
Judaic Enrichment as a Change Agent in Early Childhood Education

Limitations and Possibilities

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Introduction

Forty-two teachers from two Conservative synagogue preschools participated in a two-year program of Judaic enrichment. At both schools, about three-quarters of the faculty attended biweekly classes that allowed them to explore a wide range of Jewish topics of their own choosing. These sessions were taught by a “mentor” selected for the preschool by the project director at the Melton Research Center for Jewish Education at the Jewish Theological Seminary. In addition, more than half of those learners went on a two-week trip to Israel as the culminating experience of the program. While rates of participation were the same and the overall evaluation of the experience was positive at both schools, what appears to be occurring subsequent to the conclusion of the formal program is quite different at each of them. One school, Kehilat Israel, seems to be in the process of making significant changes in its culture and curriculum, while the other, Beth Jacob, reports no change at all.¹

On the surface, one might suspect the impact of the program to be greater at Beth Jacob than at Kehilat Israel. Beth Jacob (BJ) is a smaller school, with a director who identifies with the denominational ideology of the synagogue. The teachers loved their mentor, and the congregational rabbi was highly visible throughout the learning. Kehilat Israel (KI) has a larger staff whose director does not have an ideological commitment to the

Conservative movement. The relationship between the participants and their mentor was less than ideal during much of the two years of learning, and the congregational rabbi rarely appeared to show his support of the program. However, despite these factors, KI is the school on the trajectory of change.

This study examines the potential reasons for such different outcomes. We know from the literature that school change is a complex and delicate process that is highly situational and dependent upon active collaboration between leadership and staff.² In addition, most change initiatives are difficult to sustain once formal funding for the project concludes.³ People and by extension the organizations in which they work generally resist change unless a compelling need is perceived. Organizational stability and maturity typically constrain innovation, especially in schools where everything is running relatively smoothly, which was the case at both of these schools.⁴ It is surprising, therefore, that one school does seem to be in the process of significant change. This study examines the organizational, cultural and leadership dynamics that seem to be contributing to the change process in one school and inhibiting them in another, despite the vast majority of teachers in both schools reporting high levels of satisfaction and excitement with their learning and the Israel trip.

The paper begins with a brief overview of the Judaic enrichment project, followed by a description of the methodology for the study. The next section summarizes the reported impact of the learning experiences and Israel trip on the teachers at both schools. This is followed by analysis of the interviews and site visits conducted five months after the conclusion of the formal program. The paper closes by contextualizing the possibilities and limitations of a program focused on personal learning to promote enhanced Judaic culture in Jewish preschools in the theoretical literature of school change.

The Early Childhood Judaic Enrichment Pilot

Early childhood educators have the potential of playing a vital role in strengthening Jewish continuity through their work with young children and their families. A study of teachers in three mid-sized Jewish communities showed that more than half of teachers in Jewish preschools had no Jewish education beyond the age of 13. Further, only 14 percent had any college-level background in Jewish studies or Jewish education.⁵ In response to this lack of Judaic knowledge, the Melton Research Center for Jewish Education at the Jewish Theological Seminary, initiated a professional development pilot project at four Conservative congregational preschools in 1998.⁶ The Early Childhood Educators Judaic Enrichment Project was designed as a two-year, intensive program of Jewish studies for the leadership and faculty of the schools. The specific goals were to:

1. Increase the knowledge base, personal commitment and openness of early childhood educators through intensive, long-term adult Jewish study;

2. Enable early childhood educators to learn together with rabbis and other professional educators within the synagogue context, opening avenues of communication among them;
3. Heighten the professional stature of early childhood educators within the context of the synagogue and community at large; and
4. Change the Jewish culture of the school by the increased awareness of Jewish values and concepts.

The sessions were conducted on-site at each school. Specific content was determined on the basis of staff interests. Judaic subjects were taught via thematic approaches, which cut across different content areas. Research on professional development suggests that a change process must begin with the personal before focusing on the professional.⁷ The instructor was deliberately called a mentor to reinforce the sense that the educational approach focused on personal development.

In addition to regular biweekly sessions, the two-year program included four day-long retreats, during which the preschool teachers, their rabbis and educational directors studied directly with scholars at the Jewish Theological Seminary and the Jewish Museum and with Jewish environmental experts, and they participated in Passover workshops and a feminist seder. It was intended that the rabbi and educational director of each school would work with the project staff in developing structures for ongoing professional growth beyond the life of the project. As such, they were expected to regularly participate in the classes with the preschool teachers.

Methodology

This study focuses on the experiences of two of the four congregational preschools that were part of the initial pilot. There are several sources of data for this study. Formative evaluation was built into the two years of learning. At the start of the program, all participants completed a questionnaire to assess their background, experience with adult Jewish learning and receptivity to the program. Participants completed written evaluations of their on-site learning experiences at three different points during each of the two years of study. In addition, the project director made regular site visits to each school to solicit informal feedback from the director and teachers about their learning experiences. Those who went on the Israel trip also completed pre- and post-trip surveys. While on the trip, each teacher had the opportunity to contribute a page to a group journal. All of these written reflections were incorporated into the overall evaluation of the program.

In addition to this rich source of written material, on-site visits were made to each school five months after the conclusion of the program. At Beth Jacob, interviews were conducted with three teachers, the congregational rabbi and the preschool director. At Kehilat Israel, interviews were held with

eight teachers, the preschool director and the educational director, who served as one of the mentors during the second year of study and went with the group on the Israel trip as well. At both schools, time was spent walking through the school and observing classes in session.

One of the underlying assumptions of the Judaic enrichment program was that strengthening the Jewish identity and Jewish knowledge of the teachers would heighten awareness about the need for strengthening the Jewish content and culture of the school. School change must be driven by the people who teach and learn in them. As Fullan notes, "personal purpose is the route to *organizational* change."⁸ However, despite the positive evaluations received of both the classroom learning experience and the Israel trip, minimal evidence exists of dramatic personal transformation in terms of behaviors and Jewish practice among the program participants. Perhaps, it is too much to expect that two years of adult Jewish learning would generate sufficient momentum for a substantive change initiative in these two congregational schools, both of which are stable and well-run and where satisfaction is high among parents and teachers. A study of a professional development program for early childhood educators showed that it took five years of intensive educational and consultative intervention before any substantive changes could be measured in terms of the quality and intensity of the Jewish content in the curriculum in six Jewish preschools in Baltimore.⁹ Should only two years of adult Jewish learning with an Israel study tour, without the professional development component or the tremendous investment of consultant resources, produce similar results? As Fullan comments, a "process of sustained interaction and staff development are crucial regardless of what the change is concerned with."¹⁰ Perhaps, two years simply is not long enough.

Summary of Project Evaluations

This section profiles the two preschools and summarizes the results of the teachers' evaluations of the learning and their Israel trip. Table 1 presents an overview of the schools by size and rates of program participation. Beth Jacob has approximately 130 children enrolled, with a faculty of about sixteen. Selma Markowitz, the director, is a member of the congregation and has been in her position for over ten years. Staff turnover is quite low. At the end of the first year of the program, Beth Jacob's rabbi left the congregation and a new rabbi came in. Like his predecessor, he participated regularly in the classes during the second year of the program. Kehilat Israel is a larger school with over 200 children enrolled and more than thirty teachers. Here, leadership has been stable, with the same rabbi, educational director and early childhood director in place for many years. Unlike at Beth Jacob however, Iris Salm, the preschool director, does not personally identify as a Conservative Jew and is not a member of the congregation.

Table 1: Overview of Two Preschools in Judaic Enrichment Program

Preschool	Enrollment	Total # Faculty	# in Enrichment Program	% of Total Faculty	# Who went to Israel	% of Participants	E C Director on Israel Trip
Beth Jacob	130	16	12	75%	9	75%	No
Kehilat Israel	200	35	30	86%	23	77%	Yes

Beth Jacob

Twelve teachers participated in the two years of study, along with Selma Markowitz, the preschool director. Nine of these twelve went on the Israel trip at the end of the two years of study. The staff possessed a mixed educational background, ranging from a graduate of an Orthodox high school, to several who had no formal Jewish education. In the survey conducted prior to beginning the formal learning, all but one appeared to be looking forward to the program. However, few thought it would have any impact on their role as a teacher in a Jewish preschool. The majority of respondents expressed the opinion that the Jewish culture of their school was "fine the way it is" and did not need to be changed.

Despite the positive perception of the status quo, the majority of participants reported that the experience enhanced their pride about being a Jewish teacher. The evaluations of the quality of instruction and their relationship with their mentor were consistently positive. By the middle of the second year, most noted that they intended to pass on many insights to the children, especially in the areas of Jewish holidays, Shabbat, mitzvot and teaching Jewish values.

At the close of the two years, participants indicated that the experience deepened their interest in Jewish learning and made them want to learn more. They also noted how it enhanced relationships with colleagues offering comments such as "great sharing," "respect and excitement," "we learned from each other," "we bonded," "it opened our minds and hearts to each other." While few indicated that their level of observance had changed, many said that what they do practice is now done with deeper intent and meaning and better understanding.

Kehilat Israel

Thirty teachers participated in the two years of learning and 21 went on the Israel trip, along with Iris Salm, the preschool director, and Wendy Hurvitz, the educational director of the synagogue. Initially, only about half of the KI teachers said that they were looking forward to the program. Most of these teachers had no formal Jewish education, and their Hebrew skills were gener-

ally nonexistent. Similar to Beth Jacob, many did not feel that the Judaic culture of their school needed change.

In the first year of the program, the evaluations reflect this mixed point of view. Many participants were highly enthusiastic about the course content and its personal and professional relevance, while others continued to express disappointment and detachment. This group did not have as positive a relationship with their mentor. Some enjoyed his historical and textual focus, while others indicated a preference for discussion of contemporary issues, which they felt was lacking. This resulted in restructuring the second year of learning so that the mentor and the educational director of the synagogue co-taught each session. The team-teaching approach appears to have helped participants to make more personal connections. Comments such as "I feel more spiritual and connected to Judaism," "I am surprised by how much I know and feel deep within" or "I've enjoyed this year much more than the last" were representative of this shift in attitude.

By the end of the two years, the teachers at Kehilat Israel were as positive about their experiences as their Beth Jacob counterparts. The teachers reported that, to a certain extent, the two-year course had influenced their teaching of Jewish holidays, Shabbat, prayer, mitzvot and Jewish values. They also reported significant changes in the closeness of the staff. In the words of some teachers: "We became closer as we shared more diverse activities outside our school," "it brought us closer—gave us a new outlook and respect for each other," "it deepened our conversations," "we bonded as women."

As at Beth Jacob, most Kehilat Israel teachers claimed that their level of observance did not change significantly. A few reported that they were slightly more observant ("I observe Shabbat more now since this class," "I observe holidays in a more meaningful way" and "for the first time in years I had a seder at my home again"). Many also indicated that they planned to continue Jewish learning once-a-month and participate in other Jewish adult courses, as well as continue to read about aspects of Judaism.

Israel Study Tour

The culmination of the Judaic Enrichment for Early Childhood Educators project was a twelve-day trip to Israel. Three-quarters of the teachers who participated in the classroom study at both schools went on the trip. This was a first trip to Israel for about one-third of the teachers. Both Iris Salm and Wendy Hurvitz from Kehilat Israel joined the group on the trip. Selma Markowitz, Beth Jacob's preschool director, did not go.

This tour was a great success. Both seasoned and first time visitors were intellectually, emotionally and spiritually affected by the experience. The post-trip evaluations are filled with praise for the well-organized progression through the Jewish time line and appreciation of the opportunities for emotional, educational, spiritual, religious and reflective experiences. Female

unity, group bonding and the emphasis on early childhood education also gained favorable responses.

Most teachers indicated that the trip made them feel closer to Judaism and to Israel; they planned to share this closeness with their families and to revisit Israel with family and friends. They also reflected on the professional impact that the trip had on them. The vast majority of respondents (90 percent) said that they planned to expand their curricula to reflect a deeper level of Judaism and Zionism. They described specific ideas of what they planned to do, such as taking imaginary trips to Israel, playing Israeli games, using visual aids, working on Bible stories, adding more Hebrew and prayer, teaching the holidays and Shabbat from different perspectives, and instilling in the children and their parents an anticipation of their own future trip to Israel (“When you go to Israel, you will see . . .”).

Post-Project Change Forces

As can be seen by this summary, participants from both schools tell a similar story of meaningful experiences, intensified connections with Judaism and Israel, excitement about Jewish learning and plans for implementing significant changes in curricula and instruction. The prospects for actual change, however, appear quite different at the two schools five months after the close of the formal program. At this stage, the culture and leadership of the schools seem to be the more significant factors in determining just how much these positive personal experiences will shape a process of organizational change. The following section reports on the scene now that the initial glow of excitement has faded.

Kehilat Israel

Impressions from the site visit at KI suggest a school in motion. The “interview” with Iris Salm, the preschool director, took place while following her around through her busy morning activities. Prior to the enrichment program, Iris acknowledged that the preschool curriculum did not include a great deal of Jewish content. Based on the morning visit, it seems that this may still be the case. None of the activities witnessed during the morning visit had any noticeable Jewish content or theme. The preschool shares some of its space with the religious school. Almost all of the visual displays with Hebrew language, Israel or Jewish symbols were in these shared classrooms. The only Jewish content observed in the exclusively preschool wing was a mural of the seven species of foods indigenous to the land of Israel (Deut. 8:8–9).

While minimal Judaic content was observed, conversations with Iris, Wendy Hurvitz and the teachers suggest that a number of small but meaningful programmatic and curricular changes have taken place and more are in the works. Iris consistently gave her teachers credit for these initiatives. While both she and her teachers agreed that the two years of learning were

extremely valuable, it appears that the Israel trip served as the greater catalyst in terms of the actual programmatic changes taking place. She said, "We came back from Israel knowing that we had to make our school a more Jewish school." Among the projects conceived and being implemented by the teachers are:

- An enriched *kabbalat shabbat* program on Friday mornings, based on practices observed in Israeli preschools;
- Development of a week-long focus on "Preparing for Shabbat" for the entire school;
- Creation of a hallway mural about the Exodus from Egypt based on an exhibition that the teachers saw at the Bible Lands Museum in Jerusalem;
- Adapting a new kind of bulletin board modeled after one at the Bible House in Ramat Gan; and
- More prayer being introduced into classes, including children wearing *kipot*.

Since the end of the program, Iris said she has noticed a change in attitude among her teachers. "There's more seeking going on now, more learning." In fact, two-thirds of the teachers who participated in the two years of study are continuing to meet on a monthly basis for adult learning with a rabbinical student intern at the congregation. Wendy Hurvitz, the educational director, noted how, in addition to these monthly study sessions, several of the preschool teachers are coming to the general adult education offerings in the synagogue. "They see learning as part of an ongoing process of personal growth and our evolving vision of the school as a Jewish school," she said. Wendy also described how her involvement in the program has changed her perception of the preschool as part of the Jewish educational mission of the synagogue. She said:

It didn't used to be a part of my consciousness as an educator. Now, the nursery school teachers know more. It makes the nursery school and the religious school more in tune with each other. Now, we are planning some joint educational programs with the two faculties to strengthen the connections.

In addition, Wendy described how the preschool is establishing a closer link with the local day school as a result of their participation in the enrichment program. A series of programs were sponsored in the fall to introduce preschool parents to the possibility of enrolling their children in day school for kindergarten or first grade. A Hebrew immersion class, which will feed into the day school, is in the planning stages as well.

Both Iris and Wendy discussed several examples of ways in which the synagogue community's regard for the preschool and its teachers have changed since their participation in the program, the one of which is still visible five months after the trip. In the main hallway of the synagogue is a photographic

mural from the group's Israel trip. Immediately upon their return from Israel, the teachers were publicly honored for their participation by being called to the Torah for a group *aliyah*. In addition, the synagogue president spoke about the Judaic enrichment program and its impact in his High Holiday address to the congregation.

Teacher Themes

While the teachers were mixed in their review of their assigned mentor, they were unanimous about three central aspects of their learning experience. These include (1) the development of a strong bond among the participants, (2) increased confidence and comfort with their Jewish knowledge, and (3) a much greater commitment and connection to Israel.

The social aspect of the learning experience appealed to many of the participants. "It was an unexpected bonus," said one teacher. "I really looked forward to going to class so we could share our ideas and feelings together." Teachers also reported feeling closer to Wendy Hurvitz, the educational director when she started co-teaching in the second year of the program. Wendy confirmed this when she said, "The teachers see me as a rabbinic leader or counselor. They come to me more often now for family issues and for help with their teaching."

Many teachers talked about how they began to get to know one another better through the learning, but the real bonding came on the Israel trip when they were in an intense learning environment, separated from role, routine, and responsibilities.¹¹ One teacher simply said, "We really feel much closer to each other now." Another spoke about how the Israel trip enhanced the teachers' professional self-image. "We went as professionals. It was an unbelievable bonding experience." This seems to have translated to an increased spirit of cooperation in the school. One teacher noted, "We are more willing to cooperate with each other now. Everyone wants to share their ideas about increasing Judaics in the classroom." One teacher provided an example of this enhanced collaboration. A group of three who teach science, art and literature to four-year-olds in the afternoon have integrated Judaic and Israel content into these units for the first time.

All of the teachers interviewed indicated how the two years of learning made them feel more knowledgeable and comfortable about Judaism. For some, this resulted in more personal than professional ramifications. One teacher said, "The change is more in me, than in the classroom. I feel more connected, but I haven't really added a lot in the class." Others, however, do seem to be translating their personal growth into their teaching. One teacher, who admitted she was initially extremely resistant to the learning, relayed how she has added much more Jewish content in her classroom. "We are doing more Israeli dancing and singing. We've learned *Hatikvah*. Each child now has a *kippah* for Shabbat. We read Bible stories. All this is new." An Israeli-born teacher described how the trip ". . . gave me a sense of freedom

that I can fully express myself as an Israeli and a Jew and teach anything I want.”

The impact of the Israel trip appeared to be occurring both in individuals and schoolwide. Every teacher interviewed who went on the Israel trip noted how she felt much more connected to Israel. “I didn’t have an affinity towards Israel before the trip,” said one, “but now I do.” Another said, “It has changed the way I read a newspaper, even the way we vote.”¹² A teacher who had been to Israel before said, “I thought it was going to be repetitive. But I saw things I hadn’t seen and it renewed my feelings about Israel. Talking with people there really humanized it for me.” The Israeli-born teacher said, “It was wonderful seeing Israel through my friends’ eyes. Now I feel that everyone shares the crisis with me. It’s not just *my* crisis.”

Wendy Hurvitz described “a total shift in our thinking about Israel” as a result of the trip. Soon after the new Intifada began in the Fall of 2000, she met with the preschool staff and told them, “The most important mission we have with this age group is to instill a love of Israel.” Around the same time, she invited the parents to an open house to begin what she described as a dialogue about Israel. “We began the program with the prayer for the State. We tried to convey the sense that Israel’s problems are *our* problems, too.”

Beth Jacob

While the Kehilat Israel preschool conveyed a sense of controlled chaos, the scene at Beth Jacob appeared much calmer. As at KI, Beth Jacob shares many of its classrooms with the religious school. Though it is difficult to distinguish between the religious school and the preschool influences, Beth Jacob had a somewhat more Jewish appearance than Kehilat Israel did overall. Most rooms had an Israeli flag and one or two posters with Hebrew and/or scenes of Israel. Hanukkah decorations were displayed in one classroom. Outside the door of several rooms were sign-up sheets for parents hosting *kabbalat shabbat* in the class (bringing *hallah* and grape juice and attending the program). As was noticed at KI, however, there were few activities with Jewish content during the one-hour observation.

Most of the post-trip visit was spent with the director in her office, a small, tidy room filled with books and toys. Even though the onsite visits at each school were limited to a single morning, distinct differences were noticeable in how the two directors engaged with parents and staff. Iris appeared more collaborative and interactive, meeting parents or teachers in the hall or classrooms. Selma Markowitz seemed to prefer having people come to her.

Neither the rabbi nor Selma identified any specific changes in individuals or the school culture as a result of the learning experiences or the Israel trip. Selma said, “I don’t think it changed the way of life for anyone. But, it gave people an awareness they never had before.” The rabbi responded similarly, “I see a slightly greater level of receptivity among the staff for Jewish content in the school.” Selma was quick to point out that the Beth Jacob preschool

was run based on Jewish values of caring for each other. Before their participation in the program, she noted that she would give a *d'var Torah* before every staff meeting and organize a special program before each holiday. She and the rabbi also mentioned his participation in the *kabbalat shabbat* programming on Friday mornings. This, too, pre-dated their involvement in the program.

The teachers who were interviewed all recalled their learning and travel experiences with enthusiasm. They all agreed that it was a wonderful program and a wonderful trip. "Everyone loved our mentor," said one teacher. "She really knew how to get us involved." Like at KI, all three teachers noted how the staff bonded with one another as a result of their learning. However, only one offered an example of a change she had made in her teaching since then. She loved the practice she saw in an Israeli preschool of assigning different children the roles of Shabbat prince and princess. "We started doing it here, but it's getting going slowly," she noted. Another teacher mentioned that she had suggested adapting the style of bulletin board that they saw at the Bible House in Ramat Gan. This idea was rejected by Selma, who did not go to Israel with the group. "She has a different way of doing bulletin boards," the teacher said.

Neither the rabbi nor Selma appears to be taking an active role in encouraging or offering any ongoing formal learning for the Beth Jacob faculty. Selma said, "I hope it will continue, but it hasn't yet." The rabbi attributed the reluctance to cost and logistical challenges. He said, "There's no funding to pay for substitutes and people don't like to come out in the evenings." Both Selma and the rabbi referred to the preschool as a "cash cow" for the synagogue. "The board always tells me I have to pay for everything out of my own budget. That would include staff learning." She also noted a lack of enthusiasm among her staff for studying with the rabbi. "We don't like the rabbi and we wouldn't want to study with him," she said.

The Beth Jacob preschool is viewed as separate and distinct from other educational programs at the synagogue. Both the rabbi and director mentioned that the school attracts children from a wide geographical area, including a few non-Jews, because of its extended hours. Only about 20 percent of preschool families are synagogue members, whereas the proportion is double that at Kehilat Israel.

This separation extends to how the teachers are perceived by the broader synagogue community. When talking about the preschool's relationship to the synagogue, Selma said, "I'd like the Board to be more aware of the importance of the staff and the preschool to the synagogue other than as a money-maker. The only recognition comes from our own PTA. When a teacher leaves after fifteen years of service, I don't think the average congregant really cares." A recent event reinforced her sense of disconnect with the congregation and the rabbi. "The daughter of one of our teachers had her bat mitzvah a few weeks ago. The rabbi didn't even mention that this mom teaches in the preschool."

Lessons Learned and Affirmed

Teachers from two congregational preschools went through a similar experience in Jewish learning and Israel travel. Everyone described them as personally rewarding and powerful experiences. In one case, this positive experience seems to have made little to no difference in the school culture or content of what is being taught. In the other, substantive changes have already taken place and more seem to be in development. Curiously, if a “readiness for change” audit had been conducted at the start of the program, Beth Jacob would have been predicted as the institution more likely to embrace a change initiative. The leadership and faculty were excited about the learning, and the congregational rabbi was fully supportive of and actively engaged in the project. At KI, the faculty were more ambivalent, and the rabbi was less visible.

At the most basic level, it appears that KI simply has greater organizational capacity for change. Certainly, severing ties at Beth Jacob with a beloved rabbi at the end of the first year and building ties with a new rabbi in the second year had a chilling effect on the climate for change. Studies consistently show that school change is jeopardized by turnover of top leadership.¹³ The fact that Selma Markowitz did not accompany her teachers on the Israel study tour also appears to have derailed the momentum for change. Aron and Zeldin point out that readiness for change requires both a baseline of stability and a sense of dissatisfaction with the ways things are.¹⁴ KI had the leadership stability before, during and after the program. It appears that the dissatisfaction grew as a result of the process of learning together and especially going on the Israel trip. Clearly, the process of Kehilat Israel preschool becoming “a Jewish school” is in its early stages, as the director said after her return from Israel. Yet indications appear favorable that this organization is primed to continue along the path of innovation and restructuring to enhance the Jewish content and nature of the school. What are the conditions that make this climate for change possible at one school and improbable at another?

Four key factors appear to be significant in enhancing or inhibiting this organizational readiness. All of them are supported by the literature on leadership and school change as will be discussed below. They include: moral authority for decision-making; a culture of teamwork; a systems view of Jewish education; and commitment to ongoing Jewish learning.

Moral Authority for Decision-Making

In *Leadership for the Schoolhouse*, Sergiovanni writes of the need to develop a theory of leadership based on moral connections that come from a shared sense of obligations, resulting from common commitments to shared values and beliefs. This form of leadership should encourage “principles and teachers, parents and students to become self-managing, to accept responsibility for what they do and to feel a sense of obligation and commitment to do the

right thing.”¹⁵ The data can only provide an impressionistic picture of whether this moral imperative drives decision-making at KI. At both schools, the leadership spoke of shared values and commitments. However, a much greater spirit of shared purpose and responsibility seemed to exist at KI than that observed at Beth Jacob. Wendy said, “We are much more focused on enriching the curriculum with Jewish content than we were before. It’s a central part of our mission now.” In contrast, both the rabbi and director at Beth Jacob seemed to say that it was more important for them to recruit students from a wide geographic area than it was to enrich their curriculum with greater Jewish content. Even more compelling evidence of the sense of moral imperative at KI comes from a statement Wendy made twice during the interview. Both in terms of funding a significant portion of the Israel trip and supporting the ongoing program of Jewish learning, Wendy said: “We operate on Torah economics here. Nothing will stop because we don’t have the money.” If it is the right thing to be doing in support of improving the school and the people teaching in it, she seemed to be saying the money will be found.

This sense of moral leadership “is concerned not just with what works, but with what is good. It speaks to a fundamental human need to affiliate with transcendent values and overarching purposes.”¹⁶ The language Wendy and Iris used was filled with enthusiasm and a sense of forward movement as they spoke about working together with the teachers to infuse their school with more Jewish learning and Jewish culture. This analysis makes no claim that this objective has been fulfilled, but there appears to be a sense of forward movement and shared responsibility. Teachers seem to be a central part of this momentum as evidenced by their role in curricular and instructional innovation. In contrast, Selma Markowitz and the rabbi at Beth Jacob spoke in terms of limitations rather than possibility. Money was a constraint to continued learning, the board was unaware and unsupportive of the preschool teachers’ learning or trip to Israel, ideas that teachers brought back from Israel were slow to be realized or squelched before they could even be tried.

A Culture of Teams

Although initially scheduled to be interviewed during the site visit, the rabbi at KI had been called out of town. Wendy said, “I can speak for him. We work together as a team.” This sense of teamwork came through at all levels of operation. Wendy noted that this spirit of shared leadership pre-dated their participation in the Judaic enrichment program. She said, “We were already a team before. Now, it’s much stronger.” Iris and Wendy both spoke about how their solid working relationship is based on mutual respect. The respect and trust Iris shows her teachers is evident in how she supports and enables their ideas for enriching and changing core functions of curriculum and instruction, which are at the heart of school improvement.¹⁷

Sarason writes: “[Y]ou cannot achieve your goals unless all members at all levels of the organization meaningfully participate in some important way in

the organization's affairs."¹⁸ Evans adds: "In well-led organizations people feel that they make a significant contribution, that what they do has meaning, that they are part of a team or a family, that mastery and competence matter, and that their work is exciting and challenging."¹⁹ This sense of common purpose and shared responsibility for action seems to be the prevailing climate at KI. At KI, change is occurring both from top-down and bottom-up initiatives. There is a developing sense that each and every teacher has the potential to serve as a change agent, by offering ideas and collaborating with others on instruction and curricular innovation.²⁰ Pascale notes: "Change flourishes in a 'sandwich'. When there is consensus above, and pressure below, things happen."²¹

In contrast, the spirit of teamwork appears far less visible at Beth Jacob. Here, the director seems to be less inviting of collaboration. Teachers seem to offer suggestions for curricular or programmatic change infrequently, perhaps because they are not readily supported by the director. The rabbi limits his involvement in the preschool to Friday mornings for *kabbalat shabbat*. Selma's comment, "We don't like the rabbi," was the stark evidence of the sense of alienation and disconnect she and her teachers feel about the relationship with the top leadership of the synagogue.

A Systems View of Jewish Education

The description of the Beth Jacob preschool as a "cash cow" provides a strong signal that the school is viewed as separate and distinct from the rest of the synagogue's educational enterprise. Despite the fact that the offices of the religious school and preschool directors are adjacent to each other, little communication seems to take place between the two, aside from coordinating space and schedules. The difference at KI is noticeable. Here, Wendy readily acknowledged that her participation in the Judaic enrichment program raised her consciousness about early childhood education as an essential component of Jewish educational system at the synagogue. Inviting representatives of the local day school to speak to preschool parents about continuing their children's Jewish education is one attempt at building stronger links between different parts of an educational system. Increasing educational programs for parents and involving teachers in adult Jewish learning in the synagogue are other examples of this systemic integration. Wendy and Iris are actively supporting greater integration of their own programs through staff development. They are now planning a joint "day of learning" for the preschool and religious school teachers based on the model developed by the enrichment program. In perhaps the greatest form of flattery, the religious school teachers are now participating in a similar program of study and Israel experience, modeled after the early childhood enrichment program.

These examples suggest an evolving attempt to think about how the relationship between various components of Jewish education can work together more effectively to improve the quality and quantity of Jewish learning overall.

This approach can be viewed as a form of systems thinking, where problems and opportunities are considered “. . . not as isolated events but as components of larger structures.”²² Systems thinking attempts to identify how the various elements of a system interact and influence one another. Rather than focusing on structures and techniques, systemic change concentrates on the attitudes, actions, and artifacts that shape organizations and have developed over substantial periods of time.²³ This requires first examining the human interactions that shape the way a school is run. The authors of *Schools That Learn* write: “If you want to improve a school system, before you change the rules, look first to the ways that people think and interact together.”²⁴

Commitment to Continuing Jewish Learning

Another significant difference between the two schools is their attitude toward continued Jewish learning. At KI, Jewish learning is now seen as part of a process of personal and professional growth, not just a one-time program. Wendy said: “Before we started, we would do some Jewish education two or three times a year for the preschool staff. Now we see this must be an ongoing process of learning.” As noted, more than half of the KI teachers are continuing to study monthly with a rabbinic intern. They are engaged in a process of inquiry, which means “internalizing norms, habits, and techniques for *continuous learning*.”²⁵ At Beth Jacob, the learning is over, at least for the foreseeable future. The following comment by the rabbi suggests that he does not see it as his responsibility to encourage or support continued learning by the preschool staff. “The program served us well. It was a nice experiment. It could have been longer. There should have been more lay leadership involvement in it to ensure ongoing funding.”

Teachers who want to improve their practice have been characterized by four attitudes, each of which the teachers who were interviewed at KI seem to possess: “They accepted that it was possible to improve, were ready to be self-critical, and to recognize better practice than their own within the school or elsewhere, and they were willing to learn what had to be learned in order to be able to do what needed or had to be done.”²⁶ These teachers have that sense of possibility. They have the support and trust of the school and synagogue leadership to innovate and enrich curriculum. They operate in a culture where teamwork is normative and has been enhanced through their experiences of study and traveling to Israel. Finally, they have a commitment to continue their own Jewish learning, which both strengthens their own Jewish identity and gives tacit recognition of the statement, “There is no final end point to change.”²⁷

Conclusion

School change is slow, difficult and tenuous at best. Scholars and practitioners alike agree that the support, involvement and collaboration of leadership

and staff are essential to shaping the process of change.²⁸ As Fullan notes, “shared vision, which is essential for success, must evolve through the dynamic interaction of organizational members and leaders.”²⁹ At KI, this vision is evolving in both a planful and emergent fashion.³⁰ Some of the conditions necessary for systemic change were present before the enrichment program began, such as a sense of moral leadership and team spirit. Others, such as the commitment to ongoing Jewish learning and an appreciation for early childhood education as part of the overall Jewish educational enterprise of the synagogue, grew as the program progressed. The joint participation of leadership and faculty in the Israel study tour seemed to be the catalyzing force that awakened a sense of urgency for transforming a preschool in a Jewish setting into a Jewish early education center.

As we see from the KI experience, a program focused on personal growth through learning can enhance the Jewish identity and professional stature of the teachers. It also can heighten awareness of the importance of regarding the preschool as an integral part of the Jewish educational enterprise for the children, their families and the congregation as a whole. As we see from the Beth Jacob experience, however, change is by no means a guaranteed outcome. Change would not occur without strong leadership that both directs and involves a team in the development of a vision and conscious actions that integrate the preschool into the system of Jewish education. This study suggests that the stability and openness of the congregational leadership are the critical components in determining whether this potential can actually be realized. While the journey has just begun and the ultimate outcome remains uncertain, the recognition that change is a process without a fixed end point, the mutual sense of ownership and responsibility that the teachers and leadership share, the congregational support and the underlying moral imperative to do “what is good” are the key factors that indicate the probability of KI sustaining this initiative for many years to come.

NOTES

1. Pseudonyms are used for the congregations and school directors.
2. See Michael Fullan, *Change Forces: Probing the Depths of Educational Reform* (London: Falmer Press, 1993); Michael Fullan and S. Stiegelbauer, *The New Meaning of Educational Change* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1991); P. Senge, N. Cambron-McCabe, T. Luca, B. Smith, J. Dutton and A. Kleiner (New York: Doubleday Dell, 2000); S. Sarason, *Revisiting “The Culture of the School and the Problem of Change”* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1996); Robert Evans, *The Human Side of School Change: Reform, Resistance and the Real-Life Problems of Innovation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1986).
3. Sarason, *Revisiting*.
4. E. Sohein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership* (2nd ed.) (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1992).
5. A. Gamoran, E. Goldring, B. Robinson, P. Goodman and J. Tammivaara, *The Teachers Report: A Portrait of Teachers in Jewish Schools* (New York: Council for Initiatives in Jewish Education, 1998).
6. This project was made possible by the generous support of Alfred and Temma Kingsley.

7. P. Cranton, *Professional Development as Transformative Learning: New Perspectives for Teachers of Adults* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1996); L. A. Daloz, *Effective Teaching and Mentoring: Realizing the Transformational Potential of Adult Learning Experiences* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1986).
8. Fullan, *Change Forces*, p. 14.
9. I. Vogelstein, "Machon L'Morim: Bereshit— Lessons Learned," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service* (Fall, 2000), pp. 49–55.
10. Fullan, *The New Meaning*, p. 86.
11. Jean Anderson Fleming, "Understanding Residential Learning: The Power of Detachment and Continuity," *Adult Education Quarterly*, 48/1 (Summer 1998), pp. 260–271; Eric J. Leed, *The Mind of the Traveler—From Gilgamesh to Global Tourism* (New York: Basic Books Inc., 1991).
12. This interview occurred one week after the 2000 presidential election.
13. P. Berman and M. McLaughlin, *Federal Programs Supporting Educational Change, vol. VIII: Implementing and Sustaining Innovations* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 1977); Fullan, *The New Meaning*.
14. I. Aron and M. Zeldin, "Change in Jewish Education: Prescriptions and Paradoxes," *Agenda: Jewish Education*, #2, pp. 19–25.
15. T. Sergiovanni, *Leadership for the Schoolhouse* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1996), p. 41.
16. Evans, *The Human Side*, p. 168.
17. Fullan, *Change Forces*; Sarason, *Revisiting*.
18. Sarason, *Revisiting*, pp. 323–324.
19. Evans, *The Human Side*, p. 146.
20. Fullan, p. 39.
21. P. Pascale, *Managing on the Edge* (New York: Touchstone, 1990), p. 126.
22. Senge, *Schools that Learn*, p. 78.
23. P.B. Vaill, *Managing as a Performing Art: New Ideas for a World of Chaotic Change* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1989), pp. 149–150.
24. Senge, *Schools that Learn*, p. 19.
25. Fullan, p. 15.
26. Nias et al., quoted in Fullan, p. 63.
27. Fullan, *Change Forces*, p. 66.
28. Senge, *Schools that Learn*; Fullan, *Change Forces*; Sarason, *Revisiting*.
29. Fullan, p. 28.
30. Aron and Zeldin, *Change in Jewish Education*.

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