RESEARCH AND JEWISH EDUCATION

1. INTRODUCTION

This volume is more than a collection of essays on Jewish education; it is an attempt to contribute to the creation of a new sphere of discourse. If seen as the former, it might be treated respectfully, but indifferently, as yet another interesting but not particularly crucial academic exercise. If seen as the latter, it may help to enable us to focus on present and future Jewish education in more fruitful ways.

The issue which such a volume raises is, of course, the nature of research in Jewish education and its relationship to practice. In this introductory essay, I should like to focus on two aspects of the larger issues: 1) the state of Jewish educational research, 2) the meta-issue related to the construction of a practice which will be informed by theory.

2. THE STATE OF RESEARCH

The issue of research on Jewish education has received growing attention in recent years, and certain patterns have

^{1.} See the following: Barry Chazan, Jewish Schooling and Jewish Identification re: Melbourne, (Jerusalem: Institute of Contemporary Jewry, 1980), Ch. 2; Harold Himmelfarb, "Research on American Jewish Identity and Identification: Progress, Pitfalls, and Prospects", a paper presented at the Planning Conference for Modern Jewish Studies, Brandeis University, Oct. 21-24, 1979. David Reznick, "Toward an Agenda for Research in Jewish Education," Planning Conference for Modern Jewish Studies, Brandeis University, Oct. 21-24, 1979. Ronald Wolfson and Stuart Kelman, "Research in Jewish Religious Education". Religious Education, LXXV, 6, (Nov. - Dec., 1980), pp. 692-697.

emerged; I should like to focus on two of these patterns. The first is the fact of the erratic tradition of Jewish educational research. There are few institutional structures whose main or even ancillary function is Jewish educational research. The great academies of Judaica and the proliferating departments of Jewish studies at general universities have usually not included Jewish education as one of their academic areas. In those departments of Jewish education which do exist at institutions of higher learning (seminaries, Hebrew colleges, departments of Jewish studies), the main thrust has been teacher-training and in-service programs. While bureaus of Jewish education have often been headed by individuals with research interests and expertise, these bureaus have not become research centers. Any "research" done in such contexts has been mainly descriptive-statistical data-collecting. The national and international organizations concerned with Jewish education have established other priorities for themselves. (One exception to this may be the activities of the Research Division of the American Association for Jewish Education.) Hence, one characteristic of the issue of research on Jewish education is that:

there does not now exist an ongoing research enterprise in Jewish education... there is neither a nucleus of researchers nor a lore unique to Jewish educational research about which topics are worthy of study or what methods of research are most useful²

The second pattern which emerges (and which, in a sense, contradicts the first) is the existence of a surprisingly large and variegated body of "research" on Jewish education. Wolfson and Kelman indicate that a search for existing research using the usual data sources, such as Comprehensive Dissertation Index and

^{2.} David Reznick, "Toward an Agenda for Research in Jewish Education", p. 2. The exception to this generalization is, in fact, the Samuel Melton Centre for Jewish Education in the Diaspora of the Hebrew University which defines the research enterprise as one of its primary functions.

ERIC, generated a list of more than 215 entries³. Other sources which reveal additional Jewish education research include: Sociological Abstracts, **Religious Education**'s Annual Review of Doctoral Dissertations, **Jewish Education**, introductory chapters of specific studies (e.g. Gannes, Schoem, Wolfson, Kelman); and the World Jewish Congress "Survey of Current Jewish Research." Thus, in a variety of places and in a variety of forms (and for over fifty years or more) there has evolved a significant body of Jewish educational research. (Indeed, colleagues working in other types of religious or ethnic education indicate that they have no body of educational research comparable to that in the Jewish field.)

This literature covers a broad range of categories and subjects. Wolfson and Kelman suggest nine categories for cataloguing such research:⁴ 1) historical, 2) philosophic-bibliographic, 3) descriptive, 4) developmental, 5) case and field, 6) casual-comparative or ex-post-facto, 7) true experimental, 8) quasi-experimental, 9) action. In the appendix to this article, I suggest seven categories (with some examples) which I find helpful in cataloguing contemporary Jewish educational research.

This research is done in all sorts of places and contexts. The setting which has emerged as a central address for such research is the marketplace of doctoral dissertations. Most research in Jewish education is the result of individual research projects conducted at institutes of higher learning. Typically, such doctorates will reflect the pattern of applying terminology, methodology, and supervision from some discipline of general education to a Jewish educational issue. (In that sense, Jewish education research has become quite stylized and is likely to include: 1) the problem, 2) a theoretical framework or model from general education, 3) a survey of the literature of Jewish education, 4) the research itself, 5) implications for the practice of Jewish education.) Some other contexts in which such research is

^{3.} Ronald Wolfson and Stuart Kelman, "Research in Jewish Religious Education", p. 694.

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effected are: school or community studies; research commissioned by national or regional organizations; and research done by university scholars.

Thus, as noted, one finds two (seemingly contradictory) dynamics in Jewish educational research: a substantial number of research studies, together with the absence of an established institutional or conceptual tradition of Jewish educational research.

3. A META-THEORY OF JEWISH EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

This conclusion leads me to my second issue, namely, the problem of a meta-theory of the role of research in Jewish educational practice; or the relationship between theory and practice in Jewish education. That is, one might argue that the problem is not the lack of people, issues, or procedures for research, but rather the lack of a theory to guide the role of research in affecting Jewish educational practice.⁵

The relationship between theory and practice is, of course, one of the perennial and prominent issues of education, and I shall not dip deeply into that complicated issue and literature at this point. My main concern is to deal with the question of how Jewish educational research might best inform practice. I shall initially and mainly adapt a Schwab-like direction in responding to that question, by arguing that the practice of Jewish education should be the starting point and ending point of all such research.

^{5.} This comment should not be misinterpreted to imply that research in Jewish education is comfortably established. In fact, it is underfunded, is often regarded as a luxury or excess, and qualified people in this sphere frequently cannot find institutional frameworks in which to work. Thus, a multiplicity of studies does not necessarily point to a healthy field.

^{6.} Some relevant discussion of this issue can be found in: Paul Hirst, "The Nature and Scope of Educational Theory", in New Essays in the Philosophy of Education. G. Lengford and D.J. O'Connor (eds.) (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), pp. 47-49; John Wilson, Educational Theory and the Preparation of Teachers. (Slough: NFER, 1975). John Dewey, Democracy and Education, (N.Y.; Macmillan, 1916); J.J. Schwab, Science Curriculum and Liberal Education: Selected Essays, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), Chapters 10, 11, 12.

Practice is what matters in Jewish education; it is where the action is; it is what should forever distinguish Jewish (and general) educational research from other forms of Jewish (and general) scholarship.

At the same time, I must quickly note that this stance should not be misunderstood as a justification for the current (and perennial) plaint of the practitioner that truth is to be found in the trenches; i.e., that what really informs us as to what is happening is the voice and experience of the field itself. This "trenches" argument is often coupled with the "building-is-burning" position which argues that we are faced with a host of immediate, pressing, critical problems (e.g. eroding support for Israel; intermarriage; assimilation; poor motivations; decline of Jewish family life) which demand our attention and preclude much reflection or theorizing. Proponents of these two arguments might feel that the position I have just enunciated vis-a-vis the centrality of practice is a "theoretican's" justification of their arguments.

It is not. The argument I am making is *not* that the trenches and fires are the truth and should determine (in the sense of "force" or "fix") our responses; but rather, that the trenches and the fires are the locus from where our theory and practice should begin, and to which it should respond. Just as it is poor education to let theories blindly and in a detached manner determine practice, so I would suggest that it is equally poor education to let current practice dictate policy. What is needed and is being suggested, is an approach to Jewish educational practice which is firmly initiated and informed by practice and is moved from there by other inputs.

This concern with practice should not cause the researcher in Jewish education to feel that his work is less "academic," "rigorous," or "serious" than research in other areas of Judaica. That one deals with practice does not mean that one's activity is less "intellectual"; it simply means that the researcher in Jewish education is dealing with a different set of givens, constraints, or commonplaces (just as the Bible scholar's research differs quite dramatically from that of the sociologist of contemporary Jewry or the analyst of modern Hebrew literature). Hence, Jewish educational research is certainly research, and in that sense similar to and no less rigorous than research in other areas of

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Judaica; at the same time, it is a different type of research, which requires different tools and constructs.

Two operative conclusions emerge from the general position which I have suggested. First, in order to contribute to practice fruitfully, it may be necessary (ironically) for Jewish educational research (and funding) to become completely liberated from practice. Research in Jewish education is probably at the moment too closely linked to the need to produce either immediate programmatic suggestions or doctoral dissertations. This frequently means that outside pressures immediately urge or elicit polemical, recipe-ish, stylized outcomes. Jewish educational research is not allowed to "think" enough, because its thinking process is already predetermined. What is needed is some luxury of excess, some wandering of the mind, some creative starts and stops, some waste — all of which periodically lead to breakthroughs. Jewish educational research needs to be allowed to wander with the same moral non-responsibility as research in philosophy, Talmud, Bible, Hebrew literature, or physics.

I am suggesting such wandering not necessarily because it is a value in itself (which it may be) but because it is important for the realization of the ultimate moral responsibility of research to educational practice. However, practice has so dominated contemporary Jewish education in the sense that what is is what must be, that we probably need a powerful antidote.

The second conclusion which I suggest emerges from this conception of Jewish educational research and practice, is the need for the creation of an entirely new job and category in the professional map of Jewish education; i.e., the Jewish educational theorist. People should receive salaries for the position of "Jewish educational theorist" (or any other phrase one may want to use to describe the task being suggested); they should have offices and appropriate calling-cards. "Educational theorist" in this context is a specific, technical term⁷ (and is not

^{7.} See the following for a discussion of this technical usage: Barry Chazan, *The Language of Jewish Education*, (Bridgeport: Hartmore House, 1978), pp. 19-36.

used in a broad, popular sense to imply educational philosopher, prophet, or day-dreamer). It refers to the activity of drawing upon disparate sources (current practice in Jewish schools; politics; sociology; Judaica; psychology...) in order to create Jewish educational programs, strategies, curriculum units, games, trips, camps, and films. It encompasses the art of creation, of innovation, of giving birth. (It includes some of the activities described by Schwab as "deliberation" and "eclectic" but goes even further). It is probably the most important function (along with teaching) needed in Jewish education.

Such a function requires a host of skills and excellences: Jewish, educational, organizational, and group dynamics. It encompasses the ability to be part of the classroom and to step outside of it; to read academic research yet not be derailed or controlled by its jargon and pre-conditions; to be able to function in today's high-powered business-like Jewish community, but not to become a Jewish education businessman; to be a messenger of the Holy Word but to constantly remind the Holy Word of the realities and exigencies of modern Jewish life and to be an advocate for both sides. The task is obviously complicated, and this is so because the parameters of modern Jewish education reflect and are defined by so many forces. It may suffice simply to break down the phrase into its three constituent components in order to make the point: "modern," "Jewish," "education."

The movement towards such a new "profession" would require boldness by those concerned with Jewish education, particularly since we have little precedent to guide us. Some of the existing institutional formats of Jewish education (e.g., bureaus, national Jewish educational organizations, teacher-training colleges) seem to reflect responses to earlier issues. Departments of Judaic studies at general universities are one potential contributor to the activity I am describing; however, in the metasense, they in themselves do not represent a model or paradigm for elementary and secondary Jewish education. Finally, while general education does provide us with a good deal of discussion of the issue in question and some models of resolution, it does not offer extensive, rich experience in actually doing it. Thus, we have little to draw upon and will need a degree of confidence to forge new paths.

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There are a host of logistic, political, geographic, and economic implications of the suggestion I have made but I shall not spell them out here. I would simply note that revolution is not the only viable route for implementing such a change; it could also be done in an evolutionary fashion. Thus, existing offices, calling cards, functions (e.g., directors of local boards, headmasters, academic positions) might be adopted and adjusted to the new task. New monies will be needed, but old monies could also be re-directed. The external trappings of the new order are not, in themselves, the essence.

In essence, I am suggesting that there are three possible models for the relationship between research and/or theory and practice in Jewish education. The first model would see theory and research as irrelevant to Jewish education, or as a frill and excess. I would regard this as the worst of the models. The second model would see the need for Jewish educational research to achieve the status, rigor, and respectibility of research in general (including Jewish studies today). This model sees theory and research as relevant in a "hand-me-down" fashion, once they have established themselves as sophisticated, rigorous, and legitimate. I would regard this model also as inadequate. The third model regards theory and research as crucial for Jewish educational practice, but not in a "hand-me-down" fashion and not after years of patient development of academic respectability and footnotes. (Among other things, this model is sobered by the lack of success of general education on this score; after years and years of searching for respectabiltiy, "schools of education" are still regarded as "schools of education.") Instead, this model proposes a "hand-in-hand" theory of educational change, in which all participating fingers have something to contribute. I would regard this as the best of the three options.

4. THIS VOLUME

This volume reflects and hopefully contributes to the metaissues raised in the previous section. The articles reflect diverse methodologies and issues related to Jewish education. Thus Rosenak and Arzt deal with concepts ("indoctrination," "consciousness") which impinge directly on contemporary Jewish educational realities. Bullivant, Schoem, and Wurtzel raise methodological issues related to how we should look at

Jewish educational settings and possible strategies of intervention. Schimmel and Cohen deal with the crucial sphere of the input of, and relationship between, Jewish tradition and Jewish education today (and, in so doing, they remind us of the categorical uniqueness of the enterprise of Jewish education in terms of its inherent link with some notion of tradition). Kronish's essay emphasizes the dynamics of the relationship between the Jewish and the general, and the interplay between Jewish life and the societies and intellectual climates in which Jewish schools exist. Ackerman, Schremer, Haramati, and Copeland focus on curricular issues which inform us of both practices and implicit ideologies of contemporary Jewish education.

Each of these groups of contributions is, in effect, an agenda of inputs for the deliberative and creative task of the educational theorist. In that sense, this and subsequent volumes in this series will attempt to serve as a forum for the presentation of variegated research efforts in Jewish education. The volume is academic and a product of the academy. Moreover, it is published in Israel by a department of Jewish education at an Israeli institution of higher learning. It attempts to reflect the passionate commitment of both the academy and Israel to the future of Jewish schools and the lives of Jewish children.

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^{8.} See the following discussion of this topic: Barry Chazan, "Tradition and Autonomy: The Paradox of Contemporary Jewish Education." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association of Jewish Studies, (Boston, Dec. 1980).

APPENDIX

A CATEGORIZATION OF JEWISH EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

1. Descriptive Data-Gathering

(e.g., the 1959 Duskin-Engleman Study: Jewish Education in the United States; Jewish School Census 1978/1979, N.Y.: AAJE).

2. Ethnographic and Case Studies

(e.g., Brian Bullivant, The Way of Tradition: Life in an Orthodox Jewish School (Melbourne: ACRE, 1975), David Schoem "Ethnic Survival in America: An Ethnography of a Jewish Afternoon School," Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1979; R. Wolfson, "A Description and Analysis of an Innovative Living Experience in Israel: The Dream and the Reality," Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Washington University, 1974.)

3. Correlational — Causational Studies

(e.g., G. Boch, "The Jewish Schooling of American Jews: A Study of Non-Cognitive Educational Effects," Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Harvard University, 1976. Harold Himmelfarb, "The Impact of Religious Schooling: The Effects of Jewish Education Upon Adult Religious Involvement," Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Chicago, 1974; Barry Chazan, Jewish Education and Jewish Identification in Melbourne, (Jerusalem: Institute of Contemporary Jewry, 1980).

4. Historical Analysis

(e.g., G. Solomon, "Minority Education in a Free Society — A Community History of Jewish Education in New So. Wales and Victoria," Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Monash University, 1972; J. Pilch and M. Ben-Horin (eds.), Judaism and the Jewish School, (New York: Bloch, 1966); L. Gartner (ed.), Jewish Education in the United States (N.Y.: Teachers College Press, 1968); Y. Gafni, "The Babylonian Yeshiva: Internal Structure and Spiritual and Social Functions among the Jewish Community in the Period of the Amoraim," Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Hebrew University, 1977).

5. Curriculum Analysis

(e.g., Walter Ackerman, "Analysis of Selected Course of Study in Conservative Schools, *Jewish Education* XL, 1 (March, 1970), 7-2.3; XLVI, 2 (Summer, 1970), 37-48. Barry Chazan, "Study and Moral Action in Contemporary Jewish Education," *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, XII, 4 (1980), 307-321).

6. Philosophical Analysis and System-Building

(e.g., Michael Rosenak, "Tasks of Contemporary Jewish Theology in the Construction of Religious Educational Theory in the Diaspora," Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Jerusalem, Hebrew University, 1975).

7. Inspirational — Programmatic

(e.g., rabbis' sermons, position papers of national and international Jewish organizations, articles in popular journals).