

COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION IN THE FIELD OF JEWISH EDUCATION *

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I HAVE yet to attend a lecture, read a book, or listen to a paper, dealing with community organization—an important aspect of our social work profession—without having the feeling somehow, that the subject has not yet been realistically treated, as we who are community organizers experience it in our day-by-day activities. Generically speaking, community organization in terms of social work disciplines is difficult to explain.

Russell H. Kurtz once defined Community Organization by stating: "In its simplest form, community organization for social welfare is achieved whenever a group of citizens, recognizing a need, band together so that the need is met."

Another definition which I have frequently used in lecturing in one of our Boston Social Work Schools was by Arthur Dunham, who defined community organization as "The process of bringing about and maintaining adjustment between social welfare needs and social welfare resources in a geographical area or functional field." I have also employed Wayne McMillian's definition who, in his book *Community Organization for Social Welfare*, stated

that: "Community organization is a process and not a program, and involves the establishing of channels through which groups can communicate and react one upon another." I suppose that one way of approaching the responsibility of interpreting the field of community organization, which will highlight the kind of work and services we render in this field of specialization, is to develop a body of information which will detail our experiences and pragmatically tie in these experiences with the generic conceptions of community organization.

One of our colleagues, Max Stern, in recent years has made an outstanding contribution in interpreting community organization by recording in minute detail the entire processes that went on in his community during the establishment of a Jewish center facility. There have been, of course, other papers which have not been as detailed as Max Stern's which have presented experience in the CO field dealing with casework, group work, health planning and other related fields of social work endeavor. Jewish education, we all recognize, has, too, become an integral part of the spectrum of community health and welfare services of our central communal structure, and accepted as a community responsibility, although Jewish education has

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yet to attain the status of complete acceptance in the Federation field as have other traditional fields of health and welfare services. However, it is a fact that year after year, not only are additional funds being allocated from central sources for Jewish education, but there is a great concern by responsible communal leadership as to the future development of Jewish education on the American scene.

Professionally, it is our considered judgment that as a result of the devastation of the Jewish communities of the Old World resulting from Hitler holocaust, we must focus greater attention on the evolving programs of Jewish education in our local communities. With the liquidation of the great centers of Jewish scholarship in Europe, we have to assume the responsibility of providing for the continuance of the tradition of Jewish learning. Many thoughtful students of the American Jewish scene are firmly convinced that Jewish community structure and its future communal development may well depend upon a greater concentration in the field of Jewish education. This becomes particularly valid when we consider the role of government in assuming the financial and planning responsibility for health and welfare services. We cannot ignore this challenge to the field of community organization, especially if we are of the opinion that the future development of communal effort, other than the refinements of our existing services, can very well be in the field of Jewish education. It may lead towards the development of an education program for Jewish children which would be indigenous to the way of life in the new world. And many educators, scholars and social workers agree that we have not as yet created such a program in the Western hemisphere.

Therefore, we welcome the opportunity to bring what we believe to have

been a challenge in our community in Boston, calling into play all the processes of community organizations to bear upon the field of Jewish education, thus highlighting the implications of our local problem as it relates to the development of Jewish community responsibility in this field.

One of the basic tools in implementing the community organization process, we recognize, is that of social planning. Henry L. Zucker, our colleague in Cleveland, in defining social planning, once stated: "Social planning is a planned approach to the solution of social problems. It is the substitution of an orderly method of studying, evaluating and meeting these problems for a 'hit or miss' approach."

A brief description would be in order, at this time, to establish the framework of our Jewish educational agencies in our community, in order to highlight the local situation. The Jewish educational services of our Federation consist of two agencies: one, a Bureau of Jewish Education and two, a Hebrew Teachers College. These agencies receive full support from Federation. In addition, there are many elementary Hebrew Schools which are sponsored either as "community" schools in that they are not completely congregational-sponsored, or elementary Hebrew Schools which are affiliated with and supported by religious institutions. Boston is no exception to the development that has taken place in our communities throughout the country, of increased congregational sponsorship of Hebrew school education and a lessening in the number of "community" schools. Our Federation has recognized its communal responsibility to support the Bureau of Jewish Education as a coordinating agency for the elementary Hebrew school programs in the community; and the Hebrew Teachers College as a graduate school of higher learning for its children who wish

to continue their Hebrew education and who have satisfactorily passed the requirements of graduation from their respective elementary schools. Federation has not as yet assumed a policy of community support of elementary Hebrew School education. However, during the past decade, the Federation has made available funds channelled through the Bureau of Jewish Education to meet the financial emergency budgetary needs of several of the larger Hebrew Schools located in economically depressed neighborhoods. These funds, at first designated as loans, have since become an annual budgetary grant on an increased basis, and an integral part of our Federation overall budget. The need for a defined policy in this field of Jewish education has been recognized by our social planning bodies, and has achieved a priority on our planning agenda.

The functions of the local Bureau of Jewish Education, as noted in their by-laws, are as follows:

"Promotion of the cause of Jewish religious education in the community at large; encouragement of cooperative effort among, and close relationships with, agencies for Jewish educational endeavor; . . . and advancement of standards of communal and professional services in the field of Jewish education."

The Bureau's relationship with the various community and religious Hebrew Schools deals with provisions of uniform curriculum; a central placement bureau; standardized achievement tests; salary codes; in-service training; audio-visual aids, etc. It also has a direct budgeting responsibility with those agencies receiving subventions from the Federation channelled through the Bureau.

Hebrew School statistics for the 1957 period, provided by the Bureau, show a total enrollment in all Jewish schools (2, 3 and 5 day Hebrew Schools, all day schools, Yiddish schools and Sunday

schools) of 13,695 students as compared with 13,611 in 1956 and 12,483 in 1955. Of the 13,695 enrolled, 7,418 pupils are enrolled in schools directly affiliated with the Bureau of Jewish Education. Of the 6,277 not serviced by the Bureau of Jewish Education, 3,509 are enrolled in Sunday Schools.

As indicated above, the Bureau's program, in addition to its central coordinating service to its affiliated schools, provides funds, channelled to it by the Federation, for those schools with serious financial budgetary problems. These schools are located in depressed, underprivileged neighborhoods which have undergone a marked change in the composition of the population, due to urban shifting, a process with which we are all familiar.

How do we provide for social planning when changes in community structure occur? The Federation Social Planning and Budget Committee is composed of several committees dealing with various aspects of Federation services. There is a standing committee which meets all year round for budgeting as well as social planning. One of the subcommittees is designated for the field of Jewish education, and it is this committee that serves as a liaison between the Bureau and its educational problems for Federation. Over the past several years, beginning in 1952, to be exact, the planning committee became cognizant of the dwindling enrollment of Jewish education among several of the Hebrew Schools located in the rapidly shifting population in the Roxbury-Dorchester area of Greater Boston. One school, with an enrollment of 140 students in 1952, had 78 in 1954; the second school with an enrollment of 47 in 1952 had 32 in 1954; and the school of a Conservative Temple, (one of the largest in New England) with an enrollment of 431 students in 1952, had 251 students in 1954.

The precipitating factor which focused

community attention on this imminent school problem was the decision of the Board of Trustees of the Congregation to build a new Temple in the new suburban area, to which the majority of its membership had moved and now resided. Plans were formulated for the erection of one of the largest religious edifices in the Jewish community and, simultaneously, the Board of the Temple decided to abandon its Hebrew School program. In absolving itself of any responsibility, the Temple Board claimed that the children were of non members, and since the Temple had overwhelming capital commitments which it had to meet, it had no on-going responsibility for its school in the older neighborhood, and that this school problem was now a "community" problem.

Since this decision was made in the spring of the year, with no provisions for follow-up in the fall term, the situation was brought to the attention of the Federation committee on education, and in consultation with the Bureau of Jewish Education, there began a series of joint meetings between the two bodies leading to a remarkable development of community concern and cooperation, under the leadership of the Federation and the Bureau of Jewish Education.

The lay leadership of the Hebrew Schools recognized the problem and agreed to merge their efforts and join in the creation of a new school which would include the children of the Temple School, to be known as the Combined Roxbury Hebrew School. The Federation and the Bureau approved an emergency budget which included financial participation of all the interested bodies. The Temple leadership initially refused to participate in the financing of the new school, and was finally persuaded to meet a small part of the operating budget as its rightful responsibility since the new school was meeting in its old building. (With a subsequent change in the

locale of the school, the Temple discontinued its financial participation.)

The rapidly changing population trend in the area resulted in a further shift of the school program. Through the efforts of the Bureau of Jewish Education, the Combined Roxbury Hebrew School merged its student body and lay leadership with that of the Beth El Hebrew School in the Dorchester area, adjacent to the Roxbury area. With the further aid of the Bureau of Jewish Education, backed by the Federation Budget and Planning Committees, the Beth El Hebrew School expanded its Board to include the responsible lay leadership of the former schools.

In summarizing our CO experience in the field of Jewish education, we find that through the awareness and active participation of the central planning agency; namely, the Federation and its functional agency, the Bureau of Jewish Education, we were able to provide adequate provisions for program and financing to meet the Jewish educational need of several hundred Jewish children. Although Federation was deeply involved in maintaining and financing its on-going constituent agencies, and was furthermore bound by a formula arrangement with the national United Jewish Appeal to hold back on any additional local services, nevertheless, in an emergency, the Federation was able to meet the challenge which confronted the community with the decision of the Temple to discontinue its educational program. Not only did Federation meet this need on a financial and planning basis, but in the process also actively participated in the planning of several schools which became part and parcel of this entire program.

It is interesting to note that through this entire process, none of the religious bodies—Reform, Conservative or Orthodox, either on the local or national level, expressed any special concern with the local development.

We wonder, therefore, whether this experience does not lead to the conclusion that Federation, in addition to its budgeting and financing responsibilities, should not, at the same time, have a direct concern with the quality and standards of Jewish education that are being made available to the Jewish children of our community. Or, should we assume a laissez faire attitude and leave this sphere in the hands of other bodies? Should we not be as deeply concerned with the quality and standards of services in the field of Jewish education as we are with the quality and standards of services in our health and welfare agencies? Is this our responsibility as community planning agencies?

It is pertinent to point out that local communities are being vigorously approached by various national religious bodies to adopt their particular philosophy of Jewish education for children of their religious persuasion. For example: The Mizrahi National Education Committee advocates Torah education. It stresses primarily all-day schools, and devotes its energies toward the establishment of such schools. The United Synagogue Commission on Jewish Education, representing the Conservative movement, has stated in its publication: "The Objectives and Standards for the Congregational School 1952—Today the Congregational School admittedly occupies a prominent and permanent place in the field of Jewish education . . . The Congregational School moreover has potentialities for enriching the whole educational process—the most important being the opportunity it provides to bring the child into close relationship with the synagogue." In the Reform movement, the Commission on Jewish Education of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, in its publication Curriculum for the Jewish Religious School, published 1957-58, the guiding principle of the Commission is stated by Dr. Solomon

B. Freehof. "It is our duty in the education of adults and children to establish a firm conviction of God's presence." We are also all familiar with the recent interest of the Zionist Organization of America in the field of Jewish education. It would seem to me that the situation could very well be compared with a similar problem in Israel, which we have so vigorously condemned. Each political and religious party in Israel, as we know, attempts to earmark for himself and his group, the immigrant children of the Middle East, in order to inculcate them, each with his particular ideology and philosophy.

We wonder, at this time, whether we on the American scene are not mature enough to establish an overall philosophy for Jewish education for our communities, which would include all of the educational interests of our respective religious bodies and educational institutions. Surely, as organized communities, interested in central planning for health and welfare needs and community relations, we might consider that Jewish education for our children requires the same concerted efforts of joint community planning and participation. There is no doubt that the American Jewish community is vitally interested in the development of a strong local Jewish community, and as part of that local development, the community approach to Jewish education is a vital necessity. Increased giving to meet emergencies overseas has not diminished the expansion of local services.

Year after year, we note at the annual meetings of the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds, greater emphasis is placed on local social planning responsibilities. It attests to the high priority being placed on the planning phase of our community organization responsibilities. While these planning meetings have concentrated in

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developing the highest standards of professionalism in the fields of casework, group work, health and hospital services, community relations, etc., we have not done our share as community organizers to place Jewish education in its proper role in this community planning responsibility. We must determine for ourselves whether we are willing to assume financial responsibility for Jewish education, while we delegate standards and philosophies to various religious bodies who express competing philosophical religious interests. As community organizers, are we ready to plan for a common goal for Jewish education in our communities which will transcend the different "schools" and make them part of

an overall plan for Jewish education in America?

Prof. Mordecai M. Kaplan, in eulogizing the late Israel S. Chipkin, spoke of "the great principle he had learned from Samson Benderly, that Jewish education was not only an individual or a congregation responsibility but a responsibility in which an entire community must share, and which should serve as a bond of unity among its various elements, organizations and institutions. The acceptance of that responsibility is the only guarantee of the solidarity which is indispensable to Jewish survival, despite the wide range of complexity and diversity that mark American Jewish life."