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## Chapter 9

# Dealing with the Shortage of Teachers

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Reflected in the title of this volume and in the direction of many of its articles is an assumption that we all agree on a fundamental direction: that of professionalizing the occupation of teaching. Based, however, on our recently completed policy-oriented research study, we would like to suggest that, while professionalizing supplementary school teaching has certainly been the hope of the past and is one option for the future in dealing with the continuing teacher shortage, it is not the only way to go. In some circumstances, it may not even be the most feasible or desirable option.

But before presenting the highlights of our JESNA-funded year-long study, with particular emphasis on what is currently being tried with regard to the recruitment and training of avocational (non-career oriented) teachers in selected Jewish schools around the country, we will review the history of the study itself, which we think instructive to the current state of research in Jewish education.

“Dealing with the Shortage of Supplementary School Teachers: An Exploratory Study”<sup>1</sup> was intended as an example of policy-oriented research. The idea for a study of the shortage of supplementary school teachers came out of many months of discussion by an informal group of colleagues in Los Angeles who were associated

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<sup>1</sup> Unpublished Manuscript, 1986, made available upon request from JESNA.

with the Bureau of Jewish Education, Hebrew Union College, the University of Judaism, UCLA, and the CAJE Research Network. From time to time, lay leaders, teachers and principals joined our meetings. In looking for a research focus of importance to decision makers, as well as one which might engage our energies, we chose the subject of the supplementary school teacher. We, Bank and Aron, then drafted a proposal for six coordinated studies analyzing the shortage of teachers and the problems and options related to teacher recruitment and retention.

We took our ideas to the CAJE Research Network, discussed them with various BJE's, solicited support from several agencies interested in Jewish education, and presented them to federation lay leaders. Many people liked the idea but offered no money; research was a low priority when compared with immediate program needs.

As time passed in our search for funding, our colleagues went on to other things although they continued to act as commentators on our work. The two of us eventually received a small amount of money from the Los Angeles Bureau of Jewish Education to do one of the studies in our original proposal, a focus group study which explored the interests, fears and perceived training needs of congregants who thought that they might become avocationally involved with supplementary school teaching at some time in their lives.

Shortly thereafter, we received a larger grant from JESNA for a combination of three of our proposed studies: analyzing emergent innovative practices in public education, looking at what was going on in Christian religious schools, and describing what was happening around the country in selected Jewish schools. The research was done through a combination of literature review, phone interviews and site visits.

A draft of the final report was reviewed by individuals who represent lay and professional leaders in large and small communities. Their observations on those aspects of the report they found useful, and their suggestions about how the report's recommendations might be discussed and used will influence how the report is distributed and considered by policy makers.

Let us now briefly highlight a number of findings from our study.

1. *There is a chronic shortage of teachers in Jewish supplementary schools.* There are approximately 2,066 supplementary schools in North America enrolling a total of 268,000 students who receive between two and six hours of instruction per week. Collectively, these schools employ approximately 20,000 teachers.<sup>2</sup> Although JESNA and some central agencies attempt to monitor personnel matters such as salaries, training, turnover and other trends, there are no comprehensive and detailed analyses of essential statistics on the past, present and future pools of teachers and of the complex nature of the teacher shortage in supplementary schools. Yet, general complaints about the shortage have long been commonplace and appear in articles since the 1950s.<sup>3</sup>

We found that when educators talk about the teacher shortage in supplementary schools they mean two things. First they mean the decreasing number of individuals who are available for employment as teachers. Our informal telephone poll of all Bureau directors revealed that in some cities, 15% of the teaching slots are unfilled at the beginning of the school year.

But this "empty slot" problem is not the only shortage. Even in those areas where all positions are filled, a second type of shortage exists: there is a shortage of teachers who are regarded as competent. Although the definition of competent may vary from school to school—some emphasizing Judaic knowledge, some emphasizing pedagogic skills, some emphasizing commitment to Jewish living—there is broad agreement that there are many individuals currently teaching who should not be in supplementary school classrooms. Incompetent teachers not only are bad for the children in their classes, they also exacerbate the instructional difficulties experienced by many supplementary schools and often discourage teachers who are competent from expending their best efforts.

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<sup>2</sup>N. Genuth et al., *JESNA-Hebrew University Census: First Census of Jewish Schools in the Diaspora, 1981-1982/1982-1983*, Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1986.

<sup>3</sup>Alvin Schiff, ed., *Jewish Education*, Vol. 50, No. 4, 1982 (entire issue).

2. *The teacher shortage is likely to get more acute.* Although we have no comparative figures nor the basis for reliable projections, it seems plausible that a number of trends may combine to reduce further the attractiveness of supplementary school teaching in the absence of effective intervention. The rise of day schools provides opportunities for full-time professional teaching in Jewish settings, drawing off people who might otherwise go into supplementary teaching. The continuing dispersion of Jews into the outlying suburbs makes it difficult for smaller congregations to offer employment to those who prefer to live in larger cities. The increasing availability of competing professional opportunities for women attracts some of these who, in former times, might have become capable supplementary school teachers.

3. *The public school model of professional full-time, well-paid teachers long has been an ideal for Jewish education, even for Jewish supplementary education.* However, the goal of full time teachers in supplementary schools, which seemed a promising direction in the 1920s when supplementary schools were under communal auspices and were in session five days a week, has become less and less viable with the shift to congregational control over schools and reduced hours of instruction.<sup>4</sup> Today, almost 95% of supplementary school teachers teach less than 11 hours per week.<sup>5</sup>

While acknowledging that most supplementary school teaching will remain part-time, there are those who argue that viewing such teaching as a long-term professional career is the best way to attract intelligent, dedicated individuals into the schools. These people advocate imitating public education and providing higher salaries, better pre-service training, and a variety of techniques for raising the status of teachers in the eyes of parents, the congregation and the community.

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<sup>4</sup>Susan L. Shevitz, "The Deterioration of the Profession of Jewish Supplementary School Teaching: An Analysis of the Effect of Communal Myths in Policy and Programs," Unpublished Qualifying Paper, Harvard Graduate School of Education, 1983.

<sup>5</sup>Genuth, *ibid.*

Our review of the current reform movements in secular education does, in fact, reveal a range of specific innovations which might be applicable to supplementary schools. Some are already being tried in Jewish supplementary schools around the country. For example, recruitment incentives may include offering financial inducements such as loans or tuition rebates to promising college students who agree to spend time in supplementary school teaching. Diversifying career options within supplementary education might also help to attract ambitious individuals. For instance, supplementary school teaching positions may be combined with teaching in day school or in adult education programs, or with other responsibilities in Jewish communal work. Or, mentor teacher positions, across a number of congregations, might carry full-time responsibilities and high salaries. Experienced and expert teachers in these positions might be responsible for supervision, curriculum development or support of new teachers. A third possibility is the improvement of both pre- and in-service training, stiffening the requirements for certification and, at the same time, providing more emotional and professional support for probationary teachers. A final avenue to explore might be sustained attention to improvement of working conditions in schools. This would mean the enforcement of discipline and attendance requirements, the purchase of good curriculum materials, and the creation of mechanisms for teacher participation in decision-making.

It is likely that moving in the direction of professionalizing the supplementary school teacher role would require a number of these strategies to be put into place at the same time. No single strategy would be powerful enough to overcome the countervailing forces. Essential also would be a sustained high level of community leadership and support as well as commitment from individual congregations.

4. *An alternative approach for addressing the shortage of competent supplementary school teachers is to recruit and train avocational teachers from within congregations.* This is being done in many congregations around the country, as well as in non-Jewish religious schools. This approach recognizes that there are many individuals who would be interested in teaching part-time when such teaching fits into other aspects of their life cycle. These people may be stu-

dents, they may be individuals whose occupations allow them some free time, they may be mothers with young children, they may be retired people. Whatever else they are, they are likely to be members of a congregation who have a desire to contribute to the religious education of the next generation.

Early in our study, in informal conversations with educators about how they handled the "empty slot" teaching shortage in their schools, we found that there were a variety of techniques being used. Some schools and communities advertised in the newspapers or enlisted the support of the local BJE. Others relied on friends or acquaintances of current teachers. But as we inquired about schools who were "doing something interesting in teacher recruitment," we discovered a large number of schools which recruited teachers from within their own congregations. We identified more than 40 such schools, interviewed the education directors of 21, and believe that many more such schools exist.

The schools recruiting congregants as teachers differed from one another in size, in location—although the practice seemed more prevalent in outlying areas than in major metropolitan areas, and in ideology—although there seemed to be more Reform than Conservative synagogues in our sample. Nearly all the congregations paid their teachers; two did not because they believe that teaching should be a volunteer activity. Most of the teachers were women who had other paid occupations or were at home with young children.

What is common to the congregations using this approach? First, a rabbi and a congregation who feel that education is part of the congregational responsibility and who believe that the supplementary school, although administratively a separate entity, should be integrated with congregational culture. Second, an education director who regards recruitment of teachers as a priority and year-round task. In most cases, the education directors we interviewed reported that they were constantly on the lookout for individuals who might make good teachers. Several principals indicated that they personally interviewed every new parent in the school and encouraged all of them to help out in some way. In other congregations an extensive

questionnaire was sent to all new members asking for their skills and interests; phone calls were immediately made to possible teachers.

How were these part-time lay teachers trained? The training for newly recruited teachers varied a good deal: in one synagogue, a few meetings and a reading list; in another, a formal training program of several years' duration. Some congregations trained their congregants on the premises, using their own resources. Others used the Bureau of Jewish Education, or a local Hebrew Teachers College. In one area, three different congregations pooled their resources to create a joint training program.

What are the benefits and liabilities of recruiting and training lay people from the congregation as supplementary school teachers? We do not know for sure since we did not do any independent evaluation of such teachers' competence. At present, there are no data comparing professional with avocational teachers as to their ability in delivering instruction or their impact on children's learning. (We strongly recommend that a variety of small-scale, policy-oriented studies be done to investigate such matters.)

However, most of the principals with whom we spoke were enthusiastic about having congregants as teachers. They stressed the high degree of commitment, involvement and enthusiasm of congregant-teachers. They did not express such concern about the potential problems of having lay people "behind the scenes" as paid staff. They approved of lay teachers being role models for children. At the same time, they noted the need for continuing education for such teachers, the need for support and supervision and the need for administrative flexibility in terms of breaking classes into small units or tailoring course offerings to available personnel. These requirements made for an administrative burden far heavier than that experienced by administrators in more conventional schools.

In our report, we describe in some detail two congregations which recruit and train avocational teachers—Congregation Solel, located outside of Toronto, and Congregation Beth Israel in San Diego. Here we will sketch only briefly what each of these quite different congregations does.

Congregation Solel has 220 families. Three hundred children are in the school. The teaching staff consists of 39 teachers, most of whom teach for three hours on Sunday mornings. In addition, some teach 90-minute weekday Hebrew classes required for 4th-9th graders. The rabbi and education director recruit all year round, looking for congregants with strong Jewish backgrounds who might make good teachers. They encourage anyone who may be interested to enroll in a training program on Sunday mornings which consists of a one-hour lecture and a one-hour classroom observation.

Successful graduates of the training start the next year as assistant teachers while those who do not wish to teach become aides or do special projects. Those who teach the Judaica program on Sundays are paid a token honorarium, while the Hebrew teachers are paid \$30 per session.

Clearly, money is not the motivation for teaching in this school. Several other things are: a strong ideological commitment to the idea of involvement and participation; a desire for learning more about their own tradition; and interest in hearing the views of the rabbi and the education director in a small, personal format.

The second congregation, Temple Beth Israel in San Diego, does not use adult congregants as regular teachers. Rather, the education director recruits and trains high school students from its confirmation classes to be co-teachers. The program started because of the school's desire to hold teenagers after their Bar or Bat Mitzvah, give them meaningful work and pay them salaries competitive with other jobs they could get after school.

About half of each year's confirmation class elects to come for an additional two-hour session each week for which each student pays an additional \$100 per year. In the first year, the 8th graders study child psychology, child development and curriculum planning through a case study or problem-oriented approach. In the process of learning about teaching younger children, the teenagers learn about themselves.

During their second year of training, the students learn about lesson planning, how to teach songs and dances, and how to plan dramatic productions and weekend retreats.

At the end of this program, those 10th, 11th and 12th graders who wish to be co-teachers are assigned to one of the 30 adult teachers in the religious school. The education director works with the teachers so that the co-teachers are not used as teacher aides. Having an extra person in the classroom was difficult at first for some of the regular teachers, especially those who usually lectured from the front of the room. Gradually, many teachers have come to use learning centers, small group projects or tutoring so as to take advantage of their co-teachers.

The benefits of this program are seen by the education director to be many: continued involvement by the co-teachers in Jewish education even after they graduate high school and go to college; role models for younger children coming up who aspire to be co-teachers; reinforcement of social bonds formed during their earlier religious school experience; additional skills in the classrooms, particularly in informal education.

These are only two of the many synagogues which are experimenting with congregational recruitment. Every synagogue's experience is different, as are the criteria by which they judge success.

*5. Neither the professional nor the avocational approach to resolving the teacher shortage is likely to be automatically appropriate for a given school.* There are many philosophical, administrative and financial issues to be discussed before a school decides whether to recruit professional teachers or within-congregation avocational teachers.

For example, the relationship between a school and its synagogue is likely to be quite different when teachers regard themselves as lay people interested in teaching as a congregational service rather than as professionals who might move from school to school. The organization and program of the school might have to be more flexible, adapting itself to teacher skills and availability when the staff consists

of lay people. Administrative, supervisory and curriculum capabilities may differ, depending on the nature of the teaching staff. And expenditures, although likely to be comparable in total amount, may be allocated differently also depending on the nature of the teaching staff. Finally, pre-service and in-service training requirements may have to be completely rethought if avocational teachers are recruited.

6. *There are some steps that national agencies, communities and schools might take to explore whether recruiting and training avocational teachers is a desirable and feasible option for dealing with the current shortage of teachers in supplementary schools.* The professional route and the avocational route do not seem to us to be mutually exclusive. Rather, given the diversity of school purposes and points of view, it seems to us unlikely that any single solution will work everywhere.

We suggest, therefore, that an overall long-term strategy be developed at the national agency level that will: (1) encourage and support a variety of locally appropriate recruitment and training activities, (2) assess their consequences, and (3) disseminate promising practices so that they may be replicated. We think that this is an alternative to continuing what seem to be non-productive exhortations to professionalize the occupation of supplementary school teaching.

National agencies together might form a high level Recruitment Policy Consortium which would make the recruitment and training of quality Jewish supplementary school teachers a high priority. Such a consortium could exercise leadership through a number of diverse activities.

1. It might mobilize Jewish public opinion by developing a a data-based "tradition-at-risk" report that would be a comprehensive assessment of the current personnel situation in supplementary schools.
2. It might develop a public information campaign telling high school and college students, congregants, and retirees of the opportunities for study, for satisfaction, and for additional income if they become involved in teaching at some point in their lives.

3. It might convene a think tank of lay leaders, scholars and educators to discuss the issues involved in recruiting and training lay teachers, especially when such issues have implications for changes in institutional roles.
4. It might create a Recruitment and Training Diffusion Network, modeled on the National Diffusion Network, to make available peer-to-peer consultation and technical assistance on all aspects of recruitment and training on a regional or sub-regional basis. Alternatively, existing organizational networks, such as that of CAJE or the denominational movements, might be used to do the same thing.
5. Finally, the Consortium might produce a long-range master plan for recruitment and training that would give local communities some guidance in setting programmatic, research and fundraising priorities in this area.

At the community level, a bureau might form a Recruitment Advisory Board (RAB) of lay people and educational professionals from a variety of settings in order to heighten awareness of the personnel problem. Such a board might sponsor conferences, hold hearings, or otherwise encourage new thinking about resolving the shortage of competent supplementary school teachers.

The RAB might act as a clearinghouse for the many financial, technical and human resources in the community-at-large. For example, the RAB could put schools which have been successful in a particular aspect of recruitment and training in touch with other schools in need. It could enlist the support of public schools, private schools or university-based educators who would conceptualize and participate in new training modalities. It might help schools develop proposals for funds to deal with their unique recruitment problems. In short, a RAB could formulate intermediate range plans for developing potential pools of qualified people to teach in supplementary schools and for creating a community-wide technical and financial support system to assist schools in training and nurturing them.

As we have already noted, we believe that each supplementary school has its own set of needs and requirements for teachers. The ultimate decisions about recruitment policy rests, therefore, on the individual school which should be receiving guidance and assistance from the community.

At school level, resolution of the teacher shortage issue, especially if it is severe and chronic, should not be left to the education director to solve alone. An ongoing high level Recruitment Committee at each school might identify the immediate "empty slot" needs, discuss the organizational, financial and administrative issues in deciding to recruit professional or avocational teachers, develop a plan of action, implement it and then assess its consequences.

Resolving the shortage of competent teachers for supplementary schools, we think, requires more than expressions of alarm over the seriousness of the situation and expressions of concern about the low status and low pay accorded to our present hard-working teachers. Resolving the shortage requires creative policy making based on clear analyses of the problem in its complex contemporary social context. Based on our study, we are optimists. We have seen signs of possible solutions appearing at the local level throughout the country. We think it important to identify such possible solutions, discuss them, value them, nurture them and from them create new responses to old challenges.