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PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR TEACHERS: Why Doesn't the Model Change?

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and

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INTRODUCTION

Any fully functioning educational system needs a serious approach to the professional development of the teachers who work in its domain. Without improving what Richard F. Elmore has called "the core of educational practice," (1996) — namely, the teaching and learning that occurs in actual living classrooms — no long term solutions to educational problems are likely to occur (Little, 1993; Darling-Hammond, 1997). Certainly this is true in Jewish education, where the weakness of teachers' backgrounds and general lack of preparation for the field are well known phenomena (Council for Initiatives in Jewish Education, 1994). Therefore in Jewish education, it could be argued, a focus on professional development is even more important than in general education (Gamoran, Goldring, & Robinson, 1999).

In research previously reported upon, we presented the findings of a study of professional development opportunities for teachers in five North American Jewish communities (Holtz, Gamoran, Dorph, Goldring, & Robinson, in press). Our goal in this article is to explore the implications of the findings from our earlier article. In that article we

reported on the current situation of professional development in the communities studied and made general recommendations about improving the situation of professional development, both at the school level and at the level of the community. Here we wish to examine possible reasons why most contemporary professional development in Jewish education looks the way that it does. We wish to thank and acknowledge the insights of many participants at the Conference of the Network for Research in Jewish Education in June, 1999 who attended our "Spotlight" session where these data were first presented and who helped us "think out loud" about the problems we wish to address in this paper.¹ Before we turn to interpreting the study, let us first review some of the key findings.

REVIEWING THE FINDINGS

Five communities participated in a 1996 survey of existing professional development opportunities — Atlanta, Baltimore, Cleveland, Hartford, and Milwaukee. The survey examined two types of providers, central agencies for Jewish education and synagogue supplementary schools. In doing so, therefore, the survey gives us information about a wide range of professional development programs, covering virtually all of the offerings for supplementary schoolteachers, and many of the programs available to day school and pre-school teachers, since a significant number of these programs are offered by the central agencies.

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Using some of the criteria that emanate out of the latest research and policy studies in general education (Little, 1986; Little, 1993; McLaughlin, 1993; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1996; McDiarmid, 1994), we looked at four "key characteristics" of good professional development:

- Good professional development is connected to knowledge of the content that is being taught.
- Good professional development has a clear and focused audience in mind.
- Good professional development has a coherent plan, sustained over time.
- Good professional development gives teachers opportunities to reflect, analyze and work on their practice.

Among other things the study showed that high quality professional development — as understood by the criteria outlined above — is not to be found in many of the programs available for teachers in these five communities. Only 4 programs (2%) across the five communities had all four "key characteristics." Fourteen programs (8%) exhibited three of these characteristics, 37 (21%) included two, 78 programs (45%) displayed only one of the key characteristics and 40 programs (23%) had none (Holtz, Gamoran, Dorph, Goldring, & Robinson, in press).

These findings have a good deal in common with the results of research about professional development conducted in general education over the last ten to fifteen years. Namely, they show that the dominant form of professional development follows what Judith Warren Little has called the "training" paradigm (Little, 1989). It is characterized by one-shot workshops, led by outside experts. Sessions tend to be about generic teaching issues, avoiding subject-specific issues (Goldenberg & Gallimore, 1991). Not much attention is paid to the contexts in which teachers work and

often teachers who work with very different student populations (by age or by subject matter) are grouped together in these professional development sessions (McLaughlin, 1991; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1996). Evaluation is done almost exclusively by looking at "customer satisfaction" of the participants and not by the impact of the professional development on classroom practices.

Current thinking about effective professional development for teachers, on the other hand, "calls for a wholesale rejection of the traditional, replacing the old with new images of meaningful professional development" (Wilson & Berne, 1999, p. 175). The differences between the "old" (training) paradigm and the "new" approach found in the literature references above is represented by Table 1.

The "new" paradigm represents the best thinking in contemporary educational research about what high quality professional development should seek to attain (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1996). With these standards in mind our survey of professional development in five Jewish communities focused on the dimensions of professional development for teachers in Jewish education that most conformed to the new model. Some aspects of current professional development in these communities, therefore, fell outside the purview of the study. First, because they are prime examples of "one-shot workshops" the survey did not count the all-day or multi-day conferences that educators often attend, such as the annual convention of the Coalition for the Advancement of Jewish Education (CAJE), or local conferences patterned after CAJE.²

Second, since the new model emphasizes "participants as members of learning communities" we did not include teachers who study on their own individually. Third, the new paradigm is interested in professional development that emphasizes both "subject matter

Table 1. Old Training Paradigm and the New Approach

| Old (Training) Model | New Model |
|---|---|
| One-shot workshops | Sustained, ongoing deliberations |
| Disconnected from teachers' work | Part of teachers' work |
| Focused on generic strategies or subject matter | Focused on subject matter and the teaching/learning of subject matter |
| Participants as individuals | Participants as members of learning communities |
| Oriented around answers and solutions | Oriented around questions and investigations of practice |
| Based on a view of teaching as technical work | Based on a view of teaching as intellectual work |

and the teaching/learning of subject matter." Therefore, general Judaica courses offered at local colleges or institutions of higher Jewish learning — courses, in other words, that usually focus only on subject matter and not on the teaching and learning of that subject matter as well — do not appear in the survey results.

Certainly, we believe it is important for teachers to know the content that they are teaching. But the new research in general education cited above strongly emphasizes the importance of connecting subject matter to practice. Courses in Bible or Jewish history disconnected from reflections on teaching that subject matter, admirable as they may be, do not represent the "best practice" in contemporary professional development. Nor does informal Jewish study that teachers might participate in, since such informal study is likewise disconnected from reflections on practice.

INTERPRETING THE FINDINGS

The findings about professional development in the communities studied present a challenge to contemporary Jewish education and Jewish communal policy. We now wish to turn to interpreting these results. What might lie behind these data? How might we understand the causes underlying these findings?

To professionals in the field the findings reported in our previous paper (and summarized above) do not come as a surprise. Many people are aware that professional development in Jewish education is characterized by one-shot workshops, generic approaches, a lack of emphasis on Jewish content, etc. But that very awareness leads to a question that we wish to address in this article: Namely, why do things remain the same? Why, in other words, does most professional development look the way it does given the fact that its inadequacies are well-known?

One explanation is obvious from our comments above. The dominant paradigm in general education has been that of the training model and therefore it is not surprising that a similar approach has been the one most commonly found in Jewish education. It is no secret that Jewish educational practices, particularly in the North American context, often reflect the current realities of what is happening in the world of contemporary general education. At times these influences are fruitful, with powerful educational ideas being adapted to Jewish educational settings. Schwab's ideas about inquiry learning, for example, had a profound effect on major curriculum projects in Jewish education during the 1960s and beyond (Zielenziger, 1989). On other occasions, such influences tend to be

fleeting or merely trendy, such as with the rage for Values Clarification in the late 1970s (Lukinsky, 1980).

So too the paradigm of professional development found in general education is the model most frequently used in Jewish education. Such an understanding of the continuing adherence to the training model is reasonable and partially explains the phenomenon, but other factors, we believe, are also at play. Thus we now want to explore other possibilities, more characteristic, perhaps even unique to the Jewish community. Our thoughts here, obviously, are speculative, but we hope to advance our understanding of the present reality through the following reflections.

Who is Doing the Work?

Aside from the challenges involved in changing a powerful paradigm such as the training model of professional development, Jewish education also suffers from a personnel crisis that would make implementing such changes difficult even if there was a will do so. Most people in leadership positions with responsibility for professional development have had no formal preparation in the latest thinking about professional development. Professional development is a field: It has a knowledge base, skills, and points of view about what works and what constitutes good practice. Until Jewish education develops appropriate leadership to do the work, it is likely that professional development will continue to follow the training model most prevalent in the survey (Holtz, Dorph, & Goldring, 1997).

As Stein, Smith and Silver (1999) put it:

Just as teachers will need to relearn their practice, so will experienced professional developers need to learn their craft, which traditionally has been defined as providing courses, workshops, and seminars. Although much has been written about the magnitude of the shift

that teachers will have to make, we know little about the changes that are required of professional developers as they make their practices more responsive to the demands of the current reform era (p. 238; see also Wilson & Ball, 1996).

Impact of Attitudes on Behavior: Beliefs About Jewish Education and Its Efficacy

Beyond the dominance of the training model, communities may not support professional development for teachers because of attitudes held, either consciously or subconsciously, about the nature of teachers, teaching or professional development itself. We can posit four different ways in which such attitudes might influence communal policy.

First, what might be called "the power of the status quo" affects the issue of professional development in the Jewish community. As Sarason has noted (1971), people tend to view the "regularities" of their settings as immutable. We are used to the situation as it is, and assume that it is a given. Thus Jewish schools are assumed to be as they always (!) have been and no amount of professional development is going to change these "eternal" regularities. In our view this attitude is a strong inhibitor to the implementation of innovative professional development in Jewish schools. If school and communal leaders believe in the unchanging and unchangeable regularities of these institutions, they are unlikely to be committed to viewing professional development as a way of changing teaching in the schools.

Second, professional and lay leaders may believe that teachers are essentially part-time, don't stay in teaching for long, and are not "professional."³ Why, if this is true, should the community bother to invest in professional development for them at all? Although other research has indicated that teachers' commitment to their profession and anticipated lon-

gevity in the field do make professional development a worthwhile investment (Council for Initiatives in Jewish Education, 1994; Gamoran, Goldring, Robinson, Tammivaara and Goodman, 1998), leaders may not be aware of this argument or may not take it into account in formulating policy. Long-held attitudes about teachers may be hard to change and in general the relationship between research and policy changes is known to be complex and often indirect (Lindblom & Cohen, 1979).

A third difficulty is that according to recent research, school principals in Jewish education are themselves undertrained and have few professional development opportunities available to them (Goldring, Gamoran, & Robinson, 1999). Yet although principals attend few in-service workshops, many respondents generally think their opportunities for professional growth are adequate (Goldring, Gamoran, & Robinson, 1999, p. 12). Therefore we might surmise that these principals (by extrapolation from their own situation) may think that the teachers in their employ — many of whom receive very little in the way of professional development — are getting enough training, despite the paucity of options for teachers reported upon in the professional development study.

This attitude constrains the professional development enterprise both for the principals and their teachers. The principals — in not being involved in professional development themselves — are not role models of people who are growing as professionals yet in terms of background and job definitions they are among the most “professional” people in the system. This last point indicates one of the complexities of the professional development issue. Jewish education can be viewed as something of an ecosystem: Changing professional development for teachers means changing many other things as well. Indeed, one of the most important changes that would have

to take place is not only a deeper commitment by principals to *how much* professional development their teachers need to have, as well as a greater understanding of *what kinds* of professional development are most effective. We can reasonably speculate that few principals conceive of professional development in ways different from the classic training model so prevalent throughout the educational system. Changing professional development for teachers also means reeducating school principals.

Finally, attitudes about professional development itself may be influenced by the length of time it takes to see the results of such efforts. It's very hard work to take professional development seriously because it takes a great deal of time (and a lot of small changes) before one can see change. Most large system — and even small systems such as schools — are famously impatient about change. To invest in professional development requires a significant amount of patience and a belief in the long-term effectiveness of such measures, neither of which may be present within the contemporary Jewish communal leadership.

Existing Communal and Institutional Structures

The attitudes outlined above can be seen as being expressed in the very nature of the current communal and institutional bodies that have responsibility for teachers' professional development. The survey focused on professional development activities organized by “central agencies” for Jewish education within the five communities studied. These organizations have a vested interest in justifying their legitimacy to their funding sources and supervisory organizations. (Often in contemporary Jewish education these are local Federations.) In order to do so, they may believe that they need to attract large numbers of participants. At the same time they may

want to meet their perceived mandate of being a broad-based communal organization. Thus central agencies are more likely to create generic, skills-based offerings that will accomplish these two goals, such professional development sessions will appeal to large numbers and reach a wide range of various constituencies in the community.

A second perceived benefit in offering professional development of this sort is that the central agencies can avoid divisive ideological issues and limit conflict with denominational organizations. In order to cut across the denominations, these sessions focus on "neutral" issues such as special education, cooperative learning, classroom management and lesson planning. Such professional development avoids subject matter "content" as much as possible: issues such as the authority and authorship of the Bible, the demands of the commandments and the status of women in Jewish law need never arise if one organizes professional development sessions that do not look at the biblical texts, rabbinic sources or historical documents.

This last approach is justified by the agencies themselves by saying that there are many new teachers in the system who have no training and therefore need basic teaching skills. Of course, they are correct, such teachers do not have basic skills, but they often also need serious work on improving their knowledge and conceptualizing ways of communicating that content to children. By taking the generic approach, the agencies are implicitly privileging knowledge of technique over knowledge of content. The result of such professional development is likely to lead to classroom lessons that lack depth, engagement with Jewish traditional texts and intellectual excitement for the learners.

Beyond the particular issues inherent in the nature of the central agencies, as described above, other difficulties are embedded in the current realities of most institutions in con-

temporary Jewish education. To begin with, the present modes of operation and structural arrangements of schools and other educational settings work against the possibility of change. David Cohen has astutely analyzed the difficulties that have inhibited changing the core practices of teaching in the history of American education (Cohen, 1988); it is clear that many of the same powerful factors act as impediments to changing the dominant paradigm of professional development as well. In particular what Cohen calls the "social arrangements" of teaching are relevant to the situation of professional development in Jewish education. If one substitutes the words "professional developers" or "teacher trainers" for "schoolteachers" in the lines below, one sees the difficulties inherent in the settings of contemporary Jewish education:

Most schoolteachers work in compulsory and unselective institutions in which there are few qualifications for entry and in which practitioners [*read: "professional developers"*] and clients [*read: "teachers in Jewish schools"*] have few opportunities for mutual choice. These circumstances heighten the impossibilities of practice by presenting schoolteachers with many clients who are relatively incapable and uncommitted (p. 71).

Second, it is hard to demand that teachers participate in professional development, when there is little support for their work to be found in communal or institutional infrastructures. Why should teachers be willing or interested in giving extra time to professional development activities when they may not feel that teaching as a profession is valued or rewarded by communal and educational institutions? Although there seems to be communal agreement about the importance of Jewish education, there is little concrete support for teachers in the field. For example, few communities offer health benefits to teachers in the system.

While it is often argued that most teachers are part-time and therefore not eligible for such benefits, this does not account for the fact that even full time teachers are not receiving such health benefits (Gamoran, Goldring, Robinson, Tammivaara, & Goodman, 1998).

The general picture of teacher's salaries and benefits goes hand in hand with the specific situation of rewards for participating in professional development itself. Few communities structure incentives for teachers or schools to participate in professional development. In fact, research has indicated — as one might expect — that where such incentives exist, more teachers actually do participate in teacher education programs (Gamoran, Goldring, Robinson, Goodman, & Tammivaara, 1997). While participation alone can't speak to the quality of the professional development sessions offered, certainly nothing at all can happen if teachers are not encouraged to participate to begin with!

Finally, there are no standards or norms for what professional development would look like in the contexts of Jewish education. Although norms for professional development in general education "vary widely from state to state" (Gamoran, Goldring, & Robinson, 1999, p. 458), nonetheless, there are many states that require mandated professional development for teachers to maintain their licenses. In the state of Wisconsin, for example, teachers have 6 times as much professional development mandated over five years than that which is found in Jewish educational settings in the same state (Gamoran, et al., 1998). More than the amount of professional development, one finds in certain arenas of general education a set of standards for the quality and content of professional development, something not found at all in Jewish education. Thus the Partnership for Kentucky School Reform lays out a set of ten detailed recommendations for professional development for teachers in the state (McDiarmid,

1994).

In Jewish education we have very few examples of standards quantifying professional development for teachers and no examples, to our knowledge, of recommendations for the nature of professional development work. How would professional development be handled in the part-time setting of supplementary schools? What kinds of compensation would exist? How much professional development would be required? What would be the incentives for teachers to attend? Who would organize and conduct professional development? What would happen in professional development seminars and workshops? None of these questions — among many others — has been addressed in a systematic way in contemporary Jewish education.

PROSPECTS FOR CHANGE

In this article we have suggested that three interrelated factors are behind the phenomenon that professional development in Jewish education continues to remain the same: 1) a set of attitudes held by communal and institutional leaders; 2) infrastructure issues within communities and institutions; 3) ongoing use of an "old" model of professional development for teachers. Changing each of these three factors involves different challenges and impediments.

Although we have a shortage of well-trained professional developers, in our view changing the nature of professional development itself may be the easiest of the three to improve. Programs to create a cadre of teacher educators for Jewish education have already been put into place (Holtz, Dorph, & Goldring, 1997) and there are optimistic signs that new personnel can be prepared to do this kind of work.

Moreover, we have a clear sense of what professional development of the "new" sort

might and should look like. We can find descriptions of such programs in the literature of general education and we have a sense of the key elements of best practices in the field (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Wilson & Berne, 1999). Such programs can be adapted to the particular settings of Jewish education. For example, one important principle of this mode of professional development is to engage teachers as learners in the area that their students will learn in but at a level that is more suitable to their own learning. We can easily picture Jewish teachers studying as communities of learners the subject matters of Bible, Siddur or Hebrew poetry and then thinking about the ways that the content that they have learned will be used in the classroom context with their students. We can imagine study groups in Jewish schools investigating the teaching and learning of Siddur, for example, through observation and conversation based on videotapes of teachers teaching Siddur (Lampert & Ball, 1998). Indeed such programs are already beginning to be tried out.

More difficult in our view is implementing changes in the communal or institutional infrastructures (factor #2 above). Such changes involve both changing the way institutions operate and investing significant financial resources into professional development. Thus institutions would need to think hard about structuring the school day — perhaps through release time, by hiring substitutes or by paying for an extra hour of a teacher's time outside of class — to enable teachers to learn together and work on their teaching practice; communities would need to create benefits packages that would encourage teachers to enter or stay in the field and to participate in professional development opportunities. Pay scales would have to be adjusted to reward participation in professional development. Communities might have to invest in video-conferencing facilities to enable teachers to participate in distance learning courses.

All of the above would require a new commitment by schools and communal institutions in upgrading the quality of the teaching profession through participation in professional development. Partnerships among schools, synagogues, academic institutions of higher learning, Federations and private foundations would be needed to provide the resources — human and financial — to do this ambitious and innovative work.

Yet even that seems to us less problematic than our first factor above — attitudes that may influence the other two elements. Changing attitudes is considerably more difficult than implementing new ideas and practices. If communal leaders do not believe that Jewish education ultimately makes a difference or if they believe that Jewish education does matter but the way to improve it does not include helping the teachers in the system change and improve — then it is going to be very difficult to find the will or the resources necessary to make things better. Attitudes about teachers, teaching and the nature of school improvement are deeply held and not easy to change. Unless those attitudes are transformed, however, the more things change the more they are likely to remain the same.

ENDNOTES

¹We want to add special thanks to Professors Ellen Goldring and Adam Gamoran whose work on the original article and presentation at the Conference were crucial to this process.

²As we noted in our earlier publication, there were eleven local conferences of this sort, most of which lasted only one day. Since these were highly diverse in their content, they did not lend themselves to the survey categories.

³Our comments about attitudes about teachers in the Jewish community are speculative and based on commonly held assumptions and anecdotes. There is virtually no research that explores this question. For a first foray into related matters see Beck (1999).

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