

# **MAPPING JEWISH EDUCATION: THE NATIONAL PICTURE**

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with**

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In Spring 2006, the Fisher-Bernstein Institute for Jewish Philanthropy and Leadership began mapping the field of Jewish education for the Jim Joseph Foundation. Our focus was preschool through college and included both direct service and capacity-building programs. We started by looking at Jewish education in select communities and by building a database of Jewish educational organizations, foundations, and programs. In order to develop a broad overview of the field--its accomplishments, challenges, interconnections (or lack thereof), and its future direction—we then interviewed executives in 16 national organizations concerned with Jewish youth education (see Appendix). Although not the sum total of the field, these organizations represent most of its major components (philanthropists, federations, the movements, central agencies, youth groups, camps, day schools, and Hillel). Informants were asked four basic questions:

- What are your top accomplishments?
- What challenges are you currently facing?
- Where is your work heading in the next three to five years?
- How does your organization fit (or not) with the rest of the Jewish educational infrastructure?

This report is based mainly on these interviews, but also draws selectively from the database and community studies for purposes of illustration. Analyses explaining the forces that created and maintain current conditions in the field come from the interview data. Although the Research Team would like to take credit for them, our role has mainly been to elicit these analyses from interviewees and to organize them for this report.

The first section of the report, “A Field in Motion,” describes new momentum in a field whose operating mode had long been static. The second section, “Funding Lessons,” presents specific lessons from the foundations as regards their mission, role, and relationships with other entities. The next section, “Issues,” lays out the programming, structural, and funding challenges that confront the field. The final section, “Innovation Trends,” describes aspects of the field that have recently gained currency and are sources of energy and activity in the Jewish education world.

## A FIELD IN MOTION

The Jim Joseph Foundation is entering the field of Jewish education at a time of great movement marked by new leadership, new directions, grand visions, and accelerated experimentation.

### New Leadership

In recent years, new leaders have assumed the directorship of several of the national educational organizations. Among these are Matt Grossman at BBYO, Wayne Firestone at Hillel, Dara Z. Klarfeld at JEXNET (formerly the NAA), Amir Cohen at Jewish Family & Life, Harlene Appelman at Covenant Foundation, Don Sylvan at JESNA, and Jerry Silverman at the Foundation for Jewish Camping (FJC). This turnover represents a significant influx of new talent and energy at the top. In some cases, turnover has also brought new perspective to the organization. For example, Jerry Silverman, with his successful background in business, has managed to raise issues previously ignored in the Jewish camping world, such as questions about competitiveness and cost.

New professional leadership is sometimes accompanied by national board development, for example at BBYO, JEXNET, and the Foundation for Jewish Camping. At the local level, Wexner Foundation, through its Wexner Heritage program, has produced numerous graduates who have gone on to become lay leaders in day schools and, increasingly, in camps. Jewishly educated and motivated lay leaders at the national and local levels contribute to momentum in the field, both through their energy and their fundraising.

### New Directions

Coupled with new leadership is a resetting of mission and direction in a number of the national organizations. Here are a few examples from those we interviewed.

- **JESNA.** JESNA was established by the federation system to serve communities, and to date has worked primarily with local federations and central agencies for Jewish education. Its new strategy, encoded as “learnings and dissemination,” will make greater use of its myriad evaluation studies. It will cull meta-lessons from across studies, from the literature, and from practitioner knowledge; analyze best practices and the conditions under which they are most likely to succeed; and disseminate findings. Future work will also integrate various parts of the Jewish educational system and develop communities of practice. A new internal entity, tentatively called the Learning and Consultation Center, will be tasked with translating lessons from the research into steps that local communities and communities of practice can follow.
- **UJC.** Until recently UJC has shown little leadership to the federation world on Jewish education. Its new vision is to have different communities model different approaches and then to help communities learn from one another. The potential role of the national entity is three-fold: to leverage the resources of the federation system, to convene community leaders for discussion and perhaps concerted action, and to be a

thought leader for the federation system. The UJC Washington office, through which dozens of communities have modeled programs for the elderly, offers a potential model for how to operate in the education field. The Renaissance & Renewal Pillar, the arm responsible for education, is being redesigned and it is not as yet clear what roles it will assume and what it can accomplish.

- **Covenant Foundation.** In the past, the Covenant Foundation had only two vehicles: grants (three years and out) and recognition awards. One of its new directions is to connect project directors and award recipients in communities of practice. Another is to recast grantees as “education entrepreneurs and activists” and to work more intensively with them in growing ideas. The strategy will be to give planning grants for good ideas; to determine if the results of planning warrant modeling; and then, if the modeling succeeds, to scale up. The new approach is intended to produce more experimentation and more diffusion of innovation.
- **JEXNET.** JEXNET is a reinvention of the North American Alliance. The original organization had four sectors (camp, Israel, campus, and year-round youth group) and offered an annual conference. NAA’s mandate was too broad to serve everyone well. And the advent of the FJC and the rebuilding of Hillel obviated the need for two of NAA’s sectors. The new organization focuses solely on year-round, experiential education for Jewish youth in Grades 6 to 12. Rather than have only a once-a-year conference, its approach will provide resources, support, and advocacy through a 24/7 network.
- **BBYO and Hillel.** BBYO and Hillel have undertaken comprehensive strategic planning efforts. These efforts signify a professional approach to management as well as new energy for proactively tackling intractable problems. Hillel’s plan calls for a doubling of the number of Jewish college students who are involved in Jewish life and have “meaningful Jewish experiences.” Its strategies build on seeds planted by the previous administration, recent research findings, and new visions for how to position Hillel on campus.

BBYO’s plan takes the organization in a dramatically new direction. BBYO was a traditional youth group with local chapters organized by regions. Its new approach gives primacy to a teen and alumni web-community. The resultant database—with information on hundreds of thousands of teens, parents, and alumni—will be used to connect participants to Jewish opportunities. BBYO is also trying to grow a network of youth professionals by offering competitive salaries and bonuses for staying on the job longer than three years. It hopes to organize BBYO alumni into a national program along the lines of university alumni associations, with chapters across the country. The alumni program would serve the dual purposes of outreach and fundraising.

## Grand Visions

New leaders bring not only new energy and strategic thinking to Jewish education, but also a palpable sense of creating its subfields. Their vision is not simply one of serving organizations and communities but of building a field of professional practice. The FJC was established explicitly to create a coherent field of Jewish camping. It was clear that only a national entity--allied with no special interests but filled with a “pure, uninhibited love of the field”—could help Jewish camping gain respect, visibility, and resources. Only a national entity could look at the field in totality and encourage its players to understand their work as part of a field and not as mom-and-pop operations.

The same thinking underlies the Institute for Informal Jewish Education at Brandeis University (informal education), JEXNET (experiential year-round programming for middle and high school), PEJE (day school education), JECEI (early childhood education), and a nascent group for congregational education. In each instance, the creation of a subfield is tied to the creation of a new, national entity which is driven by a grand vision.

Funders, for their part, are largely interested in funding change, whether that entails strengthening and enhancing what exists or introducing new structures and approaches. Their motivation is not change for change’s sake but rather change as a step toward fulfilling a grand vision. For example, The AVI CHAI Foundation, among its goals, has tried to focus attention on Hebrew instruction and it believes that more children are learning Hebrew faster as a result of its efforts. But its greater goal, as yet unrealized, is to generate a sense of momentum about the field—not just a sense of a smattering of programs but a sense that learning Hebrew is important for Jewish literacy and Jewish peoplehood. The drive to “make the whole greater than the sum of its parts” holds true for all of its funding areas.

Similarly, the Schusterman Family Foundation (CLSFF) is trying to create a field of Israel education and to get funders to invest in universities. They are promoting the idea of universal service, trying to making social service as normative a part of Jewish life as the bar mitzvah. To do so, they are thinking about how to use service as a gateway and as an enriching, inspiring experience for young Jews. In each of these examples, the funders are focused not on particular strategies or programs but rather on larger visions of what Jewish life and learning can and should be.

## Accelerated Experimentation

The rate of experimentation in the field of Jewish education appears to be accelerating and new structures are being created to support this work. Evidence of the latter are Hillel’s new Department of Innovation and Implementation and JESNA’s new Lippman Kanfer Institute: An Action-Oriented Think Tank for Innovation in Jewish Learning and Engagement.

Scores of new national programs and organizations have recently been established, adding more variety to the landscape. Since 2000, the map has gained a number of new day schools and Jewish summer camps as well as:

- organizations such as the JCCA's Mandel Center for Jewish Education (2002), the Mandel Center for Jewish Education at Brandeis University (2003), and the Lippman Kanfer Institute at JESNA (2004);
- programs such as Moving Tradition's Rosh Hodesh: It's a Girl Thing! (2000), American Jewish World Service alternative breaks (2000), The Curriculum Initiative's Jewbilee (2002), Panim's Jewish Teen Leadership Summit (2004), and J-Serve (2005);
- professional development efforts including, among others, the Grinspoon-Steinhardt Awards for Excellence in Jewish Education (2000), the Tichon Teacher Enrichment Seminar of the Shalom Hartman Institute (2001), DeLeT--Day School Leadership Through Teaching (2001), the Cornerstone Fellowship for camp counselors (2003), SULAM--Judaic Enrichment for RAVSAK Community Day School Heads (2005), and the Executive Leadership Institute for residential camp directors (2006).

The list, extensive as it is, does not include the vast number of startups in local communities. In Boston, for example, these years saw the establishment of the MetroWest Jewish Day School (formal education), Keshet Newton (after school program), Team Boston-Haifa (informal education), CJP Jewish Educational Overnight Camping Initiative (funding), Telem (community service), and the Teens for Tzedek Youth Literacy Corps (social justice), to name just a few.

There is, as well, a continuous flow of experimentation and piloting coming from the foundations. For example, this year alone, CLSFF is piloting an Alumni Service Center, Leading Up North (a trip bringing 500 students to Israel over break to help rebuild Northern Israel), and a program to bring more formal learning opportunities to campuses with significant Jewish enrollment but few Jewish studies faculty.

One reason for this flurry of activity is the general recognition that there is no "magic bullet," no single approach that will appeal to every Jewish child. Youth today live in a world of vast, individualized choice. A symbol of this world is the ipod--that little instrument that allows each person to download and listen only to the songs that s/he wants. From this reality comes the theory that the greater the choice, the greater the possibility of catching a child or a teen in the Jewish educational net. JEXNET has arrayed the world of experiential learning on a grid. Columns list approaches: sports, arts and culture, social justice, social action, Jewish learning, and identity (gender, religious). Rows list grades 6 through 12. The idea is that every box in the matrix should be filled with quality opportunities, even though only a few teens might be interested in a particular cell. In this view, the proliferation of programs is a positive. It represents experimentation and dynamism, and it increases the likelihood of engagement.

Movement in the field of Jewish education—from new leadership, new directions, grand visions, and accelerated experimentation—suggests that this is a time of great opportunity. Momentum increases uncertainty about old assumptions and opens the way for new thinking. Within the organizations contributing to this study, leadership and vision appear quite strong. The success of specific structural and programmatic innovations, however, remains an open question.

## **FUNDING LESSONS**

The foundations, through the evidence of their work and through explicit advice, offer lessons about focus, roles, and role relationships.

### **Focus**

Almost every interviewee spoke of the benefits of gaining clarity about what the organization is trying to achieve and then choosing a narrow focus within that arena.

Focus enables the foundation to be an expert in its chosen area, thus avoiding the problems that arise from funding in an area in which the foundation has little experience or knowledge. Foundations say that when they have funded in an area that they did not know, they made costly mistakes. Focus also helps the foundation know when to say “yes” and when to say “no” in a world in which “fabulous opportunities and new ideas” abound.

The AVI CHAI Foundation’s focus is an overlay of substantive goals (literacy, purposefulness, and peoplehood/Israel) with institutions (day schools and camps). CLSFF has three main pillars: service (as a gateway for teens, college aged, and young adults and as a way to deepen their connections), Israel (education, engagement, and advocacy), and leadership development. The focal mission of the FJC is to increase the number of Jewish children attending Jewish camps in North America. The Andrea and Charles Bronfman Philanthropies (ACBP) has broad goals around identity and community building but it has focused these on the emerging and young adult population. The Wexner Foundation is concerned with human resources and leadership. Its theory is that interest in Jewish education is mobilized through the cultivation of lay and professional leadership.

Like the foundations, the national agencies benefit from focusing in a field in which they otherwise could be “all over the place.” JESNA’s recent strategic statement begins with a sharp point: “Focus and impact are key areas in which JESNA needs to improve.” In re-focusing its mission on learnings and dissemination, the agency was forced to look at each of its networks and programs to assess whether it did or did not meet the new standards required by this focus. Those that did not, like its active on-line job site or its Israel office, were dropped.

Focus can also help reduce unnecessary redundancy across organizations and agencies. For example, as it was clarifying its mission, JESNA saw overlaps with the Coalition for the Advancement of Jewish Education (CAJE). As a result, early childhood networks will

move into CAJE's bailiwick and some of CAJE's professional development work will move into JESNA's.

Despite focus in their missions, the language of the foundations and agencies is peppered with ill-defined terms. One executive admits that "Jewish purpose" and "Jewish peoplehood" may be guiding principles for the foundation but are not adequately precise for communicating with grantees. Another explained that a foundation saying it is going to do "Israel education" is insufficient guidance for a philanthropic program. Rather, the purpose and the ideology behind that education needs to be clearly stated. Organizations that are working in "informal" and "experiential" education are similarly challenged. These approaches are vague to funders who cannot see them in the same way that they can see a camp or a day school, thereby making the organizations' fundraising job more difficult. As discussed below, evaluation is a tool that, when done well, can force a clearer articulation of goals.

### **Beyond the Focus**

Focal missions have not limited the breadth of funder initiatives. At the national level, the Foundation for Jewish Camping is taking a multi-pronged approach targeted to the singular goal of increasing the number of Jewish children attending Jewish camps. Its work includes investment in camp professionals, advocacy (speaking out, conducting research, helping camps market their message differently), and explicit efforts to increase camp capacity and enrollment.

The AVI CHAI Foundation, Harold Grinspoon Foundation (HGF), and the federations in Boston and New York have taken the approach of layering programs in a given institution. The theory is that no single intervention can change an institution but that, in the aggregate, multiple programs can be transformative. In turn, by providing more powerful experiences, enriched institutions will transform individuals and families. Thus, Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston has funded a family educator initiative, a youth educator initiative, Me'ah (adult education), Ikarim (adult education for preschool parents), and a camping initiative that provides funding for first-time campers at Jewish residential camps—all through the synagogues. At this point, it is not known if the approach is merely producing a series of programs or if it is, in fact, transforming synagogue life. The key, as discussed below, may be in the synergy that is achieved among the various initiatives. Nonetheless, the belief holds that schools or synagogues that embrace not just one or two, but multiple programs achieve exponential results.

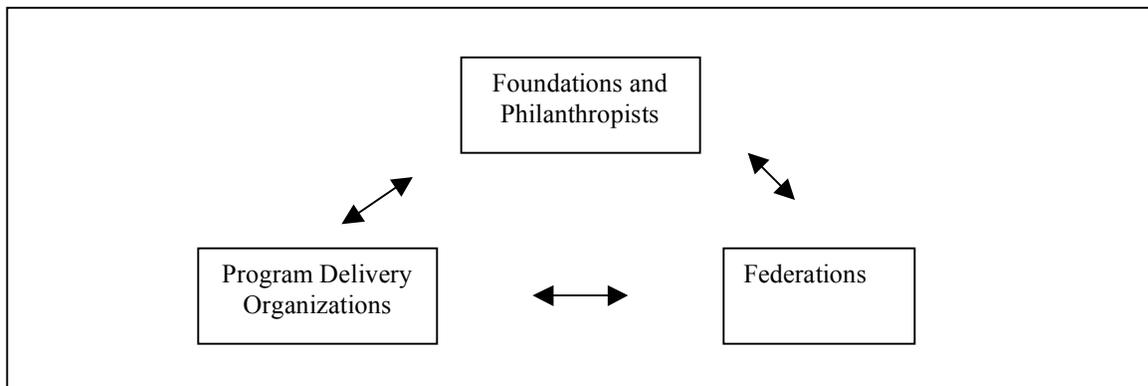
Even with focal missions, foundations have found ways to achieve flexibility in their activities. For example, the by-laws of The AVI CHAI Foundation do not permit capital funds, but the foundation was able to implement an interest-free loan program for day schools that coincided with an enormous spurt in day school growth. The program, which included over 70 loans of up to \$1 million each, is now being implemented with camps, a field which may be ripe for similar growth. As well, the foundation has come to recognize that it can make an intellectual contribution in areas outside of its grant-making. For example, AVI CHAI does not directly fund synagogue schools, but it has

commissioned a study to better understand these schools and the various models of congregational education.

The Harold Grinspoon Foundation also does not fund congregational schools directly. It does, however, support these schools indirectly by funding teen workers and family educators at synagogues, thereby providing another lamination of education in the synagogue setting. Covenant Foundation sees itself in a position to forge valuable connections among people, organizations, and programs in the field, regardless of whether or not it is not funding them. In this way, the foundation can foster collaboration and generate excitement in Jewish education even without making grants.

**Roles and Role Relationships**

If the Jewish world is to have an educational system, it will be built from three components: foundations, federations, and program-delivery organizations. These entities are currently pulling in different directions although it is possible to imagine how synergy and efficiency among them might ultimately be achieved.



**Foundation-Federation Relations**

Foundations can be countercultural. They are not obliged to seek consensus and they are free to take unpopular positions. Their business orientation and entrepreneurial spirit allow them to move faster than the traditional communal system. They have the resources to experiment and “to stretch the risk-benefit ratio.” Birthright Israel is a case in point. ACBP is convinced that had the foundation initially gone to the federations or the Israeli government, the initiative would never have happened. Foundations and philanthropists have the desire and the flexibility to create new programs and organizations. Some are aware of the need to do so without undermining existing efforts. In the best of cases, the work of the philanthropists would be additive and not destructive.

Some of the philanthropists are frustrated with the slow pace of the federations and what they perceive to be dysfunctional politics and procedures that make work with the federations difficult. The pace issue highlights fundamental differences between the two entities. As the federations see it, foundations can go into a community, fund a project,

and then leave, without worrying “about tomorrow or the day after.” But federations have an enduring obligation to the community. They need to work with diverse stakeholders and engage in a consensus-building process. Consensus, they admit, does not always lead to breakthroughs but it does lead to community strength. In terms of risk-taking, federations are spending “public money” and thus are more cautious than are private foundations. As well, because their resources increase only incrementally, federations are slow to invest new money. The growth of endowment funds has had some positive effect on this situation but, generally, incremental resource rise means incremental investment in the educational system.

A few of the funders want to nurture the federations’ role in education. For example, the Harold Grinspoon Foundation is partnering with federations on bringing PJ Library to their communities. In San Francisco, the federation is funding the program with a grant from the community endowment fund. In Detroit, funding comes from an individual donor through a gift to the federation. In other communities, individual philanthropists are providing funding not through the federation but through a JCC, a day school, or another organization. According to the foundation, the ideal arrangement for ensuring the success and sustainability of the program would be a broad coalition of funders, federations, central agencies, and implementing organizations. Other foundations that have attempted to build partnerships with federations find that it is hard work that needs to be done on a community-by-community basis.

The foundations accept that there are serious challenges on both sides. The rate of growth in federation annual campaigns has slowed. But it is equally true that few major philanthropists have entered the foundation world. “It’s not like we have a healthy philanthropy community and then a sick federation world,” one executive said. “We have this loosely connected group of Jews trying to think about the future of the Jewish world that’s not working well.”

Ultimately, the federations and the foundations want the same thing—effective Jewish education that builds a strong Jewish future for individuals and for the collective. The philanthropies understand that even though they fund nationally, they are dependent on local communities for implementation. Moreover, even though everyone wants change, the reality is that systemic change can take five to ten years to effect. As compared with foundations, the federations may be better set up for “long-term staying power.” A group of federation and foundation professionals are currently working together on ways the two entities can partner. They recognize that it is a challenge for both sides and that partnership might cover only a portion of the work that either one does. The potential benefits of foundation-federation partnerships seem obvious. However, it is not clear if the differences between the two sides will be as a source of strength or an insurmountable block to the creation of a partnership of equals.

### **Relations with Program Delivery Organizations**

The need for implementation partners varies from foundation to foundation. The Harold Grinspoon Foundation is a hybrid that both operates and funds programs. CLSFF and The

AVI CHAI Foundation, in contrast, are not operating foundations and must rely on partnerships and leverage to promote their vision. On rare occasion, when it identifies a need but cannot find a programming partner, CLSFF will create a new entity such as the Israel on Campus Coalition or the Professional Leaders Project (PLP). In these instances, it looks to partner with other funders in order to spread the risk and expand the range of stakeholders.

Certain qualities in a national organization make it a good implementation partner: the ability to connect locally, the quality of the executive, and the “bravery” of the board. CLSFF has invested most heavily in BBYO and Hillel. The qualities that attracted their dollars were trans-denominationalism, good brand names, long history, and strong leadership. Although hardly perfect, these organizations were deemed by the foundation to be the best ones for bringing informal Jewish educational opportunities to the greatest number of young people. Interestingly, JEXNET prefers to bypass these same entities and go directly to youth workers in the field. Its theory is that grassroots networking avoids the resistance that for so long has characterized the national organizations.

**Umbrella Organizations.** Foundations generally find national umbrella organizations to be undesirable implementation partners because they afford them little leverage in the field. “Umbrella organizations” refers to those in which the constituents are *members* of the organization. This definition distinguishes entities like the JCCA or the URJ from PEJE or birthright israel. In the former, the national entity is dependent on its members (e.g., URJ depends on its local synagogues). In the latter, the local schools or trip providers depend on the national organization.

Umbrella systems are often decentralized with little authority at the national level. USCJ cannot set a three-day a week standard for its congregational schools. URJ cannot mandate use of its new curriculum. And Hillel, which has relatively more leverage over its local foundations, cannot control the presentation of Israel on the campuses or set basic ideological premises. Some Hillel directors report little connection to the national office beyond small programming grants and staff conferences.

The URJ is not allowed to conduct training with the education directors at its congregational schools as this responsibility comes under the purview of the National Association of Temple Educators (NATE). URJ trains classroom teachers through online and summer programs, but this effort can have little impact if the education directors are not then open to change. Moreover, the URJ national office was not well structured to provide service to local congregations. Over the past seven years, it has decentralized the Department of Lifelong Jewish Learning and strengthened its regional offices. Each of the 14 regions now has a regional educator who works with the Reform congregations in the area and serves as eyes-and-ears on the ground for the national office. Despite the organizational redesign, local synagogues remain highly autonomous. The fate of the new curriculum is illustrative. The URJ undertook a deliberate campaign to promote the curriculum. It engaged as editors educational faculty from all three campuses of HUC and it built a coalition with NATE, the Central Conference of American Rabbis, and the American Conference of Cantors. As a result of this effort, maybe one-third of the

Reform congregational schools have adopted the new materials. This is a great success from the URJ perspective but perhaps less so from the perspective of potential funding partners.

**Central Agencies for Jewish Education.** Like the umbrella organizations, JESNA faces challenges linking to local communities. One of JESNA's main vehicles is the central agencies. Here the problem is exacerbated by the fact that these agencies are not "members" as in the umbrella organizations nor is there any kind of hierarchical structure. Moreover, the central agencies are of widely varying quality. The reasons for this are complex. Some are still led by an earlier generation of educators who know the education field but lack management skills. Others have been marginalized by their federation, which lost confidence in them and assumed the lead in setting the community's educational agenda and in driving major initiatives.

Part of the issue is funding. In general, federations have moved from providing core operating support to a grants-based approach to funding agency activities. In communities like Los Angeles, Kansas City, and Denver, the central agency now needs to raise money by writing grants for each program it wants to run, even those that cost just a few thousand dollars. In Detroit and Cleveland, in contrast, where the central agency is relieved of fundraising responsibilities, the agency can hire excellent educators (who may not know how to raise money) and focus exclusively on education. Detroit's Millennium Fund will create endowment funds for Jewish education. Major donors will be invited to underwrite organizations rather than specific programs.

The central agencies are tasked with working with the congregational schools. These schools often fit the sociological rubric of "permanently failing organizations"<sup>1</sup> and the central agencies' success rises and falls with their performance with these schools. Some of the most promising schools are in the Reform movement. According to the movement, some central agencies do not work with their congregations because these schools receive resources and consultation from the URJ regional professional. Moreover, the central agency may be ill-prepared to help the Reform congregations with their movement's educational goals, values, and approaches. As the URJ develops parallel structures in these communities, the strength of the central agency is further undermined.

A few breakthroughs are on the horizon. The URJ has begun to partner with the central agency in Pittsburgh on a two-year professional development program for faculty in three of its congregational schools. USCJ similarly reports that, after many years of living "in parallel universes," they are now developing relationships with bureaus of Jewish education.

Some of the central agencies have had a turnover in leadership. The new executives "read management literature," "think in terms of change," and are skilled in visioning, planning, and community organizing. JESNA is developing a plan to increase the capacity of these agencies through professional development and proactive recruitment,

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<sup>1</sup> Meyer, M.S. & Zucker, L.G. (1989). *Permanently failing organizations*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publishers, Inc.

and it is trying to figure out how to get federation's help with this effort. One of JESNA's goals is to upgrade the ability of the central agencies to work with congregational schools. To this end, it is conducting training to help staff and directors understand and implement the best thinking about congregational school improvement. It remains to be seen whether JESNA can effect quality improvements and whether federations will agree that it is in their best interest to invest in the central agencies.

### **Humility**

The most common advice regarding relationships among federations, grantees, and funding partners is to be humble. Interviewees say that humility should flow from the mere fact that no one, as yet, has the answers to the challenges of Jewish education. "Approach the work and the community with humility," advised one foundation professional. "There is expertise out there. There are professionals who are extraordinarily talented and do have a vision and a pulse on what's happening generally and in local communities. Identify them and learn from them. Know that we don't know all the answers...Look within the foundation when we can and be open to looking for answers within the community." Said another foundation executive, "Don't become arrogant. Become humble, informed, and live in a field that's bigger than you are."

## **ISSUES**

Interviewees were asked about issues they face in their work. Their answers refer to programming, structural, and funding challenges. They were also asked about accomplishments or work they are doing that excites them and gives them hope, even though its success may not as yet have been demonstrated. A sample of responses to this question are included here, not to endorse particular programs or approaches but rather to give a sense of various ways that issues are being addressed.

### **Programming Challenges**

Four program areas stand out as "nuts that haven't been cracked": engagement, minding the gap, congregational schools, technology and curriculum.

### **Engagement**

Some organizations and communities talk of "engagement" rather than "education." The two are mutually enhancing. Children need to be engaged in order to become educated; and the more educated they become, the more likely they are to engage in Jewish life and community. In the mutually enhancing spiral created by the two, engagement should probably be given primacy.

Engaging more youth—in early childhood education, youth programs, day schools, camping, Hillel—is an ongoing challenge that underlies much of the effort of the federations, philanthropies, and implementing organizations. As noted above, the goal for many of the national organizations is to increase enrollment and participation numbers.

Five national youth programs (USY, NFTY, Young Judaea, BBYO, and NCSY) represent the largest number of teens being served in North America. The total population in middle and high school is estimated at perhaps 650,000 youth. Collectively the five organizations claim to be reaching 55,000, less than 10% of the total eligible population. Whether we consider Jewish summer camp, year-round youth experiences, day schools, or campus organizations, only a fraction of Jewish youth and children are engaged by Jewish institutions.

Some believe that engagement is linked to cost. In this formulation, reduction in cost should lead to an increase in the number of participants. The HGF Incentive Grants are one effort to increase engagement by lowering the barrier of cost. These grants include subsidies for day school; Jewish overnight summer camp; year-round youth experiences; teen, college student, and adult travel to Israel; and college student study in Israel.

Engagement has been on the communal agenda for many years. Two contemporary factors exacerbate this longstanding issue. The first is the increased diversification of the community along many dimensions--racial, sexual, social, religious, and so on. There are now larger numbers and percentages of non-Jews raising Jewish children than there have been in the past. More and smarter work needs to be done to engage these diverse families and their children.

The second is shifts in youth culture. Teens today are technologically savvy, globally-oriented, accustomed to vast arrays of choices, and aware of few limits. The Jewish infrastructure, some professionals say, has not (and perhaps cannot) keep up with them. JEXNET argues that the infrastructure for the five major national youth organizations “doesn’t even come close to what Jewish teens are looking for.”

### **“Minding the Gap”**

For years, educators and community leaders have been aware of the sharp post-bar/t mitzvah dropout rate, not only in teen involvement in synagogue or communal life but also in the parents’ affiliation. The Reform movement bemoans how the bar/t mitzvah has co-opted Jewish education. Some of the fault lies with parents who give their children an “out” after becoming bar/t mitzvah. But the movement also acknowledges that the quality of the high school education it offers is lower than what it has developed for elementary school.

Similarly, there are widespread reports of drop-off between preschool and elementary school, and between high school and college. Hillel, for example, does not receive the names of youth coming to campus from Jewish summer camps, high schools, and youth groups. It does not know, in turn, to whom it should give the names of its graduating students. Today’s youth are highly mobile, readily moving from one community to another for college and then career. Their Jewish education, therefore, cannot be thought of in local terms alone, but also requires a national perspective.

The Partnership for Jewish Life and Learning (PJLL) in Washington DC, a replacement for the standard central agency, was designed explicitly to “mind the gap.” Rather than being organized institutionally (congregational schools, youth groups, camps, Hillel, etc.), it is organized by seven groups: early childhood, elementary school, teens, college-aged, twenty-somethings, adults, and special needs. Its charge is to link across various formal and informal educational approaches and to improve the handoff from one age group to the next. Time will tell if a structural change like PJLL can change how communal organizations operate.

### **Congregational Schools**

The congregational schools remain a key issue that needs serious consideration. It is not possible to “write off” these schools as the majority of Jewish families rely on them to educate their children. In Detroit, for example, more than twice as many children currently attend congregational schools as attend day schools.

The schools have ingrained structural problems. For example, the Conservative synagogues have reduced the number of hours of instruction by one-third. Teachers in these schools appear to be significantly less knowledgeable than teachers of a generation ago. In some instances, day schools have siphoned off the most committed families leaving the congregational school with overall less family support.

Congregational schools have been the “blind spot” of community funding. As an integral part of their synagogues, they received no community funds throughout the decades in which federation monies did not cross the communal/synagogue divide. Even after the divide was breached, they received relatively small amounts. Many local federations remain loath to fund individual congregations although they will fund community initiatives that ultimately will help individual schools. The congregational schools are keenly aware of the relatively large sums of money going into day schools. A good analogy is the government’s large subsidies of the airline industry versus its marginal support for Amtrak. The result is a clear differential in financial health, service, and ridership.

Some efforts are underway to address the issue of the congregational schools. JESNA and the Association of Directors of Central Agencies is implementing the WOW project to look at how communities can engage and better meet the needs of non-day school families. Solutions may include the congregational schools but also may entail new structures. Keshet Boston offers an alternative to congregational schools. Capitalizing on a need in the community for after-school care, the program combines such care with religious school. Children can come any number of days a week as suits the family. Activities are based on a Young Judaea model, with *chugim* that blend formal and informal Jewish education.

Jewish Family & Life, with support from The AVI CHAI Foundation, wants to increase usage of *Babaganewz*. The goal is to move the magazine, currently in use in some 3,000 classrooms, from an ancillary activity to a more central part of the curriculum. The

approach will be flexible enough to suit various models of congregational education. The plan is to work first with pilot congregations and then scale up nationally. ECE has been honing its change model for the congregational schools. It is experimenting with ways to trim its process, to make it more cost-effective and less dependent on outside resources and consultants. It, too, hopes to arrive at a design that can more easily scale up.

Announced in April 2006, a group of funders, along with JESNA and the Jewish Funders Network, is creating a partnership for congregational education. Like its counterparts in the day school and early childhood arenas (PEJE and JECEI), its intent is to use the funders' convening power to create a leadership assembly for congregational education and to build the field. It will spotlight projects and use matching and challenge grants to leverage in other funders. This partnership may also provide the forum for some much-needed experimentation (e.g., linking congregations and camps, creating informal models of pre-bar mitzvah education, using the computer for additional learning time, and so on).

It is difficult to read this activity in the field. Perhaps it is like the early years in the computer industry when geniuses in garages worked to develop new technologies and investors waited to see which would emerge as the standard for the field. Or perhaps the Jewish world is again duplicating effort and failing to pull the pieces together efficiently. It is also not clear where the denominational movements fit in. Some efforts at outside curriculum development are seen as competition to the movement model. Although the movements may not obstruct these efforts, they certainly do not open doors for the innovators. In addition, there are ways in which the movements have been ineffectual, not the least of which has been their poor fundraising record.

### **Technology**

The Jewish community has barely begun to use the Internet for formal and informal Jewish education. Some professionals consider the disregard of this opportunity to be a vast error given the technology habits of today's youth, the variety of vehicles now available (e.g. streaming, networks), and the ever-diminishing number of hours devoted to Jewish education. They argue that if local Hillels don't start using the technology, students will come to see them as a third-class organization.

Jewish organizations are unsophisticated when it comes to technology. They know they need to be on line, so, they have IT create a website for them. But they do not think about how the technology integrates into their overall organizational and educational strategy. Both technology and content are expensive to develop and "cracking this nut" is beyond the capacity of any one organization or community. As well, it may not be feasible for Jewish sites to compete with other Internet offerings. MySpace, recently purchased by Rupert Murdoch's News Corps for \$580 million, has professionals working on it day and night. Jewish teens, one suspects, will find a place for themselves on MySpace and not on a Jewish alternative.

For the most part, funders have shown little interest in media and technology. CLSFF is just beginning to focus on technology and will sponsor a consultation on the topic in Spring 2007. ACBP has commissioned a review of existing technologies and innovations.

## **Curriculum**

There are pockets of curricular development in the field. In its effort to increase Jewish education in the Center field, the JCCA developed Ethical Start, a values-based curriculum for its preschools. It is now working on TAG, a curricular initiative to enrich the Jewish component of its summer camps. USCJ identified an acute need for new curricula in its congregational schools and developed Etgar, a program of study at the middle school level. The URJ's new curriculum is theme-based and uses a non-textbook approach. Its new Hebrew curriculum individualizes instruction, allowing each child to proceed at his/her own pace. AVI CHAI has supported the development and publication of new Hebrew language curricula through NETA and TaL AM. Aside from these examples, the product of the for-profit publishing houses like Behrman House tends to overshadow field-generated curricular efforts.

## **Structural Challenges**

Despite continuing evidence of funder ego, programming redundancy, and the relational issues described above, the general trend in Jewish education appears to be toward a more highly cooperative system. Examples abound of productive alliances, partnerships, collaborations, and networks. Still, the silos in the field remain intact,<sup>2</sup> limiting synergy and diffusion of innovation.

## **Synergy**

When the Conservative congregational schools reduced the number of weekly classroom hours, the USCJ had to rethink its standards for congregational education and to articulate what good Jewish education in their synagogues entails. It determined that effective education needs to include family, informal, and high school education. What seems to be missing from this analysis is the relationship among these programs. In Boston, for example, the federation has resourced the synagogues with youth educators, family educators, and Me'ah. All of them reside in a single setting but there is no sense that they talk to one another. Such synergy does not come natively to the synagogues and is not a part of the federation's articulated vision.

Missed opportunities for synergy are seen at every level. At the community level, allocations are often perceived to favor one institution over another, complicating the possibilities for synergy among those concerned with youth education. For example, in Cleveland, the federation provides funds to reduce day school tuition. A number of the day schools also have preschools which are in competition with the JCC preschools. Even though the funds do not apply to the preschool, they potentially enable the day schools to

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<sup>2</sup> Wertheimer, J. (2005). *Linking the silos: How to accelerate the momentum in Jewish education today*. NY: The AVI CHAI Foundation.

offload expenses and under-price their preschools. JCC supporters see the community funding as unfair practice. Kansas City, another example, has put most of its educational resources into informal education. By doing so, however, it has failed to shore up other institutions in the community and has thereby reduced the potential for synergy between informal and formal educational approaches.

In the national organizations, as noted above, there is untapped potential for synergy both vertically (between the national office and local affiliates) and horizontally (amongst the local units, whether these are synagogue schools, Hillel foundations, or youth groups). In a most remarkable way this summer, the federations operated as a system for the emergency campaign for Israel. Interviewees noted that UJC and the federations have not responded to education in that way, but they could.

At the same time, the national level has seen the growth of networks and communities of practice. This approach was started by PEJE and then adopted by the FJC in the camping world and JECEI in the field of early childhood education. It is now being taken up by JESNA and by the congregational school partnership in formation. JEXNET and BBYO are building on-line networks with informal youth educators. UJC intends to create communities of practice with its constituents. These communities of practice create great strength within each subfield, but overall serve to perpetuate the silos of Jewish education. Networking, support, learning, and sharing are all taking place within the various sectors of the field. None of these networks or communities of practice cross lines and address the totality of the field.

Funders have a critical role to play in linking among silos. Unlike organizations and agencies, they can take the macro-perspective, make connections, catalyze partnerships, and spur cross-pollination. They can identify gaps and figure out ways to fill them.

### **Diffusion of Innovation**

The structure of the Jewish education world stifles diffusion of innovation. Despite the accelerated pace of experimentation cited above, local professionals in the communities we studied were often unaware of the activity of their national organization and of the lessons learned from its experiments and pilots. As well, they, themselves, gave little heed to disseminating the fruits of their own innovative work. A Hillel in Detroit is doing interesting work in engaging commuter students. The central agency in Cleveland has a fulltime professional working with schools and other organizations on designing and delivering retreat experiences. Boston has an innovative Jewish after school program. The list of local innovations is extensive but, to our knowledge, none of them has the means to become diffused to other parts of the field.

### **Funding Challenges**

Five funding challenges emerge from the data: personnel, quality, scaling up, sustainability, and inspiring philanthropy.

## Personnel

Funders and others at the national level are most frustrated by their inability to find enough high caliber, dynamic people in the field to drive their agendas. Even in organizations with leadership strength, there tends not to be much depth of leadership below the top level. “Without good people,” one executive said, “we have nothing.” One foundation funds based on the strength of leadership. “Look to the professional and often the lay leadership,” the executive advised, “and invest energy and time in places where there is exceptional leadership.” Foundations have to “scout projects,” in much the same way that baseball teams scout talent.

National and local organizations need the leadership of both great educators and great administrators, two talents that tend not to reside in the same person. They also need strong lay boards as these can help assure that the organization is offering competitive salaries and hiring the right executive director. This message was clear from Hillel, BBYO, day schools, and other organizations.

In informal educational organizations, professionals are generally young adults in their 20s. Most do not choose a lifetime career at that age but rather seek to have a variety of professional experiences. Given the silos that exist in the field, these young professionals are not exposed to the full array of opportunities in Jewish education. And they may perceive that a career in this field carries little cache. Some, but certainly not all of the informal youth organizations are “old school.” They are run by executives who have been in their jobs for decades and have no succession plan for when they retire. To the extent that these organizations do not welcome new ideas and creativity, they turn off the younger professional who feels that his/her views are not valued. Aside from these cultural issues, insufficient work has been done to identify, nurture, and invest in “the best and the brightest.”

Camping, for the most part, has a cadre of passionate, hardworking, and caring professionals at the top. But most are “mired in a survival mentality” and lack forward thinking. There are few in the pipeline to follow them or to assume the leadership of new camps. Executive compensation for camp directors lags behind that in other fields and there seems to be little institutional understanding of the issue or support for fixing it. Threatened with a loss of its best directors, URJ is now making a major adjustment in its compensation package for camp directors.

The FJC is helping the camping field define excellence in professional development. Through the Cornerstone Program, originally established by AVI CHAI as a counselor retention program, 184 staff members from over 26 camps get a week of high-level leadership training with the “who’s who” in experiential Jewish training. Through the Executive Leadership Institute, experienced camp directors are improving their business, management, and leadership skills. FJC believes that continuing and expanding these programs will, in five years, raise the level of excellence in Jewish summer camping.

The personnel challenge is being addressed through professional development efforts throughout the field, not just in camping but also in the JCCs, day schools, informal educational organizations, Hillel, and other sectors. The unlimited possibilities for professional growth and the continuous search for talent suggest that the need for such efforts will continue unabated.

## Quality

Jewish education is torn between questions of quantity and quality. The proliferation of programs and the effort to reach large numbers of children often seem to override concerns with the quality of programs and of the education being delivered. Formal and informal Jewish education lack explicit educational standards. Little has been done to define the educated Jew and to operationalize the measurement of program quality and success. Nonetheless, the philanthropists say that they strive to make their foundations models of excellence and to call for quality in the programs they fund.

Research and evaluation, key tools for quality assurance, are on the ascendancy. The Berman Center for Research and Evaluation in Jewish Education at JESNA conducts some 35 to 40 evaluation studies a year. Part of this growth has been driven by the funder, Mandell Berman, and part by increased demand in the field. Evaluation research has become standard in education and in the nonprofit world more generally, and funders increasingly require evaluation studies. Highly visible studies, such the evaluation of birthright israel done by the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis University, have helped make evaluation part of the Jewish landscape. As well, early adopters like Sidney Schwarz at Panim, who demonstrated how evaluation could be parlayed into new rounds of programming and funding, sent the message that evaluation is good for an organization.

The Jewish world today has more sophistication about research and a greater sense of its value. Amongst funders, evaluation has become “de rigueur” and increasingly is being built into educational initiatives from the outset. In the past two years, different foundations have sponsored consultations with their grantee organizations in an effort to promote the concept of evaluation research. Foundations like the HGF and Covenant are using research and evaluation as a key part of their strategy to experiment, model, and scale up new approaches.

Some of the program delivery organizations are trying to build metrics into their work.

- One of the most notable efforts is the Day School Peer Yardstick Model, developed by Sacha Litman of Measuring Success and implemented through PEJE. The system helps schools track key indicators related to recruitment, admissions, retention, and finances. Data are then used for benchmarking and planning.
- BBYO is developing metrics from its electronic network. The key measure will be the number of teens involved in Jewish activities and the breadth of their involvement.

- Hillel International has created a taskforce on measurement and it has developed metrics for gauging success in achieving the organization's five goals (to involve more students and provide them meaningful Jewish experiences, to improve professional development, to make Hillel an integral part of campus life, to increase Hillel's organizational effectiveness, and to increase its financial strength). The next step, admittedly a difficult one, is to develop metrics at the local level and to create a "culture of measurement and accountability" across the field. Hillel is also updating its accreditation process and will attempt to synchronize it with the metrics process so that the two work toward the same end. Ultimately, success will depend on the local boards' taking ownership of the goals and determining how to tackle them.

The shortcoming in this burgeoning research is its atomization, with little work done to integrate lessons learned across programs, organizations, and subfields. Covenant Foundation and JESNA have arrived at this same conclusion and, in the coming years, will attempt to derive meta-lessons from the evaluation studies they have conducted.

### **Scaling up**

In order to maximize their impact, foundations need to aim nationally. The Harold Grinspoon Foundation, for one, has incorporated scaling up into its goals. Its modus operandi is to model programs in its local region, conduct research, and use results to inspire other philanthropists to create similar programs in their local communities. The Grinspoon-Steinhardt Awards for Excellence (administered by JESNA), the incentive programs, PJ Library, and B'nai Tzedek Teen Philanthropy Program all started with a local focus but are now being scaled and offered in different ways to communities. The awards are a case in point: Sixty-seven educators received awards at this year's General Assembly. They come from over 40 communities in North America, some of which otherwise had no teacher recognition awards programs.

Other foundations seem uncertain about how to bring good ideas up to scale. One executive says that his foundation recognizes opportunities for scaling up but does not know how to do it. The executive of another foundation notes that there exists a body of knowledge on diffusion of innovation that could be brought to bear on the foundation's opportunities. JESNA, through its Lippman Kanfer Institute, intends to work on questions of innovation and its diffusion over the next few years. The Institute will function as an in-house think tank and R&D center focused on the issue of infusing innovation throughout the Jewish education world.

The issue of scaling belongs in the hands of the national agencies and foundations. Directors in local organizations do not have the capacity to scale up, even when they have a program that appears ripe for such a move. The three examples from Boston that are often given are Prozdor (supplementary community high school), Keshet (Jewish after-school program), and Camp Yavneh (interdenominational residential camp). The directors of these programs are busy managing everyday operations and raising money for their current program and facilities. These responsibilities overwhelm any thoughts of

expansion. Moreover, as one interviewee pointed out, these directors are not prepared to do feasibility studies or any of the ensuing steps needed for scaling up.

### **Sustainability**

A survey of AVI CHAI grantees revealed that their number one concern was the continuity of funded programs. This result is not surprising. Big philanthropy is always looking to create something new, leaving open the question of the future of the programs that it creates. This issue is seen across the field. Very few of the programs established in recent years have stable financial bases. As one funder told us, “PEJE will end the day half the philanthropists decide day school is no longer their current interest.” The lesson for foundations is that, from the outset, they need to be thinking not just about how a program gets started but about how it is sustained.

Covenant Foundation reviewed its grants of the past 15 years and found that over half sustained themselves without the foundation’s help. Although it will attend to sustainability in its future funding, the foundation will not fund an organization or program *in perpetuum*. A possible alternative would allow for additional funding for successful models to use for the purposes of dissemination and financial resource development.

### **Inspiring Philanthropy**

Jewish education is an area of unlimited need, yet most Jewish philanthropic dollars go outside the Jewish community. Some funders, like HGF and AVI CHAI Foundation, have tried to address this issue by offering challenge grants and mentoring new philanthropists. Others are looking for ways to cultivate the next tier of Jewish education funders.

A partnership of funders created MATCH to bring in new donors and to increase the level of giving of current donors. Under this program, matching funds are given to an institution of the contributor’s choice, a reversal of common matching funds programs. In 2005 the program was responsible for over \$15.5 million in new gifts to Jewish day schools. HGF created the Grinspoon Institute for Jewish Philanthropy to help Jewish nonprofit overnight camps become more effective organizations, particularly as regards board development and fundraising. With the right consultation, capacity building, and matching grant funding, the institute has been able to leverage in new money, raising over \$11 million in new capital projects with a \$3 million investment.

## **INNOVATION TRENDS**

In our interviews, we asked foundation executives about the sources of innovation. Where do new ideas come from? What confluence of factors enables them to be realized? Interviewees suggested various elements of success although none claim to know the full complement. In terms of internal dynamics, they mentioned the brilliance and vision of

the philanthropist, expert philanthropic mentors, a dynamic board of trustees, traction with local initiatives, willingness to assume risk, and professional excellence.

Funders constantly scan the field for new ideas and models. And they borrow ideas freely. For example, The AVI CHAI foundation borrowed its interest-free loans program from the Gruss Foundation. The Harold Grinspoon Foundation got its idea for PJ Library from the Dolly Parton Foundation's national "Imagination Library."

CLSFF Alumni Service Center resulted from a convergence of ideas. The foundation saw that young people were being engaged by the programs, trips, and conferences that it funded. But it also saw that the delivering organizations were doing a poor job of following up with participants. It recognized that these organizations lacked the time, money, staff, and expertise to do alumni tracking and programming. It started to develop the idea of helping the organizations manage their alumni. At the same time, proposals came in from service organizations to launch alumni programs. Taken together, these threads resulted in the idea of an Alumni Service Center. The vision grew to include everything needed to create a virtual community of alumni along with on-the-ground activity.

CLSFF's J-Serve program had a similar history. The foundation recognized the problem of low penetration of teen programs and brought together the teen leaders of the major Jewish youth-serving organizations. Out of this process came the idea for J-Serve, a national day of service that is both Jewish and American.

Research has also played a role in innovation. AVI CHAI sponsored research on Jewish life on college campuses. The study found campuses with significant Jewish populations but little by way of Jewish studies.<sup>3</sup> This same problem/opportunity was identified by Hillel in its most recent strategic plan. With these inputs, CLSFF came up with an idea for a pilot project to address this issue.

## **Trends**

Interviews with the heads of the national foundations and organizations point to current trends that are generating excitement and galvanizing energy in the field. In the programmatic realm, these include early childhood and alternative education. In the realm of capacity building, they entail new modes of operating.

### **Early Childhood Education**

There is a movement in the field to push Jewish education down to the preschool years, a time, it is believed, when greater opportunity exists for setting a family's Jewish trajectory and for increasing the likelihood of Jewish institutional involvement and Jewish educational choices. Much of this energy is focused on the parents of preschoolers because, as one federation executive likes to say, "I never saw a preschooler who has

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<sup>3</sup> Sales, A. & Saxe, L. (2006). *Particularism in the university: Realities and opportunities for Jewish life on campus*. NY: AVI CHAI FOUNDATION.

decided his own education.” So strong is the belief in the early childhood gateway that several interviewees chided us for not including parent or family education within the parameters of this research. According to CAJE, there are approximately 125,000 children in the United States enrolled in early childhood Jewish educational programs.<sup>4</sup> As per their estimates, the field employs some 20,000 educators. Our own exploration found a burgeoning of such programs. Day schools are beginning to open pre-school arms (a boon to them as feeder programs, but a challenge to them in terms of their mission) and there is increasing competition among the day schools, synagogues, and JCCs, all of which are offering preschool programs.

Other programs for young children are also being developed. For example, PJ Library, a creation of the Harold Grinspoon Foundation, sends Jewish-content books and music on a monthly basis to families with children between six months and six years of age. The program has seen rapid and remarkable growth. There are now close to 700 children from over 500 families in Western Massachusetts receiving a free book or compact disc each month. Twelve other communities across the country are participating in the program and another 25 communities are expected to launch in the coming months. Increased numbers have brought down the cost of the books, making the project increasingly cost-efficient.

### **Alternative Education**

Throughout the field, there is an increasing appreciation for and energy around alternative forms of education. New entrepreneurial talent is creating a plethora of Jewish opportunities that include programs as diverse as Jewish Youth Philanthropy, Hazon’s Environmental Bike Ride, Rosh Hodesh—It’s a Girl Thing!, J-serve, Jewish Student Union, community film festivals, and more. These programs have several characteristics in common: They respond to a specific need and interest. They appeal to a niche audience. They are voluntary and require no membership, making them open and available to the unaffiliated. And they involve a limited time commitment.

There is, as well, a growing interest in retreats as a venue for Jewish educational experiences for various age groups and audiences. Capitol Camps had a successful capital campaign and was refurbished as a year-round retreat center. Cleveland has a Retreat Institute that works in collaboration with schools and synagogues to develop programs beyond classroom learning. Synagogues of all sorts are introducing retreats for their bar/t mitzvah classes and other cohorts in the congregation.

In part, the diversification of approaches is an acknowledgement of the post-modern tendency to form multiple, niche identities. In the past, diversity was understood only in denominational terms. But Hillel now recognizes that “if over half of the students do not see themselves in denominational terms, then our being friendly to all the denominations will not matter to them.” As well, we live in an era of, as Jeff Solomon says, “Jewing for yourself.” Google is awash in information on any Jewish topic from blintzes (16,200 entries) to Yom Kippur (3,650,000 entries). This availability of Jewish matter means that

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<sup>4</sup> Schaap, E. (June 24, 2004). Early Childhood Jewish Education and Profiles of its Educators. (<http://caje.org/earlychildhood/ec-survey04.pdf>)

any individual can find whatever s/he is looking for without going through the organized Jewish community.

The traditional response to diversity has been to try to create umbrella organizations that would embrace and serve everyone. The contemporary response shifts focus away from institutions toward individuals, and creates niche organizations that speak to individual identities. “It is time,” one foundation executive said, “to stop serving the need of the organizations and instead focus on the needs of the constituents.” Whether these highly differentiated organizations can ultimately be drawn together under an umbrella is an important question. The phenomenon is clearly displayed on campuses where Jewish clubs--based on every possible interest and identity from Jewish vegan feminists to Jewish scuba divers--proliferate. The challenge to Hillel, as it is to the Jewish community writ large, is to create a sense of *k’lal Yisrael* out of this fragmentation.

Although not mentioned by our interviewees, we would note from our community studies that Jewish institutions are doing important and impressive work with special needs students, serving this audience in a way unimaginable a decade ago. Day schools are providing aides, pullout programs, and full service to special needs students, including those with severe disabilities. Congregational schools, as well, are finding ways to include children of all abilities. Keshet of the Rockies in Denver and Sulam in Washington DC are examples of programs set up specifically to assure education for special needs Jewish children. These efforts are expensive and have no payoff in terms of a school’s college placement statistics. But they are significant in the lives of the individuals they support and in terms of the inclusive Jewish community they help build.

### **New Modes of Operating**

As noted above, communities of practice are being developed in various sectors of the Jewish education world. There are now professional networks for informal educators, day school professionals, and camp professionals. More networks, through JESNA, BBYO, UJC and others, are on the way. Such communities of practice help build connections among professionals who previously worked in relative isolation from one another. Members receive help with problem solving, access to tools, emotional support, and the like. Their organizations benefit from the ongoing learning, professional development, identification and diffusion of best practices, stimuli for innovation, and increased morale that comes through the network. Taking part in a community of practice is an opportunity for professionals and their organizations to contribute to the building of a subfield.<sup>5</sup>

Along with the development of communities of practice is the implementation of new modes of operating that should increase experimentation and diffusion of innovation. The general format entails piloting and modeling, conducting evaluation research, aggregating results of studies to derive general principles, disseminating findings, and scaling up. There is, as well, increased reference to “open sourcing,” an indication that agencies might share more of the information they gather in developing their programs. A great

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<sup>5</sup> Frank, N. & Miloff, M. (March 8, 2006). Communities of practice: What are they and how can they support our work? Presentation to Jewish Consultant Group.

deal of work remains to be done to perfect these modes of operating, but the vision and the language for working in this way have already taken hold in many places.

Taken together, the national picture suggests what a Jewish education system might look like. The national agencies and organizations would develop communities of practice, provide settings for experimentation, and generate and disseminate best practices and other lessons for the field. The federations would work within communities to sustain innovation over the long term. The philanthropists and foundations, for their part, would identify mega-trends and emerging program and service needs. They would encourage and support experimentation, modeling, and scaling up. And, importantly, they would be connectors and cross-pollinators among the sub-sectors of Jewish education, helping to create and grow an integrated field.

**APPENDIX**  
**Sources of Information and Ideas**

**Foundations**

Andrea and Charles Bronfman Philanthropies (ACBP)

The AVI CHAI Foundation

Harold Grinspoon Foundation (HGF)

Covenant Foundation

Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation (CLSFF)

Wexner Foundation

**Agencies/Organizations**

B'nai B'rith Youth Organization (BBYO)

Hillel

Jewish Community Centers Association (JCCA)

Jewish Education Service of North America (JESNA)

Foundation for Jewish Camping (FJC)

Jewish Family & Life

JEXNET

United Jewish Communities (UJC)

Union of Reform Judaism (URJ)

United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism (USCJ)