

**WHAT WE
NOW
KNOW
ABOUT
JEWISH
EDUCATION**

**Perspectives
on Research
for Practice**

Edited by Paul A. Flexner, Roberta Louis Goodman
and Linda Dale Bloomberg

Torah Aura Productions

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Torah Aura Productions • 4423 Fruitland Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90058

(800) BE-Torah • (800) 238-6724 • (323) 585-7312 • fax (323) 585-0327

E-MAIL <misrad@torahaura.com> • Visit the Torah Aura website at www.torahaura.com

MANUFACTURED IN THE MALAYSIAS

Dedication

We dedicate this work to those who came before us,
who instilled in us the inspiration to pursue our Jewish learning:

Israel Friedlaender (1876–1920)

Israel Lippert (1902–1974)

Julia Esther Lippert (1906–1997)

Marian Gugenheim Flexner (1914–1987)

Rosalind Anne Diamond (1941–1978)

And to the next generations, our children and grandchildren,
in the hope that our commitment to Jewish education
will inspire them and their children:

Carla, Brent and Adam Bloomberg

Shoshana and Evan Goodman

Charles and Leah Rosenthal

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What We Now Know about Jewish Education

Foreword

I remember sitting in my home in Berkeley editing the first volume while smelling smoke from the fire that was burning in the Oakland hills. The year was 1992, and the windows were closed, but the pungent odor was everywhere. Now, fifteen years later, much has changed in Berkeley and in Jewish education. Then thirty-two authors contributed. They were most of the names associated with research about Jewish education in this country. Now sixty-six authors are included. Of great interest is that only ten contributed to both. To what is this stunning growth in the number of researchers attributable? And, more important, how has Jewish education changed, matured or remained constant? In this new edition there are new subjects that are explored and new categories that have been added. Do these developments reflect a new field of inquiry that was not in evidence in 1992—or merely an attempt to be more complete?

A more interesting question stems from the original intent of the book, which was “to provide a useful tool for both practitioners and policymakers.” Did this original focus meet its goal? Throughout the years many individuals have told me how useful the essays were—but the comments have been general at best. In what ways have research findings about Jewish education actually impacted those to whom they are addressed? Have these essays truly bridged the gap between the lay and the professional communities?

About a year after the publication I formulated five generalizations that, I believe, may still be relevant (or at least need further exploration):

1. Competition for “Jewish time” is ferocious.
2. Research that focuses on only one variable invariably does not adequately portray the whole, which may simply be impossible to do.
3. Formal education is out; non-formal education is in.
4. The plateau myth suggests that all day school education is the same or that all congregational Jewish education is the same. This is simply not true.
5. Not enough research is being conducted.

My estimate in 1992 was that the shelf life of the book would be five to ten years—at which point the book would move from the realm of sociology to that of history. The essays provided a snapshot of the state of Jewish education at least in North America at the beginning of the 1990’s. The degree to which things have changed, matured, or stayed the same is for you, the reader, to judge. All I can offer is my deep gratitude to Paul Flexner, Roberta Goodman and Linda Bloomberg for providing another snapshot of Jewish education. May these volumes continue so that those who follow may glimpse the state of the field at periodic intervals and build on what we have learned.

Stuart Kelman
Berkeley, California
Pesah 5767

Preface

Roberta Louis Goodman

When *What We Know about Jewish Education* was published in 1992, it was the first significant review of research related to and about Jewish education collected in a single place. At that time Jewish education was emerging as a Jewish communal priority. The Mandel Commission on Jewish Education in North America's Think Tank report, *A Time to Act* (1990), called for urgent and radical reform to Jewish education concentrating on personnel, lay leadership and funding. Shortly following that publication, the 1990 National Jewish Population Study claimed an intermarriage rate of 52% for recently married Jews, prompting a focus on Jewish education as *the* way to address Jewish continuity and to revitalize, strengthen, and deepen the knowledge and commitment of Jews to Judaism. *What We Know about Jewish Education* was written to help inform the deliberations about and initiatives in Jewish education. The book's intended audience included Jewish decision makers—institutional, communal, continental, and even international (primarily Israelis)—as well as Jewish educators in formal and informal settings involved in meeting the challenges of the 1990s.

Since Stuart Kelman's initial volume, the amount of research in Jewish education, the interest in that research and even the number of people conducting the research has grown exponentially. The result is that this volume is far more extensive than the original. We have included many new topics that were barely on the horizon as issues in Jewish education. We have also turned to many new researchers (while including a number of those from the previous edition) who have entered the field during these fifteen years. Thus the contents of this volume incorporate a level of research that is reflective of Jewish education as we approach the end of the first decade of the 21st century.

How is the term "research" understood? The emphasis in this book is on empirical studies with a focus on how something works, combined with several philosophical and historical studies. Research comes in many forms, including evaluation and needs assessment. Perhaps the main distinction between "classical" research studies on the one hand, and evaluation and needs assessments on the other, is their purpose. Research studies are conducted to increase our knowledge of an aspect of a phenomenon (e.g., recruitment, funding, teaching text). Evaluation studies are done on behalf of a particular entity (institution, organization or group) to measure how well a program or person has succeeded. Similarly, an organization or institution will conduct a needs assessment to help inform its work. Even though the generalizability of evaluation and needs assessments may be limited, since the scope and population studied may be narrow or small, this type of investigation contributes to the overall knowledge of a phenomenon (e.g., recruitment, funding, teaching text). The authors draw upon studies that were primarily conducted as research, evaluation and needs assessments. Therefore, throughout this book the word "research" will be used to refer to any type of study that contributes to our knowledge of a phenomenon, inclusive of evaluation and needs assessments.

This preface has three objectives: 1) to explore the ways that research in Jewish education can aid and enhance the field, 2) to examine the growth of research in Jewish education since the initial volume and 3) to present the organization and thinking behind the structure of the book and its contents.

ROLE OF RESEARCH IN JEWISH EDUCATION

What are the ways that Jewish education research advances the field of Jewish education? On a basic level, research contributes to knowledge about Jewish education in particular, and about the

North American Jewish experience overall. It raises and answers a wide range of questions about how Jewish education informs Jewish identity and commitment and the ways in which Jewish educational practice makes a difference for educators and learners. This research only contributes significantly to the field if policy makers, planners, funders, educators, and students of Jewish education are familiar with it and apply it to their decision making processes and educational practice. Policy makers and funders may use this knowledge to inform the direction in which a community, institution or foundation allocates resources and implements a vision for its constituents. Practitioners may turn to this information to strengthen their practice and help them grow as professionals.

Research is a tool that contributes to lay leaders and professionals being both well informed and critically reflective. Knowledge produced by research serves as a balance to intuition and experience. Research often introduces new ideas and perspectives, challenging a person's or group's assumptions and presenting different ways of thinking. Research also confirms and reaffirms previously held notions of how things can or should be. Reviewing research has the potential to overcome individual or institutional isolation by connecting the reader to a larger framework and creating an awareness of what others have learned in a variety of places.

Examining research is part of the quest for pursuing quality and excellence in Jewish education. Educational research, whether philosophical or empirical, presents theories and explores practices, often creating the link between the two. Research is often conducted by recognized experts—both theoreticians and practitioners—in a particular area. The reports, books and articles that these researchers write provide people in the field with many of the most important ideas, concepts, theories, and approaches of a particular era. While many theoreticians and practitioners tend to look for materials that identify best practices, all thinking needs to be analyzed and applied to the specific context or situation in order to improve it. Research adds to what we know and augments familiarity of Jewish education with the understanding that results are subject to interpretation.

GROWTH OF RESEARCH IN JEWISH EDUCATION

Many indicators attest to the growth of research in Jewish education. Two are used here to illustrate this expansion—the professionalization of researchers in Jewish education and the financial security of a serious publication for Jewish educational research in North America. First, in the early 1980s, the then Coalition for Alternatives in Jewish Education (now the Coalition for the Advancement of Jewish Education) started a network that focused on research in Jewish education. The attendees at the first network pre-conference could easily fit into one classroom. Now, over two decades later, the Network for Research in Jewish Education is an independent organization with nearly two hundred active members. Second, the Network has assumed the ownership of the *Journal for Jewish Education* and recently secured funding from the Mandel Foundation for its continued publication. The *Journal* provides an important vehicle for sharing significant research in Jewish education both for the members of the Network and for the community at large.

What do we NOW know about Jewish education that we did not know when Kelman edited the initial volume? What has changed about research in Jewish education and in Jewish education overall? What has remained the same? In order to answer these questions, a range of other questions about research in Jewish education need to be addressed:

- Why is research being conducted?
- Who is doing the research?
- What is the focus of the research?
- Who is sponsoring or funding research?
- What are the challenges of conducting research?
- What are the challenges in applying the knowledge learned from the research to the field at large?

WHY IS RESEARCH IN JEWISH EDUCATION BEING CONDUCTED? WHO IS DOING RESEARCH IN JEWISH EDUCATION?

The days when research in Jewish education was primarily the domain of graduate students writing master's theses or doctoral dissertations in order to obtain degrees as Kelman intimates in 1992 are over. In the 21st century, research is conducted by consultants to address particular issues or evaluate programs locally or nationally and by academics who are well positioned to formulate theories and guide practice. Graduate students, perhaps even more than in 1992, also continue to write theses and dissertations and publish articles based upon their work. Others hold positions that include conducting research in Jewish education and communal life.

The connection between the significant increase in funding for Jewish educational programs and organizations and the demand for accountability by their funders has contributed significantly to the growth in research. As a result, research and evaluation are now viewed as integral rather than additional or non-essential parts of planning, policy making and program implementation. With the research often driven by these new funding sources, it is focused primarily on outcomes, a popular way of assessing the merit of an investment by its impact on the intended target population. Other purposes of research and evaluation include surveying a particular topic, conducting a needs assessment and contributing to program improvement. Many of these studies become reports or papers that are widely circulated through the Internet and are intended to inform local and/or national work.

The new funders, whether they are federations or philanthropists, are, in many ways, the driving force behind the expansion of research through their grant processes. Built into many grants is the requirement for an evaluation of the project or program with some including designated funds to cover the added expense. These evaluations increase our knowledge about the practice of Jewish education and have the potential for influencing practice in the field. The only major limitation to the influence of these evaluations is that they are often not publicly shared. It is imperative that this limitation, which is a prominent theme throughout this volume, be addressed in the near future.

A major side benefit of the changing role of research and evaluation is the growth of full-time research and evaluation staff, either experts in the field or program officers, within the larger organizations and foundations. The greatest growth is in the number of people commissioned to conduct research and evaluation projects either as independent consultants or as staff members of research centers. They include individuals who primarily work in Jewish communal life, or university settings or who do most of their work outside the Jewish community.

Another factor contributing to the increase of research is the growth of university programs and centers, both Jewish and secular, offering degrees or certificates in Jewish education on the bachelors, masters, and doctoral levels. This expansion of university programs has led to more students matriculating and writing about Jewish education. With this expansion of programs, new faculty positions in Jewish education have been created, which in turn leads to additional research in Jewish education.

Finally, there are a growing number of academic positions in related areas, such as Judaic studies, general education, religion, history and sociology. Often these academics have an expertise in Jewish education. The emergence of faculty members who connect their areas of primary research with Jewish education is an indicator of the value placed on Jewish education for understanding the larger American experience.

The overall growth of faculty with an academic interest in Jewish education impacts the amount of research conducted and published, as these efforts are often connected to promotion and tenure. This research is often supported through research grants that are obtained from foundations both within and outside of the greater Jewish community. Thus, the study of Jewish education within the university is an indication of the new role that it is offering to the creation of knowledge in related fields.

WHAT IS THE FOCUS OF THE RESEARCH? WHO IS SPONSORING OR FUNDING RESEARCH IN JEWISH EDUCATION?

Over the last two decades research has expanded to cover a wide spectrum of topics in Jewish education. It is difficult today to think of a topic or area that has not been studied or evaluated. While these studies have been conducted and some of the results have been disseminated, our knowledge in some areas remains relatively limited.

To a great extent, the topics of research studies are a result of the interests, demands and agendas of the funders and organizations paying for the research. While researchers have recommended creating a comprehensive or coordinated research plan that fills the gaps of knowledge and expands on what is known for either all of Jewish education or a particular area, this has yet to happen in a meaningful way. In fact, several studies sponsored by different organizations have tapped the same respondents or population groups on a similar topic within the same time frame. This replication of effort is an unfortunate by-product of the lack of a coordinated effort to create a research agenda that will have impact on the entire field.

WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES TO CONDUCTING RESEARCH IN JEWISH EDUCATION? WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES IN USING THE RESEARCH PRODUCED?

There are three main barriers related to conducting and utilizing research: sources of funding, publishing and the lack of a Jewish education database.

Even though funding for Jewish education has increased, there remain a limited number of organizations and foundations willing to invest in research, with much of the research being supported by the same few funders. This is in contrast to the R&D—research and development—initiatives that are common to much of corporate America as well as to many fields in the social services sector. Thus support for research in Jewish education remains sparse, especially among the foundations outside the Jewish world. Second, many of those who fund research in Jewish education fund research for the part of the system that they care about most passionately, and not the field as a whole. Third, many research and evaluation projects are underfunded due to the limited size of the programs that require evaluation. Many organizations are forced to get by on what they can afford rather than on what a thorough research project really warrants.

The barriers to publishing and disseminating results are the second issue. The Internet has greatly improved the diffusion of information and ideas across all disciplines. For research in Jewish education the Internet provides an inexpensive and readily accessible dissemination route and is frequently the method of choice. Yet many studies are not shared at all, and others appear in such a poor format, in terms of both writing style and graphics, that they are difficult to understand and digest. Not enough attention and finances are devoted to preparing studies in a readable and usable manner that would appeal to a broad range of readers. To address this weakness, funds need to be allocated to engage editors and graphic designers to prepare executive summaries and design reports to have greater impact on the field. The few reports where there has been funding for design and distribution have demonstrated the value of the investment through their significant impact on Jewish education.

In addition to the formal research reports mentioned above, shorter, more focused articles published in one of the many Jewish magazines add to the knowledge base for the field and the community as a whole. This is particularly true of evaluation studies where there is a distinction between the information required by the sponsoring organization to improve the program and the knowledge gained that would be most helpful and useful to a larger audience of policy makers and practitioners. Only rarely do the researchers receive the time or funding to translate their work into articles for publication. Also, although there are many publications serving general readers in the Jewish community, there are only a few that focus specifically on the results of research and evaluation. As a result, many institutions, organizations and researchers are now turning to the Internet rather than print media in order to share these “second tier” writings. Unfortunately, for many readers, publication on the Internet carries less status than being included in an official publication. For the foresee-

able future, we need to turn to both the print and electronic media for distribution, as is the case in most fields of scholarship in North America, if we wish to reach the widest audience.

Finally, the lack of a database for Jewish education affects the researcher, the programmer and the wide array of readers. Search engines on the Internet facilitate locating research and evaluation reports, but they do not replace the usefulness of a rich and detailed database devoted to Jewish education. Some organizations have attempted to create electronic “libraries” or “collections” of research either in a particular delivery area or for Jewish education as a whole. These efforts have yet to fulfill the role of a database whose purpose is to collect and annotate the wide range of research and evaluation reports and studies for researchers, educators and policy makers to access.

RATIONALE FOR AND ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK'S STRUCTURE AND CONTENT

The purpose of this book is to present the latest empirical and to some extent philosophical research that informs a wide range of Jewish educational topics. Our target audience includes lay leaders, professionals, policy makers, planners, funders, practitioners, students, researchers, evaluators and anyone with an interest in or role connected to Jewish education. Authors were asked to present the key research on a topic in Jewish education as well as any relevant research and literature from sources outside of Jewish education that were significant in terms of understanding the issues involved. The authors were asked to select the key studies conducted primarily in the time since the initial Kelman volume appeared. The authors are essentially the filters through which the research was selected and reviewed.

The overall organization of the chapters and the content within each chapter are patterned after the original Kelman volume.

Since this book is a collection of chapters written by multiple authors, having a format that each author followed was important in the creation of a consistent experience for the reader. The similarity of format for the chapters in all but the initial section helps the reader compare and contrast the accomplishments, issues and challenges for the wide variety of areas covered. The chapters follow an internal organization that includes setting the context, review of the key research, implications and policy recommendations, additional research questions, future directions for the field, a conclusion followed by bulleted highlights, placement of the topic in a larger context and finally an annotated bibliography of the most significant resources and references.

The book is divided into six sections. Four of those sections come from Schwab's four commonplaces of learning—learner, teacher, curriculum and milieu—which was used in the Kelman volume. While Schwab uses the term “milieu” to refer solely to the classroom environment, we, like Kelman, view the “milieu” of Jewish education as being the context both within and beyond the formal classroom, including the entire school system, informal educational settings such as camps and Jewish trips and the larger organizational and communal structures and factors affecting Jewish education in North America. Moreover, we extend the reach of the context in several directions. This volume adds a chapter on Jewish education in Australia as an attempt to inform and create dialogue beyond this continent, multiple perspectives on the role of Israel as an educational setting and a chapter that relates Jewish education to the broader field of religious education.

The two new sections are significant expansions of and departures from Schwab's framework. First the introductory section, entitled “Issues in Jewish Education,” was added, providing a backdrop to some of the larger issues that frame and influence all of the commonplaces of Jewish education. Second, we have added an entire section on planning and changing Jewish education. This section speaks to how the delivery system in Jewish education has evolved over the last fifteen years or so. Many initiatives have focused on institutional, communal and even continent-wide Jewish educational planning. Other initiatives emphasize changing and improving the delivery system for Jewish education, including the lay leaders, educators, institutions and funding. The rise of new types of Jewish educational institutions, the expansion of other institutions and other shifts in the field make a section on planning and change important to understanding Jewish education in the 21st century.

Finally, a special addition to this volume is the final chapters by two of the book's editors. Linda Bloomberg's chapter analyzes and synthesizes the key research issues that emerge from this volume's chapters. Paul Flexner's chapter discusses Jewish educational topics. These closing chapters serve to capture the lessons learned about Jewish education to date and the implications thereof and in so doing provide a platform for launching the sequel to this volume. Indeed, with the rapid pace of change and development that is occurring and the explosion of new research and evaluation studies that are being conducted, Jewish education would certainly benefit from a third volume of *What We Know about Jewish Education* within the course of the next decade.

THE AUTHORS

The increased number of chapters in this volume from the original work is another indicator of the growth of research in Jewish education and the increase in the number of researchers. Many, but not all, of the key personalities conducting research and evaluation in Jewish education have authored chapters in this volume. We attempted to include the "veteran" or "well-known" researchers as well as some of the emerging researchers who will take the field in different directions in the future. Many of the authors wrote for the Kelman volume. Interestingly, only a very few revised chapters on the same topic for this volume.

A special note of thanks to the authors must be included here. We are grateful for the time and commitment that each so generously gave. The book took an inordinate length of time to complete. Many contributors were patient in waiting to see their chapters in print, and others were kind enough to write quickly under time constraints as chapters were added at later stages to enrich the book. What all of the chapter authors share is the sense of importance that this volume contributes not just to the research and evaluation endeavors, but to the field of Jewish education as a whole. Hopefully, what is presented to you, the reader, is a critical and helpful, yet compassionate and passionate, rendering of the field.

THE PUBLISHER

While we as the editors are wishing that this book makes a big splash, that it is read by more than just our own graduate students, Torah Aura deserves its own acknowledgement for the desire to further research in Jewish education. Primarily a publisher of curricular materials, Torah Aura has an understanding of the significance of research to quality Jewish education and a vibrant Jewish community. We are appreciative of the academic freedom that they afforded us, as no constraints were placed on either authors or editors. To Joel, Jane, Alan, and all who are part of Torah Aura, we as the editors are grateful for your support, patience and dedication.

THE EDITORS

In undertaking this project we officially called ourselves Moadon Ha'Yanshuf—the Night Owl Club (of course, we all have our mascot owls, too), since in order to accommodate one another's schedules our telephone meetings would typically begin late at night and continue into the wee hours of the morning. We designed the book together, sharing responsibilities and sometimes splitting roles as well. Paul was the expert editor of the text and Linda the expert editor of the references and annotated bibliographies. We identified and solved issues together, always looking to strengthen the book. We remain colleagues and friends upon completing this book as well!

For the most part, we share three educational institutions that have formed and informed our work. All three of us are graduates of the AEGIS doctoral program in adult and continuing education at Teachers College/Columbia University. All three of us teach for the Siegal College of Judaic Studies, where Linda was previously a student in the program with Roberta as her advisor and teacher and Paul as one of her teachers. Two of us received graduate degrees in Jewish education from Hebrew Union College—Jewish Institution of Religion, Paul in New York and Roberta in Los Angeles, where Stuart Kelman was an advisor, teacher and inspiration to her. We are grateful to all our colleagues and students who have in some way shaped our journeys and our own Jewish education.

THE READERS

To you, the reader, we hope that these chapters will inform your thinking, inspire you and impact your activities in the field of Jewish education. We hope that you, like us, will be impressed with the growth of research in Jewish education and recognize how it has made and continues to make a difference in the design and delivery of Jewish education, and that you will carry forward even further the multiple ways that this research can contribute to the field. In line with the view that research is an ongoing conversation, we always are open to your reactions, suggestions, feedback and comments! We are reachable through the publisher!