

CHANGING THE CULTURE OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Results of a Survey of the Graduates of the Mandel Teacher Educator Institute

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Mandel Teacher Educator Institute (TEI) is an intensive two-year program that consists of six 4-day long seminars, with assignments in the field between seminars. TEI began with support of the Mandel Foundation.

TEI began in 1995 as a program aimed at changing the quality of teaching and learning in Jewish schools by creating a cadre of senior teacher educators who could upgrade the knowledge, skills, and instructional practices of teachers and related personnel in Jewish school settings. The need for such individuals was supported by CIJE research on both Jewish educators and the nature of professional development existing at the time in the Jewish community. This research showed that teachers lacked Jewish content knowledge and pedagogic training, though many considered Jewish education to be their career. It also showed that the most prevalent form of professional development was the one-shot workshop devoted to generic teaching skills and devoid of Jewish content. Such professional development could not begin to address the challenges of improving Jewish education.

The primary goal of TEI is to create a group of *'morei morim'*, teachers of teachers, who can work with teachers to improve their teaching and increase their Jewish subject matter knowledge. TEI is guided by a vision of excellent practice from the best of current ideas in secular teacher education integrated with a sustained focus on the importance of Jewish text and concepts. The TEI vision endorses a view of teaching as intellectual, reflective work, not a discrete set of skills. The TEI program provides concepts, techniques, and experiences to help participants develop new views and strategies for professional development of teachers.

A second goal of TEI was to establish a network of senior educators focused on issues of teaching and learning in the Jewish community. A group of professionals was needed to take on the shared mission of upgrading the knowledge and skills of Jewish educators through professional development, while serving as colleagues and collaborators for one another in this endeavor. It is not easy for participants to become proficient in the kind of professional development work TEI espouses. Research (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001; Grossman, Wineburg & Woolworth, 2001) shows that membership in a professional community is a pivotal factor in sustaining growth and development among professionals working with complex ideas. Colleagues offer support and encouragement, but more important they engage directly in the substance of professional development and advance the work intellectually. Having clusters of TEI

graduates in the same communities and organizations should substantially increase the impact each graduate can have on Jewish education.

Senior educators with substantive Jewish educational backgrounds were recruited. Most were personnel at central agencies or education directors of supplementary schools. Participants were recruited in clusters from certain communities, organizations and national movements, as well as individually. Three cohorts have graduated from TEI and a fourth cohort is currently enrolled.

This report is based on a survey that was sent to all TEI graduates (n=89) in order to learn what impact TEI had on them and what impact they are having on the field of Jewish education. We received 83 completed surveys.

Key Findings

Ninety percent of TEI graduates are designing and implementing professional development programs or supervising those who do.

TEI alumni are well positioned to impact the field of Jewish teacher education.

About one-fourth of alumni are heads of schools, mostly supplementary schools. Thirty percent are consultants in central agencies or directors of central agencies. Others are directors of other agencies and organizations, lead teachers, rabbis, foundation personnel or associated with programs such as the Florence Melton Adult Mini-Schools.

Approximately 7200 individuals benefit directly from professional development programs of TEI alumni, over half of them, teachers.

Other participants include teen and family educators, principals, lay leaders, rabbis, JCC and camp personnel, and students preparing for the rabbinate or cantorate.

The number of sessions and the total hours spent in TEI alumni programs provide a new structure that can support sustained learning and teacher development. The structure of TEI alumni programs permits growth and development over time.

Educational research (Little and McLaughlin; 1993; Little, 1993) shows that significant teacher learning and development occurs over long periods of time so effective professional development programs must be sustained and coherent, providing enough time for teacher reflection and growth. Before TEI Jewish educators in the field were not familiar with these new ideas and strategies.

The number of sessions and the total hours in each program reveal the extent to which professional development programs created by alumni afford the opportunity for concentrated learning over time. Table 1 shows that the conditions for sustained

learning are clearly in place in programs run by TEI Alumni. Over $\frac{3}{4}$ of the TEI programs last for 10 or more hours, with more than half lasting over 20 hours¹.

Tables 1a and 1b show the difference between programs planned by TEI alumni and programs that existed in five of the seven communities that participated in TEI at its onset. Programs created by alumni are offered for many more hours and over a longer period of time than previously offered in Jewish educational settings. For example, 56% of alumni programs last at least 20 hours while only 7% of programs described in the earlier study had this many hours. Alumni programs also extend over many more sessions than those offered in the five communities.

Table 1a: Comparison of Total Sessions per Program in TEI Alumni Programs and Programs in Five Communities*

| Total Sessions | TEI Alumni (%) N=132 | Five Communities (%) N=146 |
|----------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1 | 12.9 | 39.0 |
| 2-5 | 22.0 | 42.0 |
| 6-9 | 8.3 | 6.0 |
| 10+ | 56.8 | 6.0 |

Table 1b: Comparison of Total Hours per Program in TEI Alumni Programs and Programs in Five Communities*

| Total Hours | TEI Alumni (%) N=132 | Five Communities (%) N=146 |
|------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 2 hours or less | 3.8 | 27.0 |
| 3-9 hours | 18.5 | 38.0 |
| 10-19 hours | 21.5 | 29.0 |
| 20 hours or more | 56.2 | 7.0 |

- Gamoran (1998) based on an unpublished CIJE evaluation study of professional development in five of the communities from which participants came to the first TEI cohort. Data were collected in 95-6.

¹ Survey responses sometimes required estimation of the number of sessions or hours in a professional development program. For example, a respondent might indicate that a program met monthly which could refer to 12 meetings a year in some settings and 9 or 10 meetings in some school settings. We believe both underestimates and overestimates occurred, but the general pattern of findings should not be affected by the need to estimate.

The programs that TEI alumni create mark a shift from the old forms of professional education offered to teachers. TEI alumni programs incorporate strategies that support the TEI vision of content-rich, sustained and reflective professional development.

About 2/3 of the programs include Jewish text study (69%), mentoring (68%), and curriculum investigation (65%). Studying Jewish content other than text study (48%), videotape investigation (41%), and the development of classroom observation skills (40%) are incorporated by many. The extent of inclusion of Jewish content and text study represents a marked shift from programs offered in the five communities studied in 1995-6. Eighty-one percent of alumni report a direct impact of TEI on the performance of their work, primarily through incorporating specific features of the TEI vision into their professional development work

TEI alumni definitely have formed a professional network which reinforces and deepens the learning begun at TEI.

Over 80% of alumni report contact with other TEI graduates in their community or organizational team and the contact is weekly or daily for over half of them. Most of the alumni (86%) read the TEI listserv, an Internet message center through which alumni and TEI faculty disseminate information, carry on professional dialogues, and gather ideas and information from one another.

Conclusion

The character of professional development offered to Jewish educators in the communities in which TEI alumni work is clearly changing. The impact of TEI on its graduates has been profound. Alumni think differently about teaching and learning and conduct professional development to support the idea that teaching is intellectual work. TEI graduates have formed a professional network that reinforces and deepens the learning begun at TEI and supports their work with Jewish educators.

Recommendations

Based on the survey findings we recommend:

- **Because recruiting TEI participants in *teams* from targeted communities has been shown to be an effective strategy, the creation of new models, such as Boston TEI, which are community-based should be encouraged.**
- **Versions of TEI meant to serve educators in certain roles, such as early childhood educators or curriculum coordinators in day schools, should be explored.**

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- **Programs for alumni are highly valued. The TEI listserv, distribution of professional articles and materials, and alumni gatherings should be continued. Regional opportunities for alumni to work together should be offered.**
- **Conditions in schools and communities that make it most likely that professional development will be effective need study.**
- **TEI should continue to study its effects with evaluation and research.**