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### Professional Culture and Professional Development in Jewish Schools: Teachers' Perceptions and Experiences

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## **Professional Culture and Professional Development in Jewish Schools: Teachers' Perceptions and Experiences**

SUSAN S. STODOLSKY, GAIL ZAIMAN DORPH, AND  
SHARON FEIMAN NEMSER

*In this article, we report a study of professional culture and professional development in Jewish schools based on surveys of teachers and other staff and interviews with principals. We first introduce three key constructs: professional culture, professional development, and professional learning communities. We then describe research that has identified features of each that support teacher learning. With this background in mind, we compare the current realities in Jewish schools as gleaned through the survey with typical public schools and with the features of schools identified in the literature as supportive of teacher learning and collegiality. Finally, we suggest the next steps that might be taken to improve Jewish schools as settings in which teacher growth and learning flourish.*

### INTRODUCTION

A growing literature that is based on studies of public education settings describes research on the professional culture of schools and the formal and informal opportunities teachers have to learn more about and improve their practice. Researchers emphasize the potential for teacher development and learning that resides in collegial interactions about classroom practices,

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curriculum, instructional goals, and student learning. Such interactions require an infrastructure in schools that give teachers opportunities for sustained work around teaching and learning.

While there is still much to learn about the professional cultures of public schools, professional cultures and opportunities for teacher learning in Jewish schools have received even less attention. There are some studies of formal professional development opportunities for Jewish educators (Dorph & Holtz, 2000; Holtz 2000), but more school-based research describing and analyzing the current circumstances of teachers' work in both day and supplementary schools is needed. Where do Jewish schools stand on the path toward developing more effective structures and opportunities to support student and teacher learning?

In this article, we report a study of professional culture and professional development in Jewish schools based on surveys of teachers and other staff and interviews with principals. We first introduce three key constructs: professional culture, professional development, and professional learning communities. We then describe research that has identified features of each that support teacher learning. With this background in mind, we compare the current realities in Jewish schools as gleaned through the survey with typical public schools and with the features of schools identified in the literature as supportive of teacher learning and collegiality. Finally, we suggest next steps that might be taken to improve Jewish schools as settings in which teacher growth and learning flourish.

## BACKGROUND AND THEORY

Three overlapping concepts inform this work: professional culture, professional learning community, and professional development. Recent educational research has described and examined these constructs as they appear in schools that are more and less successful in supporting teacher learning and student learning. We consulted various sources about school culture, professional development, and teacher learning communities as background for this work (Ball & Cohen, 1993; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Garet, Birman, Porter, Desimone, & Herman, 1999; Knapp, 2003; Little 1993, 1999; Lord, 1994; McLaughlin, & Talbert, 1993; Meier, 1992; Troen & Boles, 2003). In this section we discuss key features of these constructs as a way of introducing the study.

Professional school culture includes norms, values, practices, and modes of interaction that are shared by teachers and administrators, including, among other things, shared goals, the nature of relationships with colleagues, and opportunities for teachers to visit each other's classrooms and talk about their teaching work. Categories and definitions of professional culture abound in the literature (Johnson, 2004; Kardos, 2004; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001), posing many questions about school

cultures: Do teachers work behind closed doors or is it acceptable for teachers to observe in their colleagues' classrooms? Do teachers work together on curriculum so that student experiences are well articulated or do they teach without knowing what is taught and learned in other teacher's classrooms? Do teachers focus exclusively on their own students or is there a shared sense of responsibility for the learning and actions of all students? Does the principal want to hear what's going on or is the staff "supposed" to conceal difficulties and problems? Should classrooms be quiet and orderly or does the administration appreciate that noisy classrooms may reflect active learning? Such standards of teaching and norms of interaction among the staff are embedded in the context of the larger school culture. Kardos (2004) has noted the distinction between organizational culture and professional culture: Professional culture refers to the workplace culture experienced by the professionals (teachers, administrators, and specialists) at the school rather than the entire organizational culture (or school culture), which would also include students. Awareness of these elements often is implicit. Teachers often say, "That's how we do things here," referring to the aspects of professional culture that surround them, shaping their actions and interactions with colleagues, administrators, students, and parents.

In his classic work on school teachers, Lortie (1975) highlighted the fact that most teachers primarily work in isolation from one another. More recently, teacher-writers Troen and Bowles comment on the way such teacher isolation affects teachers' learning, "isolation means that each teacher must learn things by trial and error . . . Teachers have few opportunities and little encouragement to work together and learn from one another . . . and collaboration and teamwork are not the cultural norm" (2003, pp. 69–70).

In contrast, sustained interaction among teachers about teaching and learning is a hallmark of professional school cultures that support teacher learning. Judith Warren Little (1982) found that students perform better in schools where teachers work as colleagues rather than as independent instructors, professionally isolated from one another. According to Little, schools with supportive professional cultures and regularized meeting times can reduce teacher isolation; however, true collegiality (what Little calls "joint work") means taking joint responsibility for improved teaching and learning. It means going beyond friendly relations with colleagues or occasional sharing of materials and ideas to serious and sustained work on teaching and learning.

Deborah Meier, school leader and educational reformer, describes how schools would have to change in order to become places where teachers as well as students could learn and grow: "At the very least, one must imagine schools in which teachers are in frequent conversation with each other about their work, have easy and necessary access to each other's classrooms,

take it for granted that they should comment on each other's work, and have the time to develop common standards for student work" (1992, 602–603).

Meier's description of a professional environment that supports teacher and student learning reinforces the idea that teachers must have formal (as well as informal) opportunities to talk with one another about teaching and student learning. The idea of making teaching public, with the expectation that teachers will observe one another's classes and receive feedback and critique from colleagues, is another key ingredient. In addition, Meier points out that teachers must develop and share expectations and standards for student work. Teachers and administrators need to agree on goals for student learning and development.

Other researchers have studied professional communities that support teacher learning. Such professional communities, which may be composed of subgroups of teachers in a given school, exhibit many of the features associated with effective professional cultures. For example, McLaughlin and Talbert (2001) and Stodolsky and Grossman (2000) identified professional learning communities in certain high school departments that were effective in adapting their teaching to the needs of diverse students. In such departments, teachers shared responsibility for student learning, rotating course assignments and, at times, ignoring seniority in order to achieve more equity among teachers. Teachers also regularly exchanged teaching ideas or materials or collaborated on developing curricular resources. Members of these departments often were active in professional associations and shared what they learned outside school with one another inside school. They developed the capacity to talk together about their own teaching in a respectful, but at times, critical manner. They often discussed student work.

Recently, researchers have begun to examine the dynamics and interactions characteristic of groups of teachers that function as "professional learning communities." Under most circumstances, teachers refrain from asking probing questions about a colleague's practice even when they have the opportunity to talk about professional issues because they don't want to "rock the boat." In point of fact, most adults do not know how to engage in constructive yet critical conversations with their peers, to function as "critical colleagues" (Achinstein & Meyer, 1997; Lord, 1994). As Lord (1994) suggests, teachers must be willing "to serve as commentators and critics of their own and other teachers' practices" (p. 185). The ability to do so requires experience, explicit practice, tutelage, and support in settings where such norms are valued.

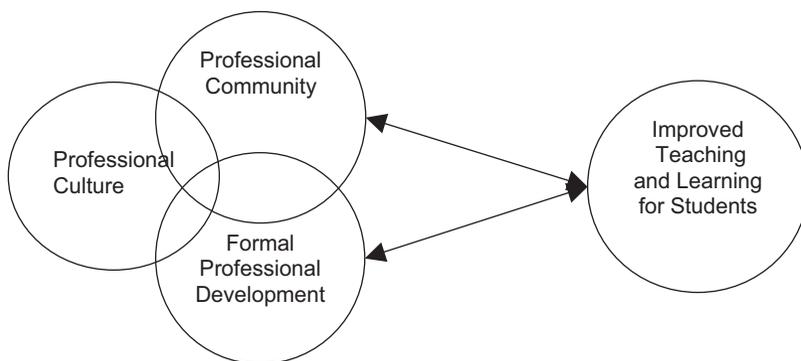
One study (Grossman, Wineberg, & Woolworth, 2001) explored in detail the interactions of high school English and history teachers who came together at the researchers' behest to read historical fiction and to develop integrated curricular units. They found that one of the most difficult challenges facing the

group was developing norms and patterns of discussion that permitted conflicting points of view to emerge without crippling the ongoing participation of members. The researchers link the value of learning to examine different, even conflicting, perspectives to the habits required to participate in a pluralistic society. They detail what this implies for communities of teachers. Finally, they acknowledge what a new experience this was for teachers in their study. A few of their observations are illustrative.

In a professional community, teachers come to recognize the interrelationships of teacher and student learning and are able to use their own learning as a resource to delve more deeply into issues of student learning, curriculum and teaching . . . The ultimate goal of a community of learners in a pluralistic society is to learn to see differences as a resource rather than a liability . . . Members begin to accept the obligations of community membership, which include the obligation to press for clarification of ideas and to help colleagues articulate developing understandings . . . we created an unfamiliar and confusing social forum, one that demanded a new form of social and intellectual participation. (Grossman et al., 2001, 989–990)

Research on the dynamics of professional community fits with findings about the kinds of formal professional development opportunities that promote teacher learning. There is growing consensus about what effective professional development entails (Darling-Hammond, & McLaughlin, 1996; Goldenberg, & Gallimore, 1991; Lieberman, 1996; Little, 1993; Lord, 1994; McDiarmid, 1994). Effective professional development must be sustained, ongoing, and intensive. No more one-shot, one-size fits all workshops. New style teacher study groups must foster an investigative stance toward the teaching and learning of particular content rather than promote content-free technical skills. New style professional development also enables teachers to experience first hand the challenges as well as the power of collaborative learning which they, in turn, may enact in their classrooms.

In summary, the research and professional literature describes aspects of professional culture, professional learning communities, and enhanced professional development opportunities that work in tandem to support teacher growth, improved teaching and enhanced student learning. Figure 1 is an attempt to graphically represent the dynamic relationship between these constructs. While these constructs often are discussed separately for analytic clarity, in schools they overlap. Taken together, these formal and informal features of school contexts support teacher learning and have an impact on the quality of teaching and learning in schools. This study focuses most attention on professional culture and professional development, but also touches on some aspects of professional learning communities.



**FIGURE 1.** Relationships among study constructs.

## THE STUDY

### Study Method

Ideas about professional culture and professional development in public schools provided an important starting point for our research. Ten schools in an eastern metropolitan area participated in the study (2 day high schools, 1 day elementary school, and 7 after school programs). All denominations were represented in the sample. The research team developed a survey to gather basic information about the conditions and opportunities in Jewish schools related to professional culture and professional development.<sup>1</sup> The survey incorporated items from previous investigations as well as some of our own. (Items used in this paper are listed in the Appendix.) We distributed the survey to all the teachers in the 10 participating schools. Response rate was 78%, resulting in a group of 178 teacher-respondents. Day school teachers ( $n = 89$ ) were 57% women and 43%

<sup>1</sup>Teams of educators from these 10 schools were all participants in the Mandel Teacher Educator Institute in Boston (Boston MTEI), 2002–2004. The surveys were administered and the interviews took place toward the beginning of this two-year professional development program. We received important help in developing the interview protocol and conceptualizing and adapting the survey instrument from Shirah Hecht, research associate with the Mandel Center for Studies in Jewish Education, Brandeis University, Susan Kardos, postdoctoral fellow at the Mandel Center for Studies in Jewish Education, Annette Koren, then chief researcher for the Boston Bureau of Jewish Education and Barbara Neufeld, president of Education Matters and Susan Shevitz, director of the Hornstein Program, Brandeis University. The survey was built on previous research and surveys in Jewish and general education, including: CIJE Study of Educators, January 1996, Principal Researchers Adam Gamoran and Ellen Goldring; Jewish School Study-Teacher Survey, 2000 by Barbara Schneider for the Cooperative Research Project in Chicago; M. McLaughlin and J. Talbert, 2001, *Professional Communities and the Work of High School Teaching*, University of Chicago Press; and the Longitudinal Teacher Survey, Elementary School Mathematics, Spring 1999 created by M. S. Garet, A.C. Porter, L. Desimone, B. F. Birman & K. S. Yoon of the American Institutes for Research, University of Wisconsin-Madison and Vanderbilt University.

men; afternoon school teachers ( $n = 89$ ) were 80% women and 20% men. Researchers also interviewed all 10 principals in order to gather more site-specific information.

The survey responses were analyzed in three ways depending on the appropriate level of aggregation. For some items, we compiled the responses of teachers in each school separately; for other items, we examined responses for the sample of teachers as a whole. For example, it was most meaningful to know if teachers agreed on goals within each school, while it made sense to combine all responses when examining the professional development activities teachers attended. Since the sample contained day schools and afternoon schools, we checked all results to see if patterns in the two types of schools differed. If teachers in the two settings responded in a similar manner, we aggregated the data. Any differences between day school and afternoon schools are noted in the results section.

## Study Results

In this section, we describe some key findings from the survey that relate to the properties of school culture and professional development critical in promoting teacher learning. We begin with a discussion of professional conversation and collaboration, especially the extent of collaboration among teachers on matters of teaching and learning and sharing a common understanding of the goals of their school. We also examine whether current structures in Jewish schools make it possible for teachers to meet on a regular basis to talk about goals, curriculum, and teaching. Subsequently, we look at some aspects of principals' leadership that influence professional culture and the kind of formal learning opportunities available to teachers.

### Professional Conversation and Collaboration

A cluster of survey items tapped the extent of collaboration and coordination with regard to curriculum, content, student progress and the existence of a shared vision for the school. The survey items examined whether teachers had opportunities to collaborate with their colleagues regularly on the core issues of teaching and learning subject matter content. Only a few schools (3 of 10) reported regular collaboration among teachers on instructional matters, such as coordinating course content or working together on their instructional practices.

At the same time, almost all of the schools seemed to offer a congenial atmosphere in which teachers were generally helpful to one another and could count on one another. This struck us as an important finding, particularly in part-time settings, where there is little time for teachers to interact in the normal course of events. The finding that teachers experience their workplace in positive terms and feel positively toward their colleagues is

certainly a necessary, but not sufficient, condition that can serve as a starting point for the development of effective professional culture.

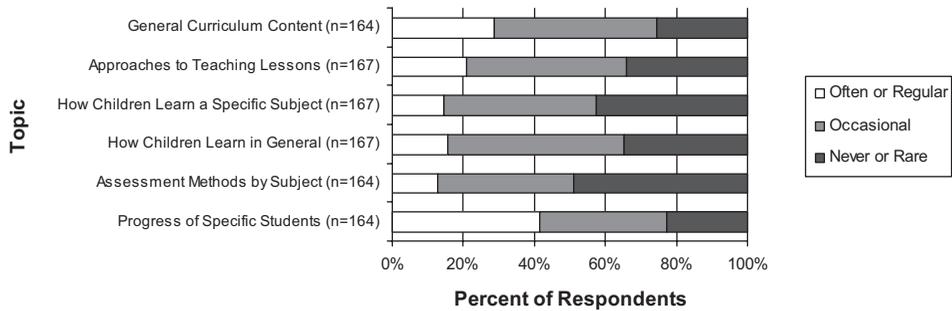
A shared understanding of the goals for student learning (see e.g., Powell, Farrar, & Cohen, 1985, and Strike, 2004) is an essential ingredient of a successful school. Collaboration on teaching and learning requires a shared vision of the ends or goals of the school so that efforts to improve the means for achieving those goals are properly focused. Consensus on what students should learn directs the selection and use of curriculum that fosters desired goals. Similarly, goals provide a framework with which to assess student attainment and growth. When asked, teachers in only half the schools substantially agreed that “goals and priorities for this school are clear.” Furthermore, fewer day school teachers reported consensus on goals than did afternoon school teachers. This result could be explained by the fact that day schools have a dual curriculum of Jewish and general studies. It could also be due to the fact that two of the three day schools in the study are high schools that teach many different subjects, and thus, teachers are not likely to know their colleagues’ goals. While these are possible explanations, they should not diminish the importance of clear goals for all educating institutions.

In schools with a strong professional culture, teachers regularly talk about goals, teaching, curriculum, students, and other educational matters. Professional conversations need to be embedded in the life of the school. In keeping with such a norm, faculty meetings might focus on substantive issues such as curriculum and instruction along with administrative issues that require collective attention.

Professional conversation among teachers also can occur in a more informal fashion when they have the opportunity to interact and observe one another’s teaching. The survey asked teachers how often they had informal contact with colleagues. Overall, 52% of the teachers reported regular informal contact and 35% reported occasional contact. When we looked at day school teachers and afternoon school teachers separately, 68% of the day school teachers reported regular collegial contact, as opposed to only 29% of afternoon school teachers. This simply may be a function of scheduling. In many of the afternoon schools, teachers only saw those teachers who taught on the same day as they did. Often Sunday and weekday teachers met only once or twice a year for whole school faculty meetings. On the other hand, day school teachers are in school every week day and run into each other in the hallway and in the teachers’ room.

Teachers were asked to indicate how frequently they discussed particular topics with one another. Figure 2 shows that the most frequently discussed topic was the progress of specific students. Over 40% of teachers reported discussing the progress of individual students on a regular basis and an additional 40% reported discussing the progress of individual students at least occasionally. One-third reported discussing general curriculum

### Topics Discussed Among Teachers



**FIGURE 2.** Topics discussed among teachers.

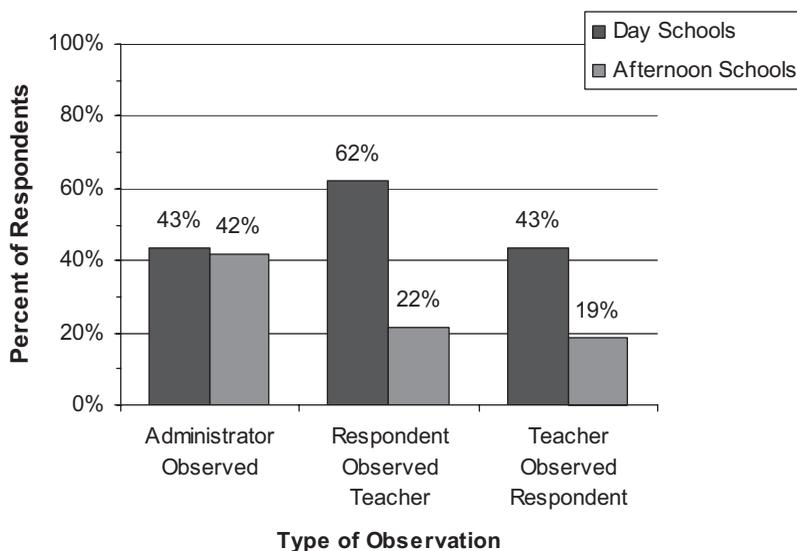
content on a regular basis; only 20% reported talking about approaches to teaching lessons on a regular basis. How children learn a specific subject, how children learn in general, and how teachers assess subject learning infrequently were discussed.

It is promising that a majority of teachers report talking with colleagues about student progress, especially the progress of specific students. The overall frequency with which teachers report discussing different topics with colleagues suggests, for the most part, that regular professional conversation around the content of teaching and learning is rare. Sustained conversation about how children learn specific content, about approaches to teaching different subjects, and about assessment of student learning in specific subjects occurs infrequently. Talking with colleagues about subject matter and how to teach it likely could contribute to improved instruction. In an effective professional learning community, these topics would need to be part of the central agenda for discussion and collaboration.

### Teaching as Public Activity

Creating opportunities for teachers to observe other teachers and to be observed can promote conversations about teaching and learning grounded in the particulars of teachers' practice. Reformers imagine schools in which teaching becomes a public, shared activity as opposed to an activity that takes place behind closed doors through peer observation and conversation.

Our data on classroom observation indicates that administrators in both day and congregational schools observe about 40% of their teachers at least once a year. Observation by administrators can help teachers develop their teaching practice, but such classroom visits often are overshadowed by issues related to teacher evaluation and supervision. Turning to teachers observing one another, we found different patterns of collegial observation



**FIGURE 3.** Observation opportunities for teachers: Day schools (N = 69) and afternoon schools (N = 74).

in these schools. As Figure 3 shows, 60% of teachers in day schools report observing another teacher at least once and 40% report being observed by a colleague. In contrast, only about 20% of congregational school teachers observed a colleague or were observed by another teacher.

If observation is a promising vehicle for professional development and a contributing element to a collaborative professional culture, Jewish schools need to find ways for teachers to observe one another. This may present a special challenge in afternoon schools because of the part-time nature of afterschool teaching. One of the principals we interviewed, when asked if teachers in her school have a chance to see each other teaching said, “Rarely. [you need to] consciously free somebody up to go watch somebody teach. It’s not easy.” Providing opportunities for teachers to observe one another in an ongoing fashion presents a challenge in most school settings, even for school leaders who understand the educational benefits of classroom observation for all teachers. Perhaps technology could help here (e.g., video taping for future viewing)—a point to which we will return in our discussion of implications.

### Principal Leadership and Creating Opportunities for Teacher Growth

Principals can play a key role in enabling teacher development by creating time and structures for teachers to work together, providing instructional

support, publicly valuing serious experimentation in support of student learning, allocating resources, and offering encouragement (Little, 1984; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001). Most teachers in all the schools surveyed agreed with the statements: “The principal is interested in innovations and new ideas” and “Teachers are encouraged to experiment with their teaching.” However, the challenge for the principal is to create structures and opportunities (e.g., common planning times, co-teaching arrangements, video taping opportunities, and summer curriculum development projects) that enable teachers to work together on issues of teaching and learning. We found limited evidence of such arrangements in these schools.

Teachers also may benefit from personal recognition by principals, especially if they are trying out new practices. In only 5 out of 10 schools did the majority of teachers agree with a statement indicating that they “were recognized for a job well done.” Interestingly, day school teachers reported less recognition for a job well done than did teachers in afternoon schools. The importance of principal leadership in creating and maintaining a collaborative professional culture in a school has been well documented. One ingredient of such a culture would be conversations about teaching and learning between teachers and principals and, as appropriate, positive feedback to teachers. This study suggests that we examine more closely this aspect of school life and try to better understand when and why teachers feel underappreciated by their school administrators.

### Professional Development Activities

To improve their teaching and enhance their students’ learning, teachers must have significant opportunities to learn new ideas and practices and integrate them into their classrooms. From the survey, we learned about the kinds of formal professional development opportunities experienced by teachers in these 10 schools.

We asked teachers to describe up to three professional development opportunities they experienced in the last year that provided the most learning. Twenty-six percent of the respondents did not describe any activity. In all, 143 teachers described their professional development experiences. Twenty-six percent listed only one professional development activity, while the remaining teacher respondents described two or three activities. For those who participated in professional development in the year prior to the study, 61% reported that their participation was mainly initiated by their school administration while 39% reported the activities as mainly self-initiated.

The most common professional development opportunity (31%) took the form of school workshops held during nonschool and school hours. With some frequency, teachers also participated in school-based study groups (8%), received classroom mentoring (8%), and attended college

courses (8%) and BJE institutes (6%). Many of these learning opportunities were limited in scope, occupying only a few hours of teachers' time.

Educational research and practical experimentation suggest that such activities need to be of sufficient duration to have an impact on teacher's practices. Knapp (2003) reports that Garet et al. (1999) found "teachers were more likely to implement what they learned when they experienced professional development that was continuous, on-going and long-term (i.e., minimum of 40–50 hours)" among other features (p. 121). Over half of the professional development experiences reported by the teachers had three or fewer sessions and lasted six hours or less. On the other hand, about 14% of the activities occupied 30 or more hours and 38% of these were college courses. The titles of the college courses taken by teachers in the sample contain a mix of Jewish content, such as Hebrew, and general pedagogy, such as cooperative learning. Conversations with participants who attended these courses suggest that the subject matter rarely had direct connections to teacher's classroom practices or provided the kind of onsite follow-up necessary to help teachers incorporate content and pedagogy into their teaching practice. While college courses can expose teachers to important new knowledge and skills, improved teaching and learning only comes about when teachers learn to use this knowledge in their practice. In most cases, teachers need help figuring out how to do this (Cohen, Raudenbush, & Ball, 2003).

Professional development is more effective when groups of teachers from the same school participate together, making follow-up and collegial interaction more likely (Knapp, 2003). In the professional development experiences that the survey teachers reported, 48% were attended by individuals while the rest were attended by school teams. Most likely the school-based workshops served their own teachers. We do not know the extent to which professional development opportunities were tied to teachers' actual classroom practices, only that 40% were offered at school sites. The majority of school-based professional development workshops held during school time or during nonschool hours were not sustained over time. Teachers reported that 70% of the workshops occupied six or fewer hours and 59% consisted of one or two sessions. At the other extreme, 10% consisted of 10 sessions while 16 hours was the maximum number of hours for any school-based workshop.

Teachers also reported the content of professional development experiences. Thirty-four percent had Jewish content, while 57% had pedagogical content. The content emphasis varied by the type of school: Day school teachers participated in activities which tended to emphasize pedagogical content; supplementary school teachers experienced more Jewish content. This pattern may reflect the assumed needs of the two groups. In fact, teachers in both types of schools need opportunities to deepen and extend their content knowledge and learn how to teach it effectively to their

students. There is a growing body of research on subject matter knowledge for teaching as well as on “pedagogical content knowledge,” which includes different ways to represent core concepts, findings about what students find difficult or confusing in a given subject, and materials available for teaching the content (Grossman, 1990; Shulman, 1986).

## DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Overall, the professional climates of most of the Jewish schools we studied seem rather similar to those described in studies of public schools. Although some elements of a productive professional learning environment are in place in some of the schools, the majority of schools are missing many critical features. Our research suggests the need for a sustained effort to make Jewish schools better places for teacher learning and growth. To accomplish this, schools need to adopt structures and practices that permit teachers to interact with one another around teaching and learning. Teaching increasingly must become a public activity and teachers must come to expect that colleagues will raise questions and offer suggestions about their classroom practices.

Moving in these directions may be especially challenging for afternoon schools where faculty are part-time and may be onsite at different times. Day schools also may experience challenges as faculty members are often on nonoverlapping schedules and divided between Jewish studies and secular subject groups. It will take imagination, leadership, and perseverance to find ways for faculty groups to come together for joint study, planning, and problem solving.

Turning toward aspects of professional culture, we found that teachers in Jewish schools generally report positive feelings toward one another and are willing to help each other out as needed. Pomson (2005) also found that day school teachers were very collegial toward one another, but rarely collaborated on substantive issues. Teachers’ positive feelings toward their colleagues could lay a foundation for more focused, professional efforts, such as working together on curriculum, examining student work and observing in one another’s classrooms.

The substantive focus of professional development deserves serious attention. Teachers reported that the majority of professional development activities focused on pedagogy, although this emphasis was more typical among day school teachers. Jewish content was often featured, particularly in programs for afternoon school teachers. We believe ongoing Jewish learning should feature prominently in professional development for teachers in Jewish schools—both for its benefit in increased content knowledge and for the personal growth of teaching professionals.

In general education most professional development programs tend to focus on pedagogy devoid of specific content. Research shows that these

“tricks of the trade” programs generally are ineffective (Little, 1993; Knapp, 2003). A more productive approach is to connect content and pedagogy by examining how different curricular materials approach subject matter content, what typical understandings and misunderstandings students encounter in dealing with the content, and what resources are available for teaching different topics.

Clearly, some Jewish schools contain pockets of exemplary practice that offer “visions of the possible” in professional development. An experiment in avocational teaching in a small midwestern *havurah*-style congregation provides additional evidence that sustained, ongoing professional development among teachers is possible (Dorph & Feiman-Nemser, 1997; Feiman-Nemser, 1997). Teams of congregants taught Torah in grades 3 through 7 and studied Torah together as adults. The teaching teams also examined curricular materials and planned lessons together. The use of teams not only made teaching a public practice, but also provided built-in support for these novice avocational teachers. The project was an effort to respond to the shortage of qualified teachers for the religious school. The result was a revitalized school and an energized congregation.

At a recent meeting of the Network for Research in Jewish Education (June 2005), educators described promising initiatives designed to promote professional development and enhance professional culture in Jewish schools. Dorph, Holtz, Echt, Goodman, and Leibson (2005) reported on two school-based study groups where teachers analyzed classroom videotapes. Both programs took place in afternoon schools. In one initiative, teachers looked at tapes of their own teaching; in the other, they analyzed videotapes produced by the Mandel Teacher Educator Institute (MTEI, 2000). Transcripts of the conversations in these groups clearly showed the beginnings of a shared language about teaching along with strong involvement in examining teachers’ practice. Participants expressed highly positive sentiments about these opportunities and attended meetings even when they were not compensated. Some teachers mentioned that these professional development sessions provided their first opportunity to get to know some of their colleagues who taught on different days. In both settings, teachers were eager to participate, suggesting that this activity tapped a nascent desire for professional learning.

Further evidence comes from a longitudinal research on a teacher study group in a congregational school started by the educational director almost a decade ago. Influenced by new ideas about content-rich, ongoing professional development,<sup>2</sup> the director obtained modest support to bring

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<sup>2</sup>This ongoing professional development project was inspired by the leader’s participation in the Mandel Teacher Educator Initiative. Graduates of this initiative have achieved some success in creating “existence proofs” in Jewish education for the kind of professional development that the research suggests is efficacious.

teachers together once a month to examine their holiday curriculum and study Jewish texts. Over a nine-year period, the study group spent most of its time on big ideas in Judaism. For example, the third year's theme was "Becoming Torah" followed the next year by "Encountering the Divine." Teachers came to view these monthly opportunities for joint study as an integral and valued part of their work as teachers. Almost all teachers continued to participate in the seminar year after year (Dorph, Stodolsky, & Wohl, 2002)

The field needs to move beyond pockets of exemplary practice so that joint work among teachers on teaching and learning becomes the norm. To create more effective Jewish schools where teachers and students grow and learn, the main actors need a shared vision of what such schools could be like. We have tried to suggest some of the essential ingredients that have been identified by others who investigated these issues. A challenge for the field is figuring out how to present such a vision to school leaders, both educators and lay leaders, in a manner that it becomes a compelling part of their work. We need to recruit and support educational leaders who can transform the way schools are as they continue learning what they can be.

Finally, more research based in Jewish schools undergoing changes in professional culture and professional development could enhance the field's understanding of the processes and strategies that hold promise or pose challenges. What structures and strategies are effective in which settings? What are key challenges and limiting factors? How can they be overcome or redefined? What changes in norms and practices actually result? Such studies would enable Jewish schools to learn from others' experience and lead to a broader conversation about how to make schools good places for teacher and student learning.

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#### APPENDIX: FIVE-POINT AGREE–DISAGREE SURVEY ITEMS

- Teachers make a conscious effort to coordinate their course content with that of other teachers.
- Teachers have many opportunities to collaborate with other teachers on their instructional practices.
- You can count on most faculty members to help out anywhere, even though it may not be part of their official assignment.

There is a great deal of cooperative effort among staff members.  
This school seems like a big family, everyone is so close and cordial.  
Goals and priorities for the school are clear.  
The principal is interested in innovations and new ideas.  
In this school, I am encouraged to experiment with my teaching.  
Teachers are recognized for a job well done.