

JEWISH SOCIAL SERVICE AGENCIES AND THE JEWISH SCHOOL *

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Task of Jewish Education

JEWISH education now has community support to a larger degree than ever before. Communities now recognize the vital stake they have, not only in elementary Jewish education but in Jewish secondary education as well. There now seems to be a greater awareness of the fact that the perpetuation of the total Jewish community, including its agencies and institutions, depends in great measure on the extent to which the community succeeds in helping its youngsters to identify themselves with the Jewish community.

Due to the recognition now given Jewish education for its role in the process, of what someone once referred to as being the goal of Jewish education, "*machen Yidden*," more and more resources have been made available to meet Jewish educational needs—resources here being used to mean wider community moral and financial support.

There is, today, a challenge to Jewish educators which goes beyond the need for community recognition and financial support in increased measure.

The forces now operative in our society which tend to erode Jewish community life and consequently threaten

the survival of the Jewish community cannot be dealt with or countered by the agencies directly responsible for Jewish education alone since they are not the sole influence in the life of the child. There is the home, there is the general Jewish community and its agencies and institutions, as well as the general external environment. It is apparent that nothing less than a total community effort can help to make Judaism a meaningful and relevant way of life for the individual Jew.

I only repeat that which is obvious and has been said many times before in many different ways when I point out that helping our youngsters to identify as Jews depends on our success in transmitting the heritage, culture and values that constitute Judaism.

One might further point out what is also obvious, that formal Jewish educational institutions do not provide the only means through which the heritage is to be transmitted. In speaking in terms of Jewish identification, one might begin with Victor Sanua's observation . . . "that during the course of an individual's development, his self-identity becomes related to a group, and that his experiences and actions are profoundly affected by his relationship with the group, by his conceiving himself as a part of it and experiencing its triumphs

* Presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Conference of Jewish Communal Service, Detroit, Michigan, June 10, 1968.

and vicissitudes as joys and tribulations."¹

The Jewish community has, obviously, a group interest, in preserving its identity as a group. In our concern for group survival, we tend to forget or overlook the needs of the individual. Perhaps some of our failures may be attributed to our lack of concentration on the needs of the individual. Wurzburger pointed out that Judaism revolves around the rights and duties, the needs and wants of the individual Jew rather than such abstract notions as communal needs or group values.

Dushkin, many years ago, stated that the aim of Jewish education in the diaspora is to educate the human being for complete living; "that is, give him understanding of the world in which he lives, ability to order his life toward the achievement of freedom and happiness, and the will to be the partner of the Almighty in the betterment of the world. The human being who is a Jew can have no complete life unless he takes full cognizance of his Jewish relationships, accepts his Jewishness readily, and knows how to direct his Jewish life toward the completeness of his life as a human being."²

These are years of crisis in Jewish life and they are years of crisis in Jewish education. Acceptance of their Jewishness seems to be a problem for our Jewish youth today. At the recent biennial meeting of the American Jewish Congress, great concern was expressed over what appears to be a failure on the part of a significant number of our youth to find meaning and relevance in Judaism. The apparent accusations leveled against

Judaism include statements such as: "Judaism is just like other institutions—stagnant, demanding conformism and status-quo adherence."³ Young people apparently saw no connection between Judaism and the social issues of our times, such as Vietnam, the draft, civil rights, the sexual revolution and the use of drugs.

Judaism is more than a religion, a system of religious and spiritual values. Judaism is a total way of life encompassing within it a culture, a system of ethics and a body of specialized knowledge. This is said in support of the view expressed earlier that the most burdensome problem that Jewish educators face today is that they are expected to provide the totality of Jewish content and identity for the child.

We, as Jewish educators, must understand the nature of the community and society in which we live—which is experiencing constant change and growth. We must try to understand the manner in which our free American community is affecting the Jewish consciousness and identification of our children. Our task as Jewish educators is to seek to learn and to understand the outside forces affecting Jewish survival in order that we may somehow learn to educate our children in accordance with them instead of against them.

We must bring about within each of our students an awakening of his own selfhood and individuality as an American and as a Jew. This is the commitment of the Jewish educator.

Judaism can be made relevant and meaningful to our youngsters by demonstrating to them the historical antecedents of the Jewish community and its institutions, their very existence being an outgrowth of Jewish concepts related to social justice, Jewish morality, and all of the basic Jewish values we hold so

¹ Victor Sanua, "Patterns of Identification with the Jewish Community in the Jewish Community in the U.S.A.," *Jewish Journal of Sociology*, Vol. VI, No. 2. (December 1964) p. 191.

² Alexander M. Dushkin, "Aims of Jewish Education in the Diaspora," *Jewish Education*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (Fall, 1947), p. 6.

³ *New York Times*, May 20, 1968.

dear. Jewish social service agencies can help to make Judaism relevant and meaningful to our youngsters by demonstrating more clearly that the ethical, moral and social action positions which they take are really rooted in Jewish values. The complexity of modern society in which the very air is infectious with restlessness and rebellion, the process of radical change in which our society is now engaged, demand that Judaism adapt itself to becoming relevant to the modern needs of the individual rather than maintaining its emphasis on the needs of the community. The needs of the community will be served if the needs of the individual are served and served well. Jewish education cannot do it alone. Jewish education needs to be part of a total community effort in which all of the community's resources are marshalled and focused on this problem.

The public schools, in attempting to meet the needs of individuals living in a highly complex technological society, are enabled to draw on the various resources of the total community. The public school program of education is based on the findings revealed by the psychological and behavioral sciences and the manner in which learning takes place and the manner in which such learning can be evaluated. Whatever the services needed, whether the need be for psychometric services, counseling, psychological or psychiatric assistance, welfare services, health care, or family problems, the resources of the various agencies of the community are usually able to cooperate with the public schools in providing these services. As a result, the public schools are more readily able to deal with special needs, such as personal problems, reading problems, providing for the needs of the gifted, the retarded, the slow learner, the handicapped student.

Jewish Social Work Can Complement Jewish Education

It is within this framework that the proposal is made to have the Jewish social service agencies support Jewish education, thereby strengthening their own agencies and the community as a whole. Nothing less than the mobilization of the resources of the total community will enable Jewish education to fulfill its function and mission effectively. It is bad enough that we have denominational fragmentation in the community. It certainly becomes necessary for community agencies to overcome institutional fragmentation.

Each of the Jewish social service agencies has a vital, constructive function which it can perform in support of the Jewish school. It would be well, at this point, to cite examples of programs that can be developed between various agencies and the Jewish school.

The Jewish Vocational Service holds much promise and potential for providing various kinds of services which would be of aid to the Jewish school. Jewish education has over the years, in a very slow and gradual manner, begun to make use of those research findings in psychology which are relevant to its goals and objectives. Although Jewish day schools may have established, in various communities, psycho-educational services, very few afternoon Hebrew schools have made use of psycho-educational services to determine the needs of their students and to evaluate the effectiveness of their program and curriculum.

In Milwaukee, a relationship was established with the Jewish Vocational Service whereby psycho-educational and psychometric services were provided to the day school. It is imperative today that the Jewish educational institutions have available for their children and teachers adequate psycho-educational services so that the school may be able

to prevent serious educational and personality problems as well as to encourage the provision of educational services based on the child's needs and abilities.

In the day school situation to which I refer, the Jewish Vocational Service provided for the following psycho-educational services:

- (A) A testing program for students entering the kindergarten who are either below the accepted age level or who may engender doubts of their ability to participate in the day school kindergarten program.
- (B) Testing for reading readiness at the end of the kindergarten year.
- (C) Achievement and intelligence tests, alternated with varying frequency in order to provide the best and most accurate picture of the child's development, scholastically and intellectually.
- (D) Individual testing in problem areas.
- (E) Social service follow-up and the provision of certain kinds of remedial help, where necessary.

In the afternoon Hebrew schools the purposes of the psycho-educational program would have the following objectives, among others:

- (1) To increase, through testing and evaluation, the effectiveness of the school's program so that the problems of adjustment that may arise as a result of the combination of a completely secularized program, and a minimal Jewish education exposure, may be met successfully, thereby enabling a child, whatever his academic ability, to identify emotionally, psychologically, ethically, spiritually and in every way, not only feel comfortable with his Jewishness, but to feel the need to live Jewishly.
- (2) To determine the abilities and interests of students so that they may be placed in relatively homogeneous groups enabling them to work at their individual capacity, as much as possible. In this area, where public schools might ordinarily be loathe to reveal I.Q. scores or other background material about a student, such information can be readily obtained by the Jewish Vocational service on an ongoing basis. It would also be

useful to devise some instrument, or adapt some existing instrument, which would make it possible to reveal a child's possible success, or lack of success, with language; instruction would help to determine the degree of intensity of the language experience to which the child is to be subjected. Children who have, or evince some difficulty in learning language might be placed in a different kind of program especially geared to their needs.

- (3) To help evaluate the ability and needs of each child in order that the curricula and methodology of the school may be appropriate to the child's abilities, interests and developmental potentialities.
- (4) To recognize student difficulties in achievement and the resulting emotional problems, diagnose the causes of such problems so that children are not subjected to pressures which they cannot carry.
- (5) To help develop a remedial program in those instances where the child has difficulties, both in the secular and religious school program.
- (6) To devise a method of meeting the child's individual needs, including the gifted, so that where difficulties arise there will be no need to discontinue his Jewish education, but rather to channel it into different directions, i.e. homogeneous grouping, special tutorial programs, special classes, etc.
- (7) To provide case work and remedial followup for those families where the need exists.
- (8) To help devise instruments for measuring or evaluating the effect of current teaching methods and curricula in helping to build attitudes, inculcate values and evaluate the results of the Jewish education program in terms of the continuing Jewish commitments of the students.
- (9) There needs to be some means of determining the relevance of Jewish subject matter and Jewish teaching to the child.
- (10) Some questions that need to be answered are:
 - (a) How strong are the child's concepts of right and wrong?
 - (b) Are these Jewishly oriented in addition to other influences?
 - (c) Does he, at this level of comprehension, relate his ethical and moral behavior to Jewish learning?
 - (d) Does he think in terms of specific

Jewish values in relating himself to daily living?

- (e) Does he relate current social, political and ethical problems to Jewish concepts?

I believe that questions need to be raised in connection with the traditional subject matter and methods of teaching heretofore advanced by the Jewish school. I believe that in order to make Jewish education more relevant and meaningful to the child, thereby increasing the length of his retention in the Jewish school (and I believe these two are connected), we must re-evaluate that which we are teaching and the methods used to teach it. If some of these questions are not answered in a positive manner, then the Jewish school is failing in those areas which are most vital to Jewish continuity. There are, of course, many problems in developing this kind of instrument for evaluation, among them the development of a check list of Jewish values which really relate to Jewish objectives and goals. However, this would be an interesting area of exploration, with the possibility of obtaining positive results, that would be helpful to Jewish programming.

Cooperation between the Jewish schools and the Jewish Vocational Service could also result in developing more effective vocational counselling for Jewish students. Together, these two agencies could more successfully promote recruitment for careers in Jewish service.

In Milwaukee, the Jewish Vocational Service was of great assistance in helping the Board of Jewish Education develop a special program of Jewish Education for the mentally retarded, a field which is too neglected.

The Jewish Family & Children's Service can perform a highly important function in strengthening the effectiveness of the Jewish school and providing

it with an added dimension in dealing with children, particularly in problem areas.

Again, in Milwaukee, a special program was developed with the Jewish Family & Children's Service in two areas. Firstly, a special program of Jewish education was developed and carried on for emotionally disturbed children in the Jewish Children's Home.

Secondly, a program of casework consultation for the day school was worked out, whereby:

- (1) A casework consultant came to the day school two hours per week to see the children who were presenting problems in a given group. A private room was set aside for interviews, if the consultant felt it necessary to see a child alone. The caseworker's diagnostic assessment of the child was then used for two general purposes:
 - (a) Interpretation to the parents of the child's need for further help which could possibly lead to agency referral.
 - (b) Interpretation to teachers involved the meaning of the child's behavior so that he could be better helped in the classroom.
- (2) Specific procedures that were agreed upon were:
 - (a) Before a consultant saw a child individually in the school, written parental permission was obtained.
 - (b) Consultations about individual children included the principal of the school. The teacher may or may not have been present.
 - (c) It was made clear that the referral process was to be the principal's responsibility; direct contact between the caseworker consultant and the parent in the school setting was not considered appropriate.
- (3) The casework consultant was available as part of a staff training program for the day school teachers, providing leadership and discussing the growth and development of children and their individual needs.

We live in an era in which there is general and widespread concern about

the increasing deterioration of the family unit. We live in an era of revolutionary change in sexual and moral behavior; a revolution which challenges some of our most deep-rooted traditions and values, condoning, nay promoting, pre-marital sexual experience and the use of drugs.

Would it not, then, be appropriate for the Jewish Family & Children's Service, as a community agency specializing in such problems, to provide the consultative services and the resources through which Jewish educators might be enabled to develop a syllabus for educating Hebrew high school youth in this area? The public schools call it sex education. And perhaps herein might lie a reflection of the difference between Jewish values and general values. For I would call it "marriage education" or "family life relationship." We speak of relevance in Jewish education. What could be more relevant than having our secondary school curricula reflect concern for inculcating in our children the Jewish concepts of the sanctity of marriage, Jewish sexual and moral mores, the duties and obligations of a Jewish husband and wife to each other and to their children. Certainly no syllabus can demonstrate greater relevancy and meaningfulness for the present than syllabi produced through the joint effort of Jewish educators and Jewish social service personnel experienced in this area.

The Jewish ethic and concept of social justice, the deep-rooted Jewish concern for the dignity of man and his worth as an individual, is the bedrock upon which the social structure of western civilization has been built.

Yet, Jewish youth is reported today to find no application for Jewish teaching in modern society, no relevancy and meaningfulness in Judaism which can

be applied to such problems as war and peace, civil rights, drugs, and other general problems of modern society. Jewish education, if it is to fulfill its mission, must help the Jewish child to learn and appreciate the values of living a Jewish life, help him to identify with the Jewish community and become a participant in Jewish community life and a supporter of Jewish community institutions.

Basic to all of these areas is the need to communicate to our children a sense of Jewish community, a concept of *Klal Yisrael*—an understanding of Jewish community structure.

It is in these areas that Jewish community relations agencies may have an important contribution to make. Such agencies can help Jewish educators to structure into the Jewish school curriculum, instruction in what might be called "Jewish civics." Assistance can be given in developing syllabi, study guides, appropriate printed and audio-visual materials. The United Hebrew Schools is presently engaged in producing a syllabus, several filmstrips, a narrative script and a narrative recording based on the filmstrip, designed to bring home to the child, in meaningful and concrete terms, a knowledge and understanding of the Detroit Jewish community—its history and its structure. These agencies can help develop materials in the following areas: (1) Discrimination in education, housing and employment; (2) Anti-Semitism; (3) Poverty; (4) Delinquency and crime; (5) War and peace.

In addition to the preparation of a syllabi and materials for the classroom, new kinds of educational experiences for secondary school youth need to be developed. These could include a program of volunteer service during the summer or after school hours. It is well known that Jewish youth participate a good

deal in service programs such as Vista or the Peace Corps, but unfortunately such service is not identified by them as being particularly related to their Jewish backgrounds and to Jewish values.

Personnel in the Jewish community relations field could assist in developing seminars and workshops for religious school teachers, to develop an awareness of, and to provide information about social problems. Opportunities would thusly be provided to view and discuss audio-visual materials and publications for use in their classrooms. Such programs could involve Jewish scholars and leaders in all fields of Jewish social service. Jewish Community Centers can, together with Jewish schools, plan and develop programs planned to reinforce, on an informal basis, Jewish educational activities within the school situation. Co-planning and sponsoring of special occasions and events can take place. In Detroit, the United Hebrew Schools maintains, with the cooperation and assistance of the Jewish Community Center, a Hebrew program at Camp Tamarack called Kfar Ivri, which provides a program combining camping experience and Hebrew and Religious education. A Judaic program in English is also conducted at Camp Tamarack.

In Milwaukee, a program was begun in which the Jewish Community Center provided personnel who developed extra-curricular activities for the day schools. Club activities, generally sponsored by the Center, were offered in the school itself. The physical education program of the day school, for example, was conducted by Center personnel.

Adult education was jointly developed and sponsored by the Jewish Community Center and the Board of Jewish Education.

Jewish values can be transmitted only by community functionaries who are themselves knowledgeable about, and committed to, these values. Jewish social service differs from general social service by virtue of the Jewish element inherent in its *raison d'être*. Green, writing about the Wurzweiler School of Social Work of Yeshiva University, points out that ". . . different Jewish dimensions are brought to consciousness within students by means of courses at the school, . . . by the demands of agency purpose or policies, and by the student's need to confront his own identity as a Jew."⁴

Central community institutions for Jewish education can, together with the various agencies, develop a program of Jewish education for persons in community service. Such a program could help to broaden and deepen the knowledge of such people of Jewish values and traditions and help them to discover the relevancy of these in dealing in their respective fields, with the forces presently operative in Jewish community life. If Jewish education is to be a community endeavor, and it must be in order to succeed, it must have the commitment and support of all the agencies and institutions that constitute the community. There is a legend that the various fruits had gathered to hold a discussion among themselves. They wanted to discover the reason why no other fruit but the grape contains the juice from which the finest wines are made. "Her drink is famous throughout the world, and exquisitely pleasing to man's taste," they declared. "Why is she more worthy than we to be blessed with this gift of God?" A cluster of

⁴ Solomon H. Green, "Seeking Jewish Dimensions in Field Instruction," *Jewish Social Work Forum*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (Spring 1968).

grapes hanging nearby, heard the complaint and replied, "All of you grow individually and produce your fruit independently. But we grapes grow together in bunches and are faithful to each other. For that reason our substance is rich and capable of imparting

such distinctive taste and fragrance to our wines."

If the various components of the Jewish community will move more closely together, and pool their efforts and resources, we too will be able to drink the wine of success.