
Consistencies and Subtle Difference: The Shared Outcomes Survey's Early Promise

The Shared Outcomes Survey has been one of the most innovative elements in the evaluation of the Jim Joseph Foundation's Professional Development Initiative. The 10 participating programs are tremendously diverse. One (Makom/Moishe House) is working with "para-educators," people doing the work of Jewish education as volunteers. Two programs (HUC's EMA, JCCA Sheva) explicitly groom rising stars to assume leadership roles in their sectors. Others promise different outcomes that are no less varied: building the skills and capacities to work with specific populations, whether teens (Gen Now) or millennials (Next Gen); engaging around particular content, whether Talmud (SVARA), Israel (iCenter), or Jewish literature (YBC); and, last, helping participants become adept with particular pedagogies or ways of educating (Ayeka, M²). In retrospect, it was actually quite audacious to propose to uncover a set of common outcomes that programs cultivate in their participants and then to develop an approach to assessing those outcomes.

Last year, we described the process behind developing this instrument, a Shared Outcomes Survey. We are now able to reflect on preliminary findings derived from the responses collected from 104 participants from seven programs (a 61% response rate). These findings—presented in an accompanying deck—indicate that the effort to develop a shared instrument was reasonable and may yet have lasting significance as a means of assessment across widely differing professional development programs in Jewish education.

Interim analysis of the responses reveals a considerable level of consistency among the respondents. Indeed, through factor analysis—a search for the underlying patterns in how participants responded to the same questions—we have been able to identify nine sets of outcomes with which participation in these programs have generally been associated to a lesser or greater degree. In order of impact from highest to lowest, these are:

1. New ways of thinking and doing
2. Growing a professional network
3. Deepening Jewish connection
4. Growth within one's own organization
5. Growth within one's professional sector
6. Growth within the field of Jewish education
7. Developing leadership
8. Remaining connected to one's cohort
9. Remaining connected to program staff

As is clear, above all, these experiences have contributed to participants developing new ways of thinking about and doing their professional work. The programs have equipped the participating educators with skills and practices that enable them to be more adept in whatever is their chosen field. Running a close second to this outcome, the programs have also been fairly consistent in cultivating networks of peers engaged in the same work, able to learn from and share with one another.

Our clinical interviews (described elsewhere) probe the personal significance associated with gaining these outcomes; what they can mean for how individuals think of themselves as Jewish educators. While coming away feeling better equipped and more willing to play a leadership role in one's institution or field also scores quite highly here, these two outcomes (gaining know-how and gaining a network), because of their immediate practical consequence, are likely to constitute the currency with which prospective and past participants assess the worth of a program. We would have been surprised if these had not been the most highly ranked; they are the most immediately accessible benefits of participating in a cohort-based professional development program. It's encouraging the instrument captured these consequences.

When it comes to the Jewish outcomes of these programs, the data at first look disappointing: on average, Jewish gains are relatively modest. However, when we distinguish between participants with more and with less prior exposure to Jewish education, we see a strong and consistent pattern. Those participants who prior to these programs were exposed to less extensive Jewish educational experiences (including day school, congregational school, and summer camp) report significantly greater gains associated with being in a program of this kind. It is as if what participants learn in the program serves a remedial function, enabling them to imagine their contribution to Jewish life differently. They are more ready to see themselves as Jewish educators and as members of a Jewish educational community. The programs don't really play this role for those who already think of themselves in these terms before they sign up. Again, this finding is consistent with data from our case studies and from the clinical interviews.

Other patterns are worth noting too. First, in respect to the relationship between participants' motivations before the start of programs and what they ultimately report gaining most from them. Our analysis of Participant Audit data (a survey fielded to all participants at point of entry to the program) revealed two central, not mutually exclusive, motivations for signing up: an interest in developing one's professional self-efficacy (learning new practices, gaining new knowledge, and acquiring new leadership skills) and a desire for more holistic professional growth (a desire to stretch, explore new ideas, and assume new roles). Merging the Audit data with the Shared Outcomes data, we find that higher levels of each of these motivations is associated with graduating programs with a greater capacity for leadership in a variety of contexts, in one's workplace and beyond. At the same time, each of these motivations is associated with one further subtle difference. On the one hand, the more people are motivated by an interest in improved professional efficacy, the more their leadership capacities seem to be informed by enhanced technical strengths—essentially the acquisition of additional know-how. On the other hand, the more people are interested in holistic

professional growth, the more their leadership capacities seem to be related to developing greater relational strengths. What people look for subtly shapes what they bring away with them from these experiences.

Finally, the length of people's service in the field also seems to be associated with differences in the gains they report. Those who have been in the field for six years or more are significantly more likely to report leadership-related gains, higher Jewish outcomes, and a sense of being better able to contribute in their professional sector. We suspect that these outcomes are less a consequence of how the programs were designed to serve different populations and are more reflective of people getting what they're looking for. Those who are more settled in their careers are ready to contemplate leadership opportunities and will capitalize on the leadership opportunities provided by programs that move them forward in this respect.

So far, our data are relatively limited. We have been fielding the survey six months after each program ends, and only about a quarter of PDI participants have received it so far. It is early days in terms of uncovering what people have gained from programs. Nevertheless, the consistencies revealed, and at the same time the differences uncovered between what different populations report having gained, leave us feeling optimistic about how this tool might prove exceptionally useful to the field in the coming years.