Double or Nothing

Jewish Families and Mixed Marriage in the United States

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WORK IN PROGRESS

Jewish Education and Its Implications for Mixed Marriages

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Alice Goldstein: When the statistics came out on intermarriage in 1990-91, there was a scramble to figure out how to react and what to do. We searched for a magic bullet, something that can inoculate us against this. We've often turned to Jewish education as the most promising avenue for intervention and for fostering stronger Jewish connections. Indeed, the research, using a variety of different sources, has shown a striking correlation between the intensity of Jewish education and the rate of in-marriage. In *Double or Nothing*, Sylvia Barack Fishman identified three factors that can be related to intermarriage: Jewish education, both formal and informal, through the teen years; home environment; and Jewish friendship patterns. But there are a lot of

questions that remain unanswered when we consider all these factors, especially when we recognize the changing social milieu in which we're operating: How much is Jewish education in itself responsible for strengthening Jewish identity? How does it operate in tandem with a constellation of experiences that include the home environment, Jewish camping, Jewish youth groups, college experiences, trips to Israel? How much does Jewish education alone contribute to the proclivity of Jew to marry Jew? How important is the content and timing of Jewish education? Should we focus on childhood education or on the teen years? Are they as good or not as good as Judaic courses in college? How can we capitalize on the Bar and Bah Mitzvah experience to keep our Jewish young people engaged? How can the organized Jewish community enhance Jewish education so as to make it a more effective means of strengthening Jewish identity and knowledge, both for those who are Jewish and for those associated with Jews through marriage? I think the questions suggest a very complex and multifaceted role for Jewish education.

In our session this afternoon, we're very fortunate to be able to explore these issues with two people who are closely associated with Jewish education. Jonathan Woocher is president of the Jewish Education Service of North America (JESNA), where he is in the forefront of developments regarding Jewish education. Some of us may also know him as the author of *Sacred Survival and the Concept of a Civil Religion*. He has been active on a large number of academic and organizational advisory boards. He has been on the faculty here at Brandeis. He is associated with the Wilstein Institute at Hebrew College. So who better to comment on the relationship between Jewish education and patterns of intermarriage?

Also on the panel, commenting on Dr. Woocher's presentation, are Jon Levisohn, who teaches in the Mandel Program at the Horenstein Institute here at Brandeis. Because of his focus on encouraging recruits to Jewish education, enhancing Jewish pedagogy, and stimulating the

work of those who are already involved in Jewish education, he plays a key role in this critical aspect of our topic.

So it gives me great pleasure to welcome Jon Woocher, the man who, when I did a search on Google, I found 310 citations.

Jonathan Woocher: Over the past decade and a half, few issues have received as much attention and excited as much controversy in the American Jewish community as intermarriage. The basic facts are seemingly straightforward: Beginning in the 1970s, marriages between Jews and non-Jews rose dramatically. By 1990, forty to fifty percent of all Jews were marrying non-Jewish spouses. Although the rate of increase in intermarriages stabilized during the 1990s (for reasons that are not clear), there is no evidence (yet) of a decrease in the rate of intermarriage. We know also that intermarried Jewish individuals and households are statistically less likely to manifest a wide range of "Jewish behaviors," including raising their children as Jews, than those who are "in-married" or whose spouses have converted to Judaism. Although many intermarried individuals and families are actively engaged in Jewish life, a higher percentage than among in-married individuals and families are not.

What has been far from straightforward is the response of the organized Jewish community to these facts. Conventionally, the responses have fallen into two main types: those focused on "prevention," i.e., aimed at reducing the likelihood of intermarriage in specific instances (such as of one's own children) and on the rate of intermarriage in the aggregate; and those focused on "engagement," i.e., involving the intermarried Jew, his/her spouse (or partner in the case of same-sex unions not formally recognized as marriages), and/or their children in Jewish life and Jewish activities. There is lively debate about the validity, value, nuances, implementation, compatibility, impact, and effectiveness of these modes of response in all their many variations. It is fair to say that the Jewish community today has no overall strategy" for

dealing with intermarriage, but rather an agglomeration of approaches, whose cumulative effect and effectiveness is difficult to gauge. Nor does this situation show any sign of changing soon.

And, what of Jewish education in all this? Perhaps surprisingly, the topic of intermarriage and Jewish education has received relatively little explicit attention. It has largely been subordinated to the larger strategic debate on prevention vs. engagement. When the Jewish community conversation on intermarriage expanded dramatically following the release of the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS), much of the discussion regarding Jewish education focused on whether inadequate Jewish education was to blame for the rise in intermarriage rates. There were calls for greater investment in Jewish education, especially intensive Jewish education, as a way of trying to stop (or even reverse) the rise. These responses were supported by the findings of NJPS, reinforced in other studies and in the 2000-2001 NJPS as well, that there is a significant correlation between the type, amount, and intensity of Jewish education that one receives and the likelihood of intermarrying. Put simply, the more Jewish education, the less intermarriage. This provided powerful ammunition for those arguing for greater investment in Jewish education and those seeking to persuade parents to send their children to day schools, summer camps, on Israel trips, and on the other experiences that correlate most strongly with propensity to marry other Jews. Whether these arguments have proven as persuasive on either the individual or communal levels as those making them hoped is another story. But, the idea of strengthening Jewish education as an “inoculation” against intermarriage remains one of the enduring legacies of this era.

The “engagement” camp did not neglect Jewish education either. Its proponents argued that educational experiences targeted to and designed for intermarried families and their children could be important tools to encourage these families to identify more actively and consistently as Jews. Programs like “Stepping Stones to a Jewish Me” and “Pathways” began to proliferate as

part of "outreach" efforts aimed at drawing the intermarried into Jewish life. There is still debate about the effectiveness of such programs (especially on a cost-benefit basis), but there is good reason to believe that such endeavors are now part of the American Jewish educational landscape for the foreseeable future.

All in all, then, Jewish education (somewhat ironically) appears at first glance to have benefited from intermarriage's rise. Whether as prophylactic or curative, the "answer" to increased intermarriage seems to be: more and better Jewish education. It's impossible to say how much of the new investment in Jewish education over the past decade or so can be directly attributed to concern about intermarriage and its implications, but the amount is probably not insubstantial.

Were this the whole story, those of us in the Jewish education business could go home happy. Either way, prevention or engagement, we win.

But, of course, this is not the whole story. In fact, the rise in intermarriage has complicated life for Jewish educators and education advocates considerably, in ways that are not always noted. The association of intermarriage with Jewish education, which in the popular mind is relatively straightforward, is not straightforward at all. It is complex and multidimensional. The rise in intermarriage over the past thirty years raises a series of questions and challenges for Jewish education that are not simple to answer. This paper will not answer all of these questions either, but I wish at least to get some of them on the table so that the discussion can move beyond correlations and clichés and come to grips with some of the difficult issues that educators face on the ground, in real time.

First, one important caveat. It is impossible to speak about the impact of intermarriage on Jewish education in general and equally impossible (at least in a brief presentation) to speak about it in detail. This is because Jewish education is such a large, disparate domain. What holds

true for Reform congregational schools and summer camps is largely irrelevant when considering Orthodox day schools. Early childhood education is different from Jewish education on college campuses. Youth programs face different challenges than do adult learning programs. Institutions that are part of movements with clear ideological positions regarding intermarriage are in a different place than those that are ostensibly "communal." Each of these arenas, and the many more in which Jewish education takes place, faces issues unique to it that are connected to the phenomenon of intermarriage. I cannot hope to do justice to all of these, and will in fact likely do justice to none. Nevertheless, there are some issues posed by intermarriage for Jewish education broadly that have emerged clearly in recent years, and it is worthwhile looking at these briefly. I have grouped the questions under three main headings:

- Whom do we educate;
- What is our goal; and
- What do we teach?

Question 1: Whom do we educate?

This is, in fact, a question with multiple dimensions. On one level, it is a question about who uses the Jewish educational system and how we respond to differential patterns of access and utilization. On another, it is a question about whom we *may* educate – do we, e.g., give patrilineal Jewish children the same access to educational institutions and programs as we do those who are recognized as *halakhically* Jewish by all movements? On still another level, the question is one of priorities – where do we target educational resources?

Underlying all of these questions is a fundamental reality: the rise in intermarriage has changed the game for Jewish education in profound and complex ways. Although it is not the only force propelling the Jewish community toward greater diversity and fuzzier boundaries, intermarriage is certainly contributing to both of these phenomena of "post-modern" Jewish

identity. And, these phenomena in turn tax the adaptive capacity of an educational system developed in large measure in simpler times.

One basic question is what the impact of intermarriage will be on the numbers of those participating in various modes of Jewish education. Statistically, intermarried families are less likely to enroll their children in Jewish educational programs, and certainly in those that are most intensive. As the percentage of children of intermarriages grows, what will this mean for our day schools, especially non-Orthodox day schools (in Orthodox schools the combination of lower intermarriage rates, higher birthrates, and a "no alternatives" commitment to day school education may be sufficient to sustain stable or growing enrollments)? Already, many of these schools face challenges in sustaining both enrollments and financial viability as cohort sizes begin to decrease; intermarriage threatens only to exacerbate the problem. Nor will early childhood programs and congregational education be exempt from potential impact. If the Jewish educational system faces the prospect of declining participation overall (which is not yet entirely clear – there are potential countervailing factors at work), and if certain types of programs and settings – often the more intensive – are likely to face such declines to an even greater extent, what kinds of structural, financial, and educational responses may be required? Thus far, the question is barely being asked, much less answered.

At the same time, intermarried families represent a potential market for Jewish educational programs and services that we are just beginning to learn how to respond to. As noted above, for some segments of the community, it is not an unproblematic market. I have participated in vigorous private discussions among friends and colleagues active in the Conservative movement about the policies of Solomon Schechter Day Schools and Ramah camps that exclude unconverted children of Jewish fathers and non-Jewish mothers (but, of course, not the reverse). Community sponsored schools sometimes face similar dilemmas. Some

may argue that such children of intermarriages have Jewish educational options elsewhere, but this does not mitigate the potential impact on individual children and families, nor on the institutions themselves, and it will certainly not end the discussions that can cause deep rifts both ideologically and personally.

Even where these ideological and *halakhic* issues are not central, the question of how to engage intermarried families and children in Jewish education is a practical challenge. What are the best settings and modes for reaching the intermarried? (Many people today see early childhood education as especially promising in this regard, but the success of Birthright Israel suggests that there may be multiple promising points of engagement.) Do programs need to be specially targeted and crafted, or should the emphasis be on "mainstreaming"? What kind of marketing is most effective? How much effort and resources should be invested in seeking to engage the intermarried? What cultural changes may be required to make an institution and its programs truly attractive to intermarried families? All of these questions are becoming familiar to leaders. If there is a trend today, it is probably away from specialized programs that seek to address the intermarried as a unique and separate group. But, seeking to draw intermarried families and children into the heart of our institutions and programs raises questions in its own right about the impact of both the effort to recruit greater numbers of intermarrieds and of whatever success we may have in doing so on the nature of the programs themselves (see below for more on this issue).

Looming above all the discussions is the question of how to define "success" and how much of it we can realistically hope to achieve. Given the diversity among the population of intermarrieds themselves – and it is substantial – where do we want to focus our efforts, on those who are easiest to engage or those who are at greater risk? From a demographic perspective, it makes a difference whether we educate one-third of the children of intermarried families or one-

half. Does it, though, make a comparable difference in the quality of Jewish life? Would the additional resources needed to engage the next 17% be worth expending? Is it even possible to do so?

None of these questions has obvious "right" and "wrong" answers (at least for me). Indeed, one of the strengths of the Jewish community today may be precisely that multiple approaches and multiple strategies are being pursued simultaneously. This makes for a messy situation, but in a world of complexity, not only in the colloquial, but perhaps even in the technical sense, "both/and" solutions tend to be more powerful and successful than those which are more consistent, but less encompassing.

Question 2. What is our goal?

If the question of whom we educate (or seek to) in a community marked by extensive intermarriage is multi-dimensional, the question of what our Jewish education should be about – what its goals should be and how these goals are translated into specific content – is even more complicated. And, I would argue, even less addressed. In much of Jewish education, the question is simply bracketed out. We teach just what we always have, for better or worse. In some classrooms and informal settings, this can work, because intermarriage remains largely an external phenomenon – out there, but not in here. But, increasingly, and in a growing number of settings, intermarriage is not "out there." It is in the life experience of the students, adults and children, and even those of the educators. The reality (and possibility) of intermarriage is so pervasive in contemporary American Jewish life that it simply cannot be ignored when we decide what to teach and why (any more, e.g., than we can – or should – ignore the reality of Israel).

We need to begin with the question of purpose. The connection between intermarriage

and Jewish education is for many, as noted above, that of a "disease" and a "cure." But, should the prevention of intermarriage be an explicit or even latent *goal* of our Jewish educational endeavors? In one sense, we can take comfort in the statistics that show that more intensive, extensive, and (presumably) better Jewish education have the effect of reducing the likelihood of intermarriage whether we intend it or not. We need not make prevention of intermarriage an explicit goal; it will happen if we do a good job educationally. Some, though, will not be satisfied with this resolution – from both sides. That is, there are those who will want Jewish education to embrace this goal explicitly, with the appropriate implications for content and teaching. And, there are others who will wish to disavow this goal explicitly for one or more of several reasons: because, they believe, it inevitably stigmatizes the intermarried as "bad Jews," because it trivializes Judaism and the purposes of Jewish education, and/or because they believe that it is inappropriate to attempt to impose a "tribalistic" ideology on young people.

If we do decide to make prevention of intermarriage an educational goal, there is reason to believe that the most effective things we can do to achieve this goal have little to do with content and far more with creating social environments where young Jews get to spend lots of time with other young Jews. As the median age of marriage rises, this is increasingly difficult to do, but it does argue for a greater emphasis on creating programs and settings where young Jewish adults can interact, even if to attract these young adults, these settings must be open to non-Jews as well. And, if we do choose ever to be overt about the goal of inhibiting intermarriage, we must be prepared for a backlash, or at least a pointed critique, from the substantial number of young adults who view such a position as contrary to their universalistic values, if not downright racist. It is no wonder that this is a goal treated gingerly in precisely those segments of the Jewish community where rates of intermarriage are highest.

But, what of the alternative way of framing the goal: not as the prevention of

intermarriage, but as the promotion of in-marriage? There are some who believe that this case can be made more readily and persuasively than that "against inter-marriage," since the focus is not on the "other" as negative, but on the affirmation of one's own identity through finding a compatible life partner. At this point, I do not believe that we know enough empirically to judge whether this is a distinction with a difference or not. For many in Jewish education, affirming the value of in-marriage will be a more comfortable stance to take than opposing intermarriage. But, whether this makes any difference in practical terms, especially to learners, remains to be seen.

So, should one of our goals in Jewish education be to prevent intermarriage / promote in-marriage? My own sense is that this is a goal best left latent. In the end, we do ourselves – and Jewish life – more of a disservice than a service if we focus attention on intermarriage in formulating our educational goals and purposes. We should seek to produce proud, literate, active, and compassionate Jews – in the many ways these adjectives are defined and elaborated upon within our community. If we are successful in this, then almost everything else that we seek – including, perhaps (though perhaps not), diminished rates of intermarriage – will follow. But, even if the rates do not fall, I for one could not consider such education a failure.

Question 3: What do we teach?

Still, even if one decides not to make prevention of intermarriage an educational goal, Jewish education can hardly avoid grappling with intermarriage when it comes to content. What should Jewish education teach about intermarriage today? Should it teach anything at all? Interestingly, given the prominence of intermarriage in the contemporary American Jewish consciousness, we have little research or information about what actually is taught, and also when, how, how much, and to whom. Nor is there a substantial amount of educational material and resources dealing with intermarriage (there are some, mostly for teens, but far less than one

might imagine). Whether this is because the topic is deemed too sensitive, not substantive enough, too complex for some, or too obvious for others is difficult to say. But, the question of what to teach is far from adequately answered in existing materials and in some respects barely asked.

So, what should be done? Not surprisingly, there is no evident consensus. Some argue that not to confront the issue of intermarriage head on, especially with teenagers, is an abdication of educational responsibility. Others resist any teaching that appears to cast negative judgments on those who intermarry, for both ideological and practical reasons. There is no likelihood that Jewish education as a whole will ever deliver a cohesive, and perhaps even a coherent, message about intermarriage. Individual settings certainly may try to do so, but today even many of these have difficulty in so doing. This is especially true when ideology and experience do not match up: As has been noted frequently, when children of intermarriages sit in our classrooms and intermarried families sit in our pews, it is far more difficult, politically, but also psychologically and even morally, to be vocal in teaching that intermarriage is something to be avoided or that it is harmful to the Jewish community.

Of course, there are ways of dealing with a topic educationally without taking a position on it. This provides those who wish it with a kind of "out." We can discuss intermarriage, debate the pros and cons, the potentially positive and negative effects, clarify views and values, without having to take a stand one way or the other. In the era of the "sovereign self," where individuals will make their own choices largely regardless of what authority figures say, this may be the most that much of Jewish education can aspire to: to teach that there is a choice, and that choices have consequences that we ought to consider fully before we make them.

One change in how we talk about intermarriage has clearly taken hold, in Jewish education and elsewhere. The concept of "welcoming the intermarried," whether through

outreach, *keruv*, or whatever terminology is employed, now permeates the rhetoric even of those who seek to prevent intermarriages. The distinction between, as it were, *lehatchila* and *bediavad* has taken firm root. Although there are still clear differences between those who seek conversion, or at least an unambiguous decision from intermarried couples to raise their children as exclusively Jewish, and those who accept a more ambiguous and possibly evolutionary approach to embracing Judaism in the intermarried family, exclusion of the intermarried from Jewish life at the family or institutional level is now the exception, rather than the rule.

On the one hand, this makes Jewish education's task easier: it is not being asked to defend what for many would today be indefensible – treating the intermarried as pariahs. On the other, though, it raises questions of boundaries, not only in principle, but in practice, in challenging ways. Do we insist that anyone coming for Jewish education abstain from any other form of religious education (or practice)? Do we apply this principle to children only, or to adults as well?

And, perhaps most difficult, do we change in any way what we teach and how we teach, knowing that there are many in our programs and institutions who are themselves participants in, products of, or closely connected to intermarriages?

What this means is that the issue how intermarriage impacts the content of Jewish education is not just about whether, what, and how we teach about intermarriage itself. Indeed, this may be the lesser concern. Of greater import is the question of how the reality of substantial intermarriage in the Jewish community affects the entire curriculum. Are there topics that we need to teach differently, to avoid altogether, or to add, if intermarried individuals or children of intermarried couples or friends of children of intermarried couples are in the classroom or the camp? Do we teach Jewish history differently? Do certain texts or topics become too sensitive (think some sections in the book of Ezra)? Do we need to teach about Christmas and Easter,

about Jesus, and about how Jews and Jewish tradition have understood and dealt with these? Given the sociological data that indicates that even converts to Judaism from Christianity tend to have a more "religious" rather than "ethnic" understanding of the meaning of Jewishness (not necessarily a bad thing, by the way), do we need to change the way in which we teach the idea of Jewish peoplehood?

These are important and somewhat troubling questions. Education that ignores the life experience of those who are being educated, whether personal experience or the nature of the society around them, is likely to prove ineffectual. On the other hand, we are justified in asking whether changes in the content of what we teach that go beyond simply being sensitive to those with whom we are dealing risk producing a subtly distorted Jewish education and Judaism where some things cannot be said and others must be. I do not wish to be an alarmist or to exaggerate what may be happening on the ground. I know of no evidence that what is being taught in our schools, camps, youth programs, or adult learning programs is in fact being substantially altered because of the prevalence of intermarriage, and I would be personally distressed if it were. But, the issues are real and there is every likelihood that they will be felt more, rather than less, acutely in the years ahead.

Minimally, the pervasiveness of intermarriage in Jewish life and the presence of the intermarried and their offspring in many of our educational settings require that educator training deal explicitly with the issues emerging from this reality. How images of the Jewish family are selected and presented, how non-Jews are spoken about, how texts or historical events are contextualized and explained – these pedagogic and androgogic decisions must now be made with greater skill and sensitivity. Educators need to be given opportunities to think about and discuss these issues openly, and they may need guidance in how to deal with them most effectively in the specific contexts within which they work. Materials may need to be reviewed,

not with the intention of hiding awkward topics, but with the goal of ensuring that they do not needlessly and inadvertently alienate or embarrass learners.

As we assess the challenges presented by intermarriage for contemporary Jewish education, it is important to note again that intermarriage does not have a uniform effect on Jewish educational practice or thinking. In many settings, its impact is relatively minimal and the response to it, both in principle and in practice, is clear and unambiguous. However, in a growing number of places, from JCCs to day schools, intermarriage and intermarried families are part of the daily reality of Jewish education, and the implications of their presence and the responses that should be crafted to them are by no means fully understood or elaborated. It is in these settings that the next stages of this story will be played out. If the questions raised above, and others like them, are not addressed thoughtfully and determinedly, then Jewish education will be less effective.

I want to be clear: It is not my intent to label intermarried families who involve themselves in Jewish life and Jewish learning as a "problem." Far from it; their involvement is in fact a positive phenomenon, something we should all desire. The challenge is on our shoulders to create the kind of Jewish education and educational settings that will attract their involvement, nurture their Jewish development, and at the same time strengthen every dimension of Jewish life and Jewish community. It is not surprising that meeting this challenge will require thought and effort. The only real tragedy would be if we failed to make this effort.

Conclusion

I have, as promised, raised many more questions than I have tried to answer. My objective here is to advance the conversation, not to resolve the issues.

In the end, intermarriage is only one of the issues facing Jewish education today. It merits

attention in its own right (though not undue attention), and also because it is, after all, part of the larger story of the transformation of American Jewish life in the last quarter century to which, I believe, Jewish education has yet to respond adequately. Intermarriage is widespread because we live in an era and in a society where Jews are free, autonomous, integrated and diverse. Intermarriage is an issue for Jewish education because despite our freedom, autonomy, integration, and diversity, a remarkable number of Jews – including those who have intermarried – wish to remain connected to Jewish life and to create Jewish lives for themselves and their families. I celebrate this fact. I celebrate as well the challenges – intermarriage and others – that this post-modern era poses for Jewish education. These challenges will drive Jewish education forward, make it better, richer, of wider scope and deeper impact. They are the price we must pay for seeing what the next steps in the remarkable journey of American Jewry will be and for playing our role in shaping these steps. It is a price that I can only hope we must pay for many decades to come.

Jon Levisohn: I'd like to build on a couple of the points that Jonathan brought up. His most important point, it seems to me, is about the presence of children of intermarried families in our schools and of intermarried adults in our synagogues and adult-education programs. I know that the middle school at which I taught had a policy of accepting all students as long as they were affiliated with a synagogue. Their denomination didn't matter. This was a community school. I imagine lots of schools have policies of that sort, even if they don't explicitly say they will accept children of both patrilineal and matrilineal descent. And in fact, regardless of the specific policy, the question of children of intermarried families is present for all kinds of schools—community schools, Reform schools, Conservative schools, and yes, Orthodox schools as well. As Jon said, this is very different from the question of whether Jewish education is the cure for

intermarriage or whether we ought to be blaming Jewish education for intermarriage in the first place.

I'd like to emphasize, however, that this is not just a matter of the presence of kids of intermarriage in Jewish schools. More specifically, it's a matter of the knowledge and awareness of that presence among educators. If you have a small number of kids from intermarried families in a school, that may not impact the educational arrangements, but once it reaches a certain critical mass, or a new social reality, as Sylvia said, then the educators have different kind of awareness. You might think of analogies such as coeducation or the increased visibility of gays and lesbians in classrooms or in other settings. At a certain point, what was previously non-normative becomes normative or at least normative in the limited sense that the educator is aware of the presence of people who didn't use to be present, or if they were present, were not previously visible. It seems impossible for that awareness not to affect educational practice, at least in those areas that are directly relevant. So, in the analogous cases, it seems impossible for the awareness that there are now two genders in the classroom not to affect discussions of gender or related matters, and it seems impossible for the awareness of the presence of gays and lesbians not to affect discussions of sexuality.

Jonathan said that he knows of no evidence that what is being taught in schools and camps is in fact being substantially altered because of the prevalence of intermarriage. I don't have empirical evidence at hand to contradict that, but it seems to me that many and perhaps most educators cannot do otherwise than to alter their approaches, perhaps not in substantial but certainly in subtle ways. This doesn't necessarily mean abandoning the Book of Ezra, to use Jonathan's example, but it certainly does mean some reconsideration of how the book is taught and why. I hasten to add that I don't think this is necessarily a bad thing. That's why I used the comparison cases of gender and sexuality. It's certainly not a bad thing for educators to be aware

that their students are or may be gay, for example, and to have this affect their sensitivity. I do think, however, that it can be a difficult thing for educators. I imagine that only particularly thoughtful and sophisticated educators have the self-confidence and maybe even the theological dexterity to articulate a coherent position that is both respectful of the students sitting in the classroom and intellectually responsible to the textual tradition with which we want them to engage. Many teachers may simply forbid discussion of all matters related to intermarriage, in much the same way that their public school colleagues do in matters of religion in general.

Jonathan also noted that we don't know empirically if there's a difference between the approaches that emphasize opposition to intermarriage versus those that emphasize the promotion of in-marriage. From my perspective, it's not really an empirical question of what works best. I don't think we're ever going to reach a consensus on the criterion that we should use to judge between them. Rather, I'd like to suggest that it's a question of intellectual and ethical legitimacy; that is, arguing in favor of in-marriage may be more appealing than arguing against intermarriage. It may be a more comfortable kind of argument to make, but the argument will only be legitimate if it is made on the basis of the richness and depth of Jewish involvement and commitment that is successful Jewish education. One cannot ethically justify the promotion of in-marriage unless one does so on the basis of a comprehensive vision of Jewish life as a product of deep immersion and engagement with the Jewish tradition. Trying to promote in-marriage without that educational context only provokes the plausible charge of racism, with the entirely expected backlash, as Sylvia has documented.

Jonathan says, I think correctly, that the connection between intermarriage and Jewish education is typically seen to be one of either blame or of inoculation. Instead, it ought to be seen as a relationship of ethical justification. It's only in the context of a rich and meaningful Jewish education that the preference for in-marriage is ethically justified. If the Jewish community can

provide that kind of Jewish education, then the children of in-marriage and intermarriage alike may come to see that commitment to a Jewish partner and a Jewish family are not exercises in parochialism but rather the ideal conditions for a full Jewish life.

Q: Jon, if I read you correctly, you're suggesting that secondary adolescent Jewish education—whether it's camps, high schools, Jewish day schools—doesn't need to be explicit about the message on mixed marriage. You're saying the message will get through if it is a rich curriculum and that students will graduate with that message. My question to you is twofold: Number one, does that not mean to the broader Jewish community—in other words, everyone who's not part of the school but who's watching school policy—that we've become neutral towards mixed marriage? We're neither in favor of it nor are we against it. Number two, in terms of the students actually in the school, when they are bombarded by an American culture that says mixed marriage is as American as apple pie, do we have an obligation to articulate a counter-message, or do we make the leap of faith that says they'll get the message anyway, let's not make enemies in the process?

Q: My name is Gerald Nablin and I'm on the board of the Jewish Family Services on the North Shore. Why should those who control the finances of the Jewish organizations be concerned about Jewish education, when they have been appointed to positions in the Jewish leadership, and when they have very little or no Jewish education themselves?

Jonathan Woocher: Let me take the second question first, very briefly, because it doesn't relate directly to the topic of intermarriage, but it's certainly a valid question. My sense is that there is a change underway in American Jewish life today. I think there was a time when leadership could safely ignore the questions of their own Jewish learning and their own Jewish background. I think, thanks to the work of a lot of people from Klal to the Wexner Heritage Foundation to the American Jewish Committee to Brandeis and our Distinguished Leaders Institute (which I was

involved in founding here many, many years ago), there has been a cultural change. I'm not saying that organizations should go out of their way now to create tests that Jewish leaders need to pass in order to ascend to leadership positions, but I do think we're making progress. Hopefully, in the future Jewish leaders will, of their own volition, understand that they can be more effective and authentic as Jewish leaders if they have a commitment to continuing their own Jewish learning.

My response to the other question: I think we have to look at the reality of what adolescent Jewish education is and the variety of different contexts, settings, and methods that take place. I do not by any means mean to say that questions about intermarriage, dating, and gender relations in general have got to be up for grabs in Jewish education. (By the way, I think that of all the issues we've been talking about, the image of women is perhaps even more important to have discussions about with adolescents than intermarriage per se, because that's when they're formulating their own ideas and images on these issues.) I don't want to make the topic verboten. I don't want to rule it out of discourse. I don't think we would serve ourselves well by building adolescent Jewish education around the message, "don't intermarry," or by making that message so explicit, so obvious, and so repetitive that teens hear that that's what their Jewish education is about.

I admit there's a big gray area between saying "be neutral, don't take a stand, don't ever talk about it," and what I think some people—including some members of my own board—would like, which is saying "intermarriage is bad, don't do it." It's somewhere within that gray area that we have to work. I want to be very respectful of the decision-making of what I'll call the adults in training. The big mistake that we make in adolescent Jewish education is in treating it as a continuation of childhood education rather than as the first step in adult Jewish learning. It's with those kinds of principles of learning that I think we can approach the issue: taking

stands, arguments, back and forth—not *parve*, not neutral, but also not trying to hammer out a position that will only produce a defensive reaction if it's too explicit.

Jon Levisohn: To the extent that Sylvia and others have documented that it's counter-cultural to defend in-marriage, I think it does have to be explicit. I think parents have to be explicit with children, and educational institutions should be explicit too. But, I don't think we should kid ourselves that being explicit is an educational process in and of itself. Jonathan mentioned, just in passing, something about creating social environments for young people. That has far more educational potential than just articulating our values, which is necessary but by no means sufficient.