

The Role of Mentoring in Day School Leadership Development

by Lisa Grant

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Mentors played significant roles in the success of JTS' Leadership Training Institute for senior administrators from Jewish educational institutions throughout North America by modeling dynamic, creative and collaborative instructional leadership through their teaching and group facilitation, and showing a deep level of caring and respect for each other and for the fellows.

This paper is based on a larger study¹ co-authored by James Hyman, director of the Leadership Training Institute, and Lisa Grant, who served as program evaluator during the planning phase and the first two cohorts of the Leadership Training Institute.

In the spring of 1998, the Jewish Theological Seminary of America embarked upon a newly conceived educational leadership development program. The goal of the program was to provide outstanding senior administrators from educational institutions throughout North America with the training to become school heads or principals at Jewish day high schools. The program was the culmination of three years of research and planning that led to design and implementation of the Leadership Training Institute, an eighteen-month professional development program, at the Davidson School of Jewish Education of the Jewish Theological Seminary, funded through a grant from the AVI CHAI Foundation.

In recent years, the dramatic growth in the number of non-Orthodox Jewish high schools around the country has created awareness of the critical lack of qualified professionals to fill positions of leadership for these new schools.² Not only is there a shortage of professionals to fill the positions created through these school expansions and openings, but many of those already in Jewish educational leadership positions also lack preparation in administrative and managerial functions.³

Until the establishment of the Leadership Training Institute, no clear process for Jewish educational leadership development existed. Three factors suggested the need for a specialized program to prepare school heads for Jewish day schools:

- ♦ Positions for large day schools often remained unfilled.
- ♦ Search committees consisting of lay personnel increasingly seek individuals outside of the day school system, who possess specialized expertise and credentials in leadership, but not necessarily in Judaic studies
- ♦ Leading a Jewish day school requires a unique combination of skills that are not attainable through formal study either at Schools of Education or Judaic Studies programs.

In the 1990's, several studies pointed to the lack of qualified Jewish educational leaders for North American day schools⁴ and the effect this has on Jewish educational leadership development.⁵ Based on what was perceived as a critical situation, the Davidson School sought to develop an intensive, short-term leadership program for a selected group of professionals who were already in leadership positions at day schools, or who demonstrated the potential and commitment for pursuing a career in day school leadership.

The initial focus of the LTI was on the development of a strong collegial environment in which junior and senior colleagues could develop long-term professional relationships that would sustain themselves beyond the duration of the formal programs. This was based on the belief that veteran school heads with exceptional reputations could significantly enhance the learning experience of up-and-coming school heads. The research and literature⁶ on principal training is quite clear: strong mentoring is often the most important element in effective principal training programs. A study⁷ by Mike Milstein pointed to three major criteria for effective mentoring:

- ♦ A selection process that identifies highly successful veteran school heads who have reputations within the profession as well as amongst academics involved in education.
- ♦ Training to provide role clarification and ongoing support and feedback as the relationship develops.
- ♦ An evaluation system to ascertain if the mentors are providing appropriate support to their charges.

PROGRAM STRUCTURE

The LTI program includes six components:

- ♦ Two four-week summer institutes held in consecutive years at JTS.
- ♦ Four two-day (Sunday-Monday) retreats: one held prior to the first summer and three held during the intervening year.
- ♦ One four-day retreat held prior to the first summer.

- Mentoring during the intervening year (by phone and computer network).
- An individual project to be completed by the end of the second summer institute, by each fellow with guidance from his/her mentor.
- One year on-the-job follow-up with a mentor.

The content of the program is structured so that the fundamentals of leadership and administration would be covered in depth. In addition, the role of Judaism and Jewish studies in informing the institution and its role in the curriculum were addressed. The curriculum is shaped around three key issues:

- **Instructional Leadership:** Curriculum development, assessment; theories and practice of adult learning; professional development; teacher supervision; school and faculty culture.
- **Organizational Leadership:** Organizational development and the process of change; the leader's role and the development of frames of leadership and their application to different contexts; conflict management; the power of vision; understanding parental needs and expectations.
- **Integration:** A Jewish world-view informed by educational theory, practice, knowledge of human development used to strengthen Jewish knowledge and commitment.

MENTORS/FACULTY

The heart of the LTI experience was the relationship between mentors and fellows. Five mentors, each of whom were veteran day school principals with proven track records as practitioners and teachers, formed the backbone of the leadership training staff.⁹ They were selected on the basis of their respective areas of strength, so that as a team they complemented each other both in terms of personal and professional skills. Each mentor was matched with two or three fellows and worked with them at summer institutes and retreats, and maintained contact during the intervening training year and through the leadership fellows' first year of employment. Mentors helped broaden the scope of the classroom work so that participants could gain insights into the practical application of the material covered. Most mentors attended all components of the program, enabling them to help trainees integrate all their learning experiences.

Three principles guided the training of mentors. First, it was imperative that the mentors relate to the fellows as junior colleagues rather than students. This was crucial in instilling in the fellows the confidence and professional demeanor that would be necessary to step into senior administrative positions. They needed to feel as though they were essential parts of the assembled team. Lois Zachary called this a "learning partnership" in which both sides are committed to professional growth and development.¹⁰ The mentor must build a trusting relationship that will allow for a mutual learning environment.

The second principle was that the mentors needed to model a sense of teamwork and collegiality in their interactions with each other and the fellows.¹¹ This meant that the program director needed to work as a team leader with the mentors, as well as be available to the fellows to hear their concerns and expectations.

The final guiding principle was the concept of apprenticeship as a key component of successful educational leadership development.¹² That meant that the fellows had to develop an appreci-

ation of the way their mentors functioned as school heads and be able to investigate their actions and decision-making processes as they related directly to their professional roles. This was accomplished in three ways. Case studies were developed by teams of mentors and fellows, based on actual experiences. The fellows were required to shadow their mentor during the intervening year so that they could integrate the classroom experience with the realities of the work place and gain first-hand insights into the decision-making processes of the school head. Most of the mentors participated in all of the formal sessions, which provided the fellows with maximum exposure to the ideas, decision-making processes, visions and frustrations that the veteran day school leaders experienced over the course of their tenure as school heads. Thus, over the institute, fellows saw the mentors in action as teachers, counselors and coaches, curriculum developers and as active leaders in their own schools.

IMPACT OF MENTORS

The mentors played two equally significant roles in the success of the LTI. They modeled dynamic, creative and collaborative instructional leadership through their teaching and group facilitation, and they demonstrated a deep level of caring and respect for each other and for the fellows. Several of the fellows remarked how they felt the experience created a true community of learners, where instructors and students could come together in an environment of trust and mutual respect and both teach and learn from each other. One fellow characterized it like this:

It's much more collegial than I expected.

The fact that we hang out together, learn together, ask questions of each other. They're not our buddies. But that openness is really wonderful. We're not afraid to challenge them and they're not afraid to admit when they learn something from us.

Fellows consistently gave glowing reports about how much time and care their mentors offered them to help them develop skills, strengths, wisdom, and self-knowledge. They were involved in all aspects of program planning and execution, including formal instruction and informal guidance and counseling. While each fellow had a particular mentor, many noted how they felt comfortable turning to any mentor for advice and support.

Over the course of the Institute, a synergistic relationship developed among the mentors. They functioned together in an atmosphere of mutual respect, where their multiple talents were put to effective use in program design and instruction. They reported how the bonds they formed through the LTI with colleagues and fellows alike were among the most important professional relationships they had ever developed. The culture of collegiality they modeled with each other and in their interactions with the fellows, was consistently noted as a highlight in evaluations of the program.

These relationships appeared to continue beyond the formal close of the program. All of the fellows and mentors were connected electronically through an email list service. In the months and years since the program ended, there has been constant communication among the group. People share news, ask questions, seek advice and almost everyone gets into the act of

responding. At times the issues relate to topics covered during the LTI such as board relations or curriculum. Other times they are more topical, ranging from questions about setting security policies to providing services for special-needs students. The exchanges come as close to real dialogue as the electronic medium can provide. All comments are welcome and treated seriously and with respect. In addition, the fellows come together twice a year, once at their own expense, and once under the auspices of the AVI CHAI Foundation. These retreats are planned by the program director in cooperation with the mentors and fellows of the individual cycles.

IMPLICATIONS FOR LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Mentoring at the LTI begins with the individual relationships established between the senior day school leaders who comprise the faculty and the fellows who are studying in it. These relationships are forged through formal classroom study, informal conversations, program time set aside for reflective dialogue on practice, and guidance on specific projects. They extend beyond the eighteen months of the institute as well, through the structured alumni support networks that have been established and are maintained by the LTI staff. Network participants also gather for an annual retreat that puts them back into the LTI model of engagement through formal study that once again integrates the themes of Jewish educational leadership. Appropriate for a maturing professional, there are strong signs that peer mentoring will become the predominant form of support as the number of LTI graduate fellows grows.

The fact that the heads-of-school mentors are so crucial to the program indicates the care that must be taken in their selection, training and supervision. These school leaders must be fully committed to furthering the field of Jewish educational leadership and invest their energies in nurturing developing leaders. It is not an altogether altruistic experience, however. One of the most unexpected outcomes of the program was the fact that the mentors reported a profound and meaningful professional development experience for *themselves*. Similarly, Milstein found that there were many intrinsic rewards for professional mentors. These include the time to reflect on one's own professional skills and beliefs, leadership behaviors and decision-making processes; the opportunity to catch up on the latest literature in the fields of education and Jewish education; and, most importantly, the chance to "directly influence the next generation of educational leaders."¹³ This was clearly the case for the mentors in the LTI. The opportunity to cultivate new leadership in a collegial environment combined with the opportunity to share their expertise and experience without any of the normal pressures of day school leadership, all contributed to this experience.

One of the major goals of the LTI program was to communicate a sense of confidence and belief in the abilities of future leaders who are being trained, as well as in the mentors. This aspect of professional development is quite possibly the most crucial, leading to the willingness of the participants to use their own resources to seek solutions to the challenges they face. Ultimately, a program such as this one cannot begin to address the full range of professional requirements of a school head. Nor should this be the mandate, for other institutions are more qualified to do so.

What it does do is approach the profession from a Jewish day school perspective by giving participants an overview of how Jewish religion, history and community have significant and ongoing consequences for the leader of a Jewish day school. The Institute provides the time and space for participants to explore their own values, beliefs and commitments and how they relate to the role of school leader. It also provides the opportunity to discuss these issues in a supportive, professional and applied manner. This means that the crucial issues of leadership identity formation are integrated into the practical components of the curriculum such as vision, staff development, teaching and learning, and board work.

One final area in which this program was particularly successful was in developing a professional cohort of fellows *and* mentors who were dedicated to the same pedagogical principles, values and aims. In addition, they developed a common language around Jewish day school leadership that allowed them to communicate across cohorts easily and swiftly. This common language, based on their similar experiences in the institutes, facilitated a rich and meaningful national support system that offers immediate responses to a range of professional challenges and issues that school heads face. This not only makes their initial years in senior management positions somewhat easier by means of a professional support and advisory group, it also give them some very real relief from the experience of isolation that characterizes the job for many. In the final analysis, the LTI appears to successfully mentor individuals who are striving for institutional leadership positions in Jewish day schools and train them in ways that make them far more effective far more quickly than they otherwise would have been. It also creates an international network of educational leaders dedicated to the same goals, values and beliefs that will be an ongoing resource for new and veteran Jewish day school leaders far into the future. ✨

ENDNOTES:

1. In the larger study, the development, evolution, and impact on the first two cohorts were fully explored.
2. Appelbome, Peter. "Growth in Jewish Private Schools Celebrates Complex Mix," *New York Times*, Oct. 1, 1997. See also: Nussbaum Cohen, Debra and Silberman Brauner, Lori. "Day Schools Face Funding Crisis Even as Demand Flourishes," *New Jersey Jewish News* Metrowest, Sept. 11, 1997. Also see: Gootman, Elissa. "Day Schools Start Scrambling Over Educators of Top Quality: Principals Pursued, Seminary Swamped as Continuity Crisis Ignites a Frenzy." *Forward*, May 8, 1998.
3. Schiff, Alvin. "The Jewish Principals Center : An Idea Whose Time has Come," *Jewish Education* 53 (1988), no. 1.
4. Goldring, Ellen B., Gamoran, Adam, Robinson, Bill. *The Leaders Report: A Portrait of Educational Leaders in Jewish Schools*. New York: The Mandel Foundation, 1999. . This study found that only 33% of the Jewish educational leaders in Baltimore, Atlanta, and Milwaukee had both Jewish studies and educational administration training, only about 50% have a formal background in Jewish studies, and only 41% have formal training in educational administration.
5. Gottesman, Sally. *Jewish Educational Leadership Development*. New York: The Mandel Foundation, 1999.. This study deals with the impact of inability to recruit quality people to

the field and the increasing number of students who enter degree programs without a strong background in Jewish Studies.

6. Barnett, B. *The mentor-intern relationship: Making the most of learning from experience*. NASSP Bulletin, 1990.

7. Milstein, Mike. *Changing the Way We Prepare Educational Leaders*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, 1993.

8. Ibid.

9. The faculty included Dr. Elaine Cohen, Head of School for Solomon Schechter of Essex and Union, NJ; Cheryl Finkel, Head of the Epstein School in Atlanta, GA; Ray Levi, Head of the Agnon School in Cleveland, OH; Dr. Steve Lorch, Head of the Solomon Schechter School of Manhattan; and Dr. Bruce Powell, President of the Millken School in Los Angeles in the first cycle. In the second cycle, Drs. Cohen and Levi were unable to participate and so

two new mentors came on board. They were Ms. Eileen Horowitz, Head of School, Temple Israel of Hollywood Day School, and Dr. Mark Smiley, Head of School, The Hillel Day School of Metropolitan Detroit.

10. Zachary, Lois. *The Mentor's Guide*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000.

11. Milstein, M. op cit.

12. The more opportunity the students have to observe the mentors in a professional context, real or simulated, the better their understanding of how ideas play out in the real world. It is through this means that students begin to develop a separate identity as educational leaders as they compare their mentor's response and reactions to the professional role with their own.

13. Milstein, M. op cit.

Insistence on In-service

by Richard Wagner

My physician attends continuing medical education sessions; he must do so in order to have his license renewed. It's also re-assuring to his patients to know that our health care provider is informed of the most current information and interventions so that he can better take care of us. I wouldn't go to a doctor who is not a regular participant in ongoing training, and I hope you wouldn't, either. So, too, for lawyers, accountants, and members of the other learned professions in whom we trust and from whom we expect the highest standards of performance.

So you know where I'm headed with this: The lowest priority in school planning, including at Jewish day schools, is the budget line for professional development. Most state regulations require in-service hours for license renewal, but many schools expect teachers to bear the cost of these courses or programs. Most Judaic studies and Hebrew language teachers do not have the incentive of licensure renewal. Echoing this sad situation, it is hard to engage many teachers in even the best in-service programs. It's a good day to schedule a dental appointment.

THE INFLUENCE OF THE HEAD OF SCHOOL

Over the past year, I have been thinking about professional development with new perspective as CAJE's first Conference for Day School and Early Childhood Educators has taken shape. Several commonplaces are worthy of some reflection:

The pace of the leader is the pace of the game. The school head's attitude toward professional development is critical and he is the person who must enable and encourage teachers to participate; lay volunteers must be persuaded of the value of such experiences. By his/her own behavior (Is regular study part of the agenda? Does the head of school attend workshops on aspects of administration?), the chief educational officer models the institutional expectations. It's about the budget, but it is true of almost everything. The leadership challenge is to demonstrate the added value that professional development brings to a school in curricula, materials, teaching strategies, innovative programs, etc.

A high level of teacher buy-in accompanies effective professional development. Several years ago, a Rand Corporation study of staff continuing education gave rise to the practice of end-users identifying their needs/interests, strategizing about the formats that might best accomplish their goals, and participating in the courses and seminars that they had designed. The more involved teachers are at every level of this process, the greater the impact of the in-service. This makes particular sense in the realm of professional development for educators. Teachers don't stop being teachers, even when they are students. Thus, their know-how should have a considerable role in their own ongoing training.

A LINK BETWEEN A SCHOOL'S MISSION AND STAFF DEVELOPMENT

However, *the desired outcomes of our students' schooling should ultimately control the kind of professional development experiences we provide.* After the Rand study became the PD standard, lots of interesting, stimulating, fun – but wholly irrelevant – programs were introduced as offerings for teachers. The meager resources that were available for in-service were frittered away on activities that may have been worthwhile in some vague, general way, but had little to do with the school's goals for students. Teachers, administrators, and volunteers should be able to see a straight line from the school's mission to the staff development provided for faculty. In-service training is an integral part of the curriculum development process, not some incidental afterthought.

It's a little early to say for a certainty, but we hope that an important "take-away" from the Day School/Early Childhood Conference will be a consideration for CAJE, as well as the schools and educators we serve, of the most effective way of modeling professional development experiences for Jewish educators. ✻

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