

- It has created a culture of accountability in Jewish education. Schools are required to report to the BJE on the implementation of their plans through written progress reports. Principals are also able to share their schools' accomplishments with their colleagues through the Principals Council.
- It has helped move congregational schools out of a "stepchild" role. Creating an accreditation system for supplemental schooling that is similar to the one employed for day schools has raised the status of supplemental schooling.
- It has transformed the culture by bringing lay leadership into meaningful involvement with the schools.

School improvement must be an ongoing process. The

school accreditation process has built-in features to address this need. Schools are accredited for a period of six years, after which the schools must reapply and demonstrate that they have made the improvements mandated in the previous cycle. By the end of this year, six of the 36 accredited schools will have participated in such a re-accreditation process. The procedures and standards established with the guidance of the community agency are also under periodic review. Thus, Los Angeles' accreditation process is a model that combines stability with opportunities for innovation.

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Curriculum Change: An Instrument of Organizational Renewal

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For the last 15 years, Project Curriculum Renewal (PCR) has played a key role in shaping the teaching and learning processes in Cleveland's Jewish schools. Developed by the Bureau of Jewish Education¹ in 1987, PCR became one of the original initiatives funded by the Commission on Jewish Continuity in 1988.² It has been nationally recognized for the partnership it forges between Cleveland's Jewish Community Federation and local synagogues and was one of the innovative programs featured in JESNA's *Visions of Jewish Education*. This article will first offer a brief description of Project Curriculum Renewal and its role in the Curriculum Department of the Jewish Education Center of Cleveland (JECC). It will then outline the operating principles that guide PCR's strategy and reflect upon the challenges inherent in the JECC's efforts to engender educational change.

THE STRUCTURE OF PCR

Project Curriculum Renewal, the focal point of the JECC's Curriculum Department, offers four avenues of engagement with local schools and Jewish educators: a three-year

process of curriculum renewal, a three-semester curriculum practicum for educational leaders (in conjunction with the JECC and the Laura and Alvin Siegal College of Judaic Studies),³ an annual short-term curriculum writing grant, and miscellaneous consultations.

The three-year curriculum process is PCR's centerpiece. The application process involves a school's director and education committee tentatively identifying the curricular change they are seeking, typically targeting a department or set of grade levels needing attention. Once accepted, the school's leadership team engages with the assigned PCR professional to begin an intensive study process aimed at refining the focus of its curricular request. Stakeholders (including professional and lay leadership, clergy, faculty, and sometimes students) meet a total of eight to 10 hours to further develop the educational framework from which the curriculum shift will grow. After the faculty has refined the framework, curriculum is written during the early part of the summer so that it is ready for implementation at the beginning of year two.

¹ Cleveland's Bureau of Jewish Education joined with its Commission on Jewish Continuity in 1993 to become the Jewish Education Center of Cleveland (JECC).

² For the last dozen years, PCR has been funded by the Fund for the Jewish Future, administered by the JECC.

³ Formerly the Cleveland College of Jewish Studies.

Once the new curriculum is designed, the PCR professionals and the school's education director develop a structure to support its implementation. This includes staff development and coaching options for teachers,⁴ resource development, and education director support. The curriculum is evaluated during the implementation year and revised in the early part of that summer. In the third year, support continues as the locus of project control shifts to the education director.

THE OPERATING PRINCIPLES

Project Curriculum Renewal constitutes an integrated approach to school improvement through goal setting, curriculum development, professional development, and evaluation. Its work is built on a number of principles that have contributed to its success.

PCR is a priority of its central agency and receives its full support.

Directed by a senior member of the agency's staff, with one full-time and one part-time associate, PCR is the centerpiece of the Curriculum Department's work in the community. The Curriculum Department sets its agenda around the time commitments needed to advance and support the efforts of its PCR schools. The Curriculum Department is able to coordinate efforts of other parts of the agency on behalf of PCR projects, involving at various times the Retreat Institute, Teacher Center, Ratner Media and Technology Center, Israel Programs Department, Adolescent Initiative, Special Education Department, and Professional Development Department.⁵

PCR respects the uniqueness and autonomy of its participating schools.

The PCR professionals understand that while they have much depth in curricular understanding to offer schools, the school educators bring their own expertise in institutional culture to the process. To build the partnership and

set direction for the three-year process, the school and PCR educators deeply study current educational research and/or Judaic texts. Together, they decide the "why, how and what" of the curricular shift. The JECC's Curriculum Department takes on a chameleon-like role, matching its approach to the particular school with which it is working. The department professionals push themselves and the educators with whom they work to move to the cutting edge of educational research and practice. Yet, at the end of the day, PCR respects a school's autonomy; final decisions rest with the school's educational leadership.

PCR work is consistently aligned with a coherent educational philosophy.

Over time, the Curriculum Department has developed a coherent educational philosophy that undergirds its work in the community. It is rooted in constructivist principles⁶ in which the conception of the teacher's role shifts from that of traditional provider of information to the "guide on the side," and the image of the students shifts from sponge-like recipients to empowered learners.

*Understanding by Design*⁷ is used as the department's model for curriculum development. All those who work with the Curriculum Department learn to use "enduring understandings"⁸ as the foundation of their educational work. Each curricular decision is closely aligned with the educational framework agreed to by a school in the early stages of work.

PCR helps develop the human and material resources necessary for the implementation of new curricula.

The scope of curriculum development and impact is broadly defined by the JECC Curriculum Department. While most of its projects result in documented curricula, the department looks beyond a written curriculum guide to focus on shifts in school culture that support a coherent educational philosophy. These shifts involve rethinking the roles of both teachers and school administration.

⁴ Teachers receive stipends to complete a ten-hour course and/or for participating in three to four "coaching cycles."

⁵ Note that the JECC has a "supra-department" called the Curriculum Resources Department, comprised of the Teacher Center, Ratner Media and Technology Center, and Curriculum Department.

⁶ For more information, see Brooks (1999) and the tutorial section of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development's website (<http://www.ascd.org/tutorials>); scroll down the page and click on "Constructivism."

⁷ *Understanding by Design*, by Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe (Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development; book, 1998, handbook, 1999).

⁸ These are statements that represent an engaging big idea at the heart of a discipline (e.g., history, theology), having enduring value beyond the classroom. An example of an enduring understanding: "Jewish families stand witness to Jewish history, transmitting memories through ritual and stories."

The Curriculum Department works hand-in-hand with educational leaders to support teachers in their work with students. Teachers in the three-year PCR process are consistently guided to:

- focus on teaching as a means to enhance the learning process;
- base learning on big ideas, rather than on collections of facts and disparate projects;
- move from a frontal role, in which the teacher tries to transfer the information in his or her head into the minds of the students, to a more facilitative one, in which students are empowered as learners;
- use traditional Jewish texts and other primary sources, rather than textbooks and workbooks; and
- become reflective practitioners, involving themselves comfortably in Judaic and pedagogic discussions.

PCR also supports school directors in their quest to focus on the educational components of their job, not just the administrative tasks. The time-intensive three-year process provides heads of school an opportunity to partner with a colleague, a rarity in most educational circles.⁹ Many directors report, “It is as if the Curriculum Department is sitting on my shoulder, whispering in my ear!” These educators have gained the pedagogic flexibility to actively apply what they learned through PCR to a variety of other settings.

The Curriculum Department is committed to making life a little easier for those involved in the intensive PCR process, focusing on the development of “no excuses” curricula. Different from “teacher-proof,” a “no excuses” curriculum offers a variety of resources to the classroom teacher and the school so that a teacher can’t offer the excuse, “I did not have *x*, so I could not try what the curriculum guide suggested.” Jewish education is quite resource-poor, missing the availability of the wide array of materials to which general studies teachers have access. The Curriculum Department partners with other departments in the JECC to locate and, at times, fund the cre-

ation of posters, special software, and student resource books that complement the curriculum.

PCR develops curriculum with and for specific sites.

With the exception of the JECC’s Immediate Response Curriculum,¹⁰ developed for a wide-ranging audience experiencing crisis, the Curriculum Department’s work is highly site-specific. By focusing on the needs of a particular school or institution, rather than a one-size-fits-all approach, PCR is able to create high quality, coherent curricula. In spite of the site-specific nature of the process, however, many other schools are able to successfully implement the “products” developed through PCR.

PCR recognizes that the change process demands strong school leadership.

Curriculum Department professionals are very conscious of the ways in which the change process invariably arouses anxiety and puts pressure on already complex systems. They work with school directors to manage change in their settings, educating them to the challenges brought on by school change, anticipating problems before they arise, and helping resolve issues after they rear up. In order to protect the JECC’s investment of \$150,000-200,000 per PCR school over the three years, schools are accepted on the basis of both leadership stability and administration’s demonstrated willingness to be pushed to think broadly about the educational enterprise.¹¹

PCR prefers to focus its efforts on key unresolved issues in Jewish education.

Schools that present PCR with a stimulating, under-explored area of curriculum development have a better chance of acceptance into the three-year process. Over the last seven years, the department has enjoyed the challenges of:

- considering whether Hebrew language can be successfully taught in a three-day afternoon Hebrew school, without compromising the “synagogue skill” priority that many set for themselves;
- developing problem-based learning units as the base of a

⁹ The PCR staff commends local directors for opening their schools to “outsiders” for three years. The department tries to make the process as safe and respectful as possible, noting that education is an imperfect art replete with challenges.

¹⁰ The Response Curricula may be found on the JECC’s website, www.jecc.org. Click on “Educational Resources,” then on “Curriculum;” scroll to the bottom of that page.

¹¹ Generally, education directors and senior clergy need to be in their positions for two years before a school is accepted into the three-year PCR Process A. However, its school director may change either *during* the three years or within a year or two of the process’s completion.

supplementary school program and discovering how to help teachers move from the traditional role of “sage on the stage” to “guide on the side;”

- experimenting with *Understanding by Design* as the basis of Jewish curriculum development;
- exploring ways to bring text study to the fore in supplementary school classrooms; and
- deciding how the new research on identity development can inform and change the structure of a supplementary high school program.

The department’s staff is looking forward to working with a local preschool in the coming year and to deepen its work with area day schools.

PCR is committed to meaningful assessment and evaluation.

The Curriculum Department consistently assesses the impact of shifts in teacher practice on student learning. In addition to normative classroom-based assessments (journal samples, written work, performance assessments, and scored rubrics), it has recently begun to gather baseline data from teachers, students, and parents using a questionnaire with items found on national identity surveys. It is hoped that this type of information will allow PCR to measure shifts in thought and practice, as well as in attitudes to Jewish education.

THE CHALLENGES

While Project Curriculum Renewal enjoys a good reputation among Cleveland’s schools and is recognized nationally, it continues to engage in self-assessment and reflection. The project faces issues related to the change process, to the partnering of professionals in a central agency and school, and to intense efforts on behalf of a single site.

Change

Change is difficult and potentially threatening. The Curriculum Department understands that quality changes occur: when those involved feel dissonance between “what is” and “what could be;” when they have a clear image of what the change will “look like” when it is done; when they are personally committed to making the change; and when they have specific, practical steps to help them get started. Managing this process, especially the initial dissonance, can be tricky.

Once the initial discomfort is overcome, the next challenge is one of unrealistic expectations. The summer prior to implementation of new curriculum is filled with idyllic images of what “could be.” But the reality of school life, with all its complexities, sometimes means that the ideal does not become reality.

The change process can be confounded by the inconsistency engendered by personnel turnover. At times, a year’s work must be repeated due to the unforeseen changeover of school leaders or teachers. Particularly when the Curriculum Department has made the investment of a year or more of education and coaching of professional staff, personnel shifts challenge an institution’s capacity to deeply implement a specific curricular change.

Change also takes time. While three years of support may seem significant, most educational changes take at least five years to take deep root. The current director of PCR, in place for eight years, can now look across Cleveland’s Jewish school system to see the flourishing of seeds planted years earlier and the synergy of the department’s efforts with other Jewish continuity projects throughout the educational system.

Partnership

The PCR process represents a delicate dance between the JECC and a school. As mentioned above, to open one’s school and thought processes to outside influence requires courage and commitment. This commitment is subjected to the gentle tug-of-war that takes place between PCR staff and school leadership when considering the implications of research and practice for a particular curriculum or class. The final success of PCR thus depends greatly on the relationship forged between its staff and those of its partner institutions. Mutual respect and PCR’s support for the director’s right to make final decisions for his or her school help the two partners bridge their inevitable differences.

Process vs. Product

Most work of the Curriculum Department is site-specific, fulfilling the needs of the school requesting assistance; a document is produced, but the meaningful results come in the shifts of educational practice achieved within the school. While PCR could distribute its curricula well beyond Cleveland, many of the PCR curricula rely on

pedagogic support in the form of workshops and coaching. The PCR director has discouraged some schools from purchasing its problem-based learning curriculum, for example, because teachers not supported while learning to facilitate this model of teaching are not likely to succeed.

On the other hand, certain PCR products could fruitfully be utilized by other schools despite the site-specific context in which they were developed. Because of the efforts needed to polish a piece of curriculum into final form and the time-intensive nature of publication and distribution, however, the Curriculum Department made a conscious decision not to advertise the availability of its materials beyond Cleveland. While this is a realistic reflection of the capacity of the JECC at this time, it means that much cutting-edge work accomplished by the JECC is not nationally accessible.

CONCLUSION

The Jewish Education Center of Cleveland's Curriculum Department, through the work of Project Curriculum Renewal, shifts the landscape for Jewish education via a holistic model that pays close attention to the nexus of curriculum development, professional development, and organizational change. The department's longevity in the Cleveland Jewish community and years of investment in long-term change processes have made a powerful impact on the capacity of Cleveland's Jewish educational professionals and institutions.

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Editor's Suggested Discussion Guide:

- Both Jacoby and Moskowitz see their projects as powerful ways to effect and manage change in supplementary schools. What are the elements of each of these programs that make it effective? Could either program have been as effective without any of those elements?
- The accreditation process in LA involves schools assessing their progress on the basis of a number of standards. Do these standards represent best practice in your view? Are they achievable and relevant? Do you feel there is merit to developing generic standards for a large number of schools? How do you suspect the schools in your area would "measure up" to those standards Jacoby lists?
- Moskowitz's model is based on a particular educational approach, *Understanding by Design*, which is utilized across the board in their work with schools. What are the advantages and disadvantages of this level of commitment to a single curriculum model?
- Beyond the direct impact of these two initiatives
 - upon school programs, both articles mention as a benefit the closer working relationships that developed between the schools and the central agencies.
 - How did these processes benefit both the supplementary schools and the central agencies?
 - What are the implications with regard to national versus local-level school change efforts?
 - How does this align with the model put forth by Avi West in this issue (page 22).
- Both authors utilize goal-setting as a key element of their processes, with the LA schools identifying global institutional goals and the Cleveland schools focusing on specific curricular goals.
 - How do these two gateways to change work differently?
 - How would you choose between them?
 - What are the benefits and drawbacks to articulating goals in the context of congregational and communal education?
- What different kinds of expertise are needed for a central agency to implement one or the other approach? What are the differences in central agency resources required for implementation?