

BOSTON MANDEL TEACHER EDUCATION INSTITUTE

***BOSTON MTEI:  
LEADING THE WAY TO A NEW VISION FOR  
TEACHERS AND SCHOOLS***

**A Project Report 2002-2004**

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## INTRODUCTION

What would it take to improve the quality of teaching and learning in our Jewish schools? Research<sup>1</sup> suggests that teachers do a better job of helping students learn when they participate in ongoing learning opportunities and collegial interaction that address real questions about what and how to teach. Deborah Meier, school leader and educational reformer, describes the requisite conditions for turning schools into places where teachers as well as students learn and grow:

*At the very least, one must imagine schools in which teachers are in frequent conversation with each other about their work, have easy and necessary access to each other's classrooms, take it for granted that they should comment on each other's work, and have the time to develop common standards for student work.* (Meier, 1992, p. 602)

A vision of schools where teachers as well as students grow was the impetus for the design and implementation of the Boston Mandel Teacher Educator Institute (MTEI).<sup>2</sup> In August 2002, the Bureau of Jewish Education of Greater Boston with support from the Combined Jewish Philanthropies, the Mandel Foundation, and the Mandel Center for

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<sup>1</sup> We have used a variety of sources about school culture, professional development, and teacher learning communities as background for this work. The studies include: Ball, D. L. and Cohen, D.K. (1993), "Developing Practice, Developing Practitioners: Toward a Practice-Based Theory of Professional Education" in L.H. Hammond & G.Sykes (eds) *Teaching as the Learning Profession: Handbook of Policy and Practice*, San Francisco: Jossey Bass pp. 3- 32; Cochran-Smith, M. and Lytle, S. (1999), "Relationships of Knowledge and Practice: Teacher Learning in Communities," *Review of Research in Education* (24), pp.249-305; Garet, M. S., Birman, B. F., Porter, A.C., Desimone, L., and Herman, R. (1999). *Designing effective professional development: Lessons from the Eisenhower Program*. U. S. Department of Education; Knapp, M. S. (2003) "Professional Development as a Policy Pathway" *Review of Research in Education*, (27),109-158; Little, J.W. (1993), "Teachers' Professional Development in a Climate of Educational Reform" in *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 15, #2, 129-151; Little, J.W. (1999), "Organizing Schools for Teacher Learning" in L.H. Hammond & G.Sykes (eds) *Teaching as the Learning Profession: Handbook of Policy and Practice*, pp.233-262; Lord, B. (1994), "Teachers Professional Development: Critical Collegueship and the Role of Professional Communities" in *The Future of Education Perspectives on National Standards in America*, College Entrance Examination Board, New York; McDiarmid, G. (1994), *Realizing New Learning for All Students: A Framework for the Professional Development of Kentucky Teachers*, East Lansing: Michigan State University, National Center for Research on Teacher Learning; McLaughlin, M.W., and Talbert, J. (1993), *Contexts that Matter for Teaching and Learning*, Stanford, CA: Center for Research on the Context of Secondary School Teaching; McLaughlin, M.W. and Talbert, J. (2001) *Professional Communities and the Work of High School Teaching*, University of Chicago Press. Meier, D.(1992), "Reinventing Teaching," *Teachers College Record*, 93(4), pp. 594-609; Troen, V. and Boles, K. (2003), *Who's Teaching Your Children? Why the Teacher Crisis is Worse than You Think and What Can Be Done About It*, New Haven: Yale University Press.

<sup>2</sup> Boston MTEI is an outgrowth of the Mandel Teacher Educator Institute (MTEI), a national program aimed at improving the quality of teaching and learning in Jewish schools by creating a national cadre of senior teacher educators skilled at working with teachers to improve their practice.

Studies in Jewish Education at Brandeis University<sup>3</sup> joined together to launch an innovative professional development project aimed at improving the quality of teaching and learning in Jewish schools in the greater Boston area. The central goal of the program was to develop school-based teams<sup>4</sup> of educational leaders who would design and implement intensive, sustained learning opportunities for teachers, thus enhancing the professional climate for teachers and the learning opportunities for students.

We launched this two-year intensive program with eleven schools: 3 day schools, 7 congregational schools and 1 after-school program. Representing all the denominations, the program brought together educators who rarely have the opportunity to work together in an ongoing way on issues of professional development and school improvement. These educational teams learned about new approaches to school-based professional development so that they and their colleagues could augment their own professional growth and enhance their students' engagement and learning.

This report is divided into five sections:

1. Rationale for the Boston MTEI Initiative
2. Research on Boston MTEI Schools
3. Boston MTEI: A Description of the Program
4. Effects of the Program
5. Next Steps

## **RATIONALE FOR THE BOSTON MTEI INITIATIVE**

We know from research in public education that most schools are not designed to promote teacher learning. Typically, teachers work alone in their classrooms with their own students. As part of their daily work, they rarely have opportunities to discuss their goals and curriculum, to observe and be observed by colleagues, to collaboratively study student work and talk about student learning. Yet studies (see footnote 1) show that school environments which support and expect regular and sustained teacher interaction around the central school mission of subject matter teaching and learning enhance the quality of learning for students as well as teachers.

We also know that formal professional development opportunities for teachers are often one-shot workshops, college courses or professional conferences run by people who are not familiar with the specific students or classrooms in which participants teach. These formal professional development opportunities may offer inspiration and introduce some new content or teaching strategies but they rarely provide the kind of follow-up support

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<sup>3</sup> The program is under the leadership of Dr. Gail Dorph, Director of the Mandel Foundation's Teacher Educator Institute, Dr. Sharon Feiman Nemser, Mandel Professor of Jewish Education at Brandeis and Marion Gribetz, Director, Center for Institutional and Professional Development for the Boston BJE.

<sup>4</sup> Teams differed in make-up. They included configurations of the following educators: principals, department heads, lead teachers and individuals responsible for professional development.

that helps teachers adapt new ideas to their classrooms or make fundamental changes in their practice. Professional development experiences offered by outside experts are rarely as effective as experiences based at schools and embedded in teachers' own classroom practice. In general, teachers do a better job of helping students learn when they participate in collegial interactions that address genuine questions about what and how to teach. Teachers also feel better about teaching when they work in schools that support their professional development.

Boston MTEI is helping school team members learn to create a different professional environment for teachers and new learning opportunities that are built into the ongoing work of teachers in schools. Boston MTEI is based on the premise that the people who do the everyday work of Jewish education can make a substantial difference in the quality and effects of that education. MTEI's strategy is to enhance the capacity of educational leaders, e.g., principals, lead teachers, and others who work with teachers to improve the quality of teaching and learning in schools. To do this, MTEI participants need to examine their visions of good teaching and learning, learn how to develop and sustain a focus on teaching, learning and subject matter among teachers at their school, and create new structures for implementing these new practices.

## RESEARCH ON BOSTON MTEI SCHOOLS

Studies on the professional culture and learning opportunities in public schools provided an important starting point for our research. We wanted to know whether the description of professional culture and professional development found in the studies of public schools also applied to the Jewish schools participating in this project. The research team developed a survey<sup>5</sup> to gather basic information about the conditions and opportunities in Jewish schools that relate to teacher development. We gave the survey to all the teachers in the participating schools toward the beginning of MTEI. Approximately 75% responded, resulting in a group of 178 teacher-respondents. Researchers also interviewed all eleven principals in order to glean more site-specific information.

In this report, we describe some key findings from the survey that relate to the properties of school culture and professional development critical in promoting teacher learning.<sup>6</sup> We begin with the extent of collaboration among teachers on matters of teaching and

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<sup>5</sup> The survey was built on previous research and surveys in Jewish and general education, including: CIJE Study of Educators, January 1996, Principal Researchers Adam Gamoran and Ellen Goldring; Jewish School Study-Teacher Survey, 2000 by Barbara Schneider for the Cooperative Research Project in Chicago; M. McLaughlin and J. Talbert, 2001, *Professional Communities and the Work of High School Teaching*, University of Chicago Press; and the Longitudinal Teacher Survey, Elementary School Mathematics, Spring 1999 created by M. S. Garet, A.C. Porter, L. Desimone, B. F. Birman and K. S. Yoon of the American Institutes for Research, University of Wisconsin-Madison and Vanderbilt University.

<sup>6</sup> As part of the project, the results of the survey were extensively analyzed and individual reports were prepared for each school, providing them with a description of the school's strengths and weaknesses in the areas of school culture and professional development, along with strategies for addressing significant issues. These reports were then used as the basis of constructive conversations between the school's MTEI team and their MTEI advisor and sometimes, between the MTEI team and their lay leadership team.

learning and whether they share a common understanding of the goals of their school. We also examine whether current school structures make it possible for teachers to meet on a regular basis to talk about goals, curriculum and teaching. Subsequently we look at some aspects of principals' leadership and the kind of formal learning opportunities available to teachers.

### Collaboration on Instruction

Through a variety of questions, the survey examined whether teachers in the MTEI schools had opportunities to collaborate with their colleagues regularly on the core issues of teaching and learning subject matter content. We found that most schools did not yet operate as effective teacher learning communities in this regard. A majority of the schools seemed to offer a congenial atmosphere in which teachers were generally helpful to one another and could count on one another, however, only a few schools (3 of 11) reported regular collaboration among teachers on instructional matters such as coordinating course content or working together on their instructional practices.

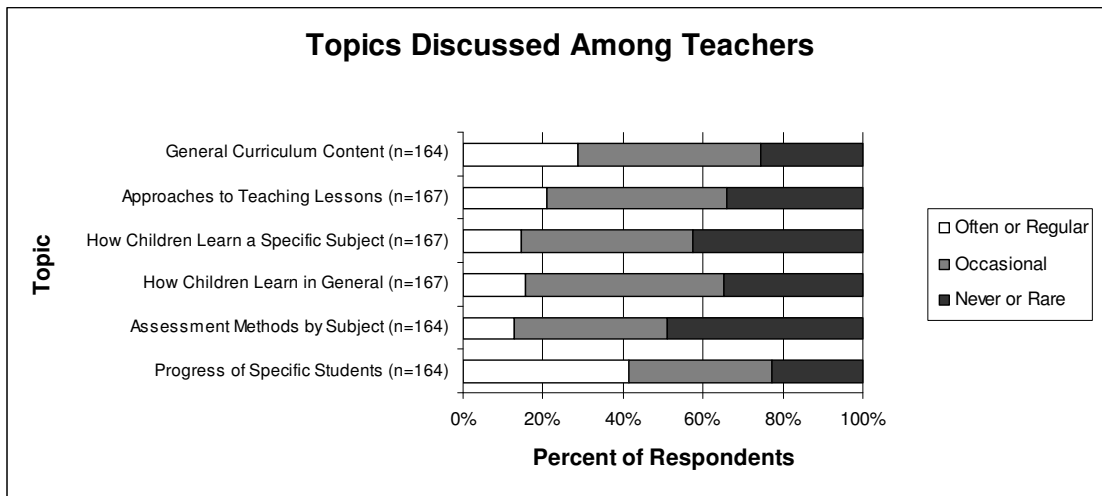
A shared understanding of the goals for student learning<sup>7</sup> is an essential ingredient of a successful school. Collaboration on teaching and learning requires a shared vision of the ends and goals of the school so that efforts to improve the means for achieving those goals are properly focused. Teachers in only half the schools agreed substantially that "goals and priorities for this school are clear."

### Professional Conversations

The survey asked teachers to indicate how frequently they discussed particular topics with one another. As Figure 1 shows, the most frequent discussion topic was the progress of specific students. Over 40% of teachers reported discussing the progress of individual students on a regular basis and an additional 40% reported discussing the progress of individual students at least occasionally. One-third reported discussing general curriculum content on a regular basis; while only 20% reported talking about approaches to teaching on a regular basis. How children learn a specific subject, how children learn in general and how teachers assess subject learning were infrequently discussed.

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<sup>7</sup> Powell, A.G., Farrar, E. and Cohen, D.K. (1985), *The Shopping Mall High School*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin; Smith, M.S. and O'Day, J. (1991) "Systematic School Reform," in S.H. Fuhrman and B. Malen, *The Politics of Curriculum and Testing*, Philadelphia: Falmer Press, pp. 233-267; Strike, K.A. (2004). "Community, the Missing Element of School Reform: Why Schools Should Be More like Congregations than Banks." *American Journal of Education*, 110, 215-232.



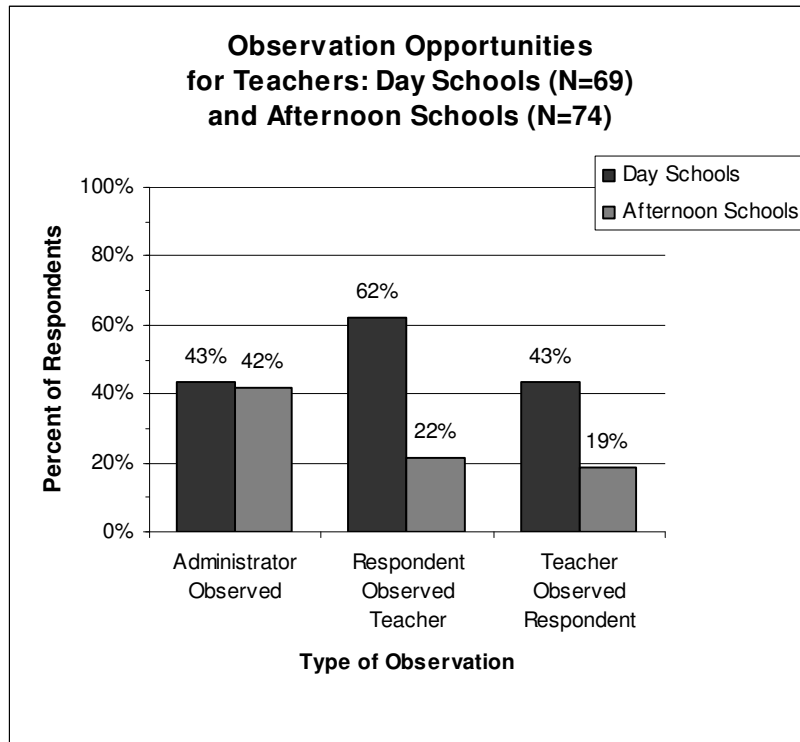
**Figure 1**

The overall frequency with which teachers report discussing different topics with colleagues suggests--for the most part--a lack of regular professional conversation around teaching and learning, the core mission of the school. Sustained conversation about how children learn specific content, about approaches to teaching different subjects, and about assessment of student learning, occurs infrequently in these schools. In an effective school community, these topics are part of the central agenda for discussion. While it is promising that a majority of teachers report talking with colleagues about student progress in general terms, it may be more productive if those conversations were connected to particular content. Similarly, talking with colleagues about subject matter and how to teach it could contribute to improved instruction.

### Observation of Teaching

One mechanism for facilitating conversation among teachers about instructional practices is to provide opportunities for teachers to observe one another's classroom instruction. Observing colleagues also helps to make teaching more of a shared and public activity, countering the isolation of teachers. We found different patterns of collegial observation in day schools and afternoon schools. As Figure 2 shows, 60 percent of day school teachers have observed another teacher in the past year while only 20 percent of afternoon school teachers have had this opportunity. While this difference may be related to the part-time nature of after-school teaching, providing such opportunities in an ongoing fashion presents a challenge for school leaders who understand the educational benefits of classroom observation for all teachers.





**Figure 2**

Principal Leadership and Creating Opportunities for Teacher Growth

Principals can play a key role in enabling teacher development by publicly valuing serious experimentation in support of student learning, providing instructional support, creating time and structures for teachers to work together, and allocating resources and offering encouragement. Most teachers in every school agreed with the statements: “the principal is interested in innovations and new ideas” and “teachers are encouraged to experiment with their teaching.” However, the challenge for the principal is to create structures and opportunities (e.g., common planning times, co-teaching arrangements, and summer curriculum development projects) that enable teachers to work together on significant educational initiatives. We found limited evidence of such arrangements in these schools.

Teachers may benefit also from personal recognition by principals, especially if they are trying out new practices. However, in only 5 out of 11 schools did the majority of teachers agree with a statement indicating that they “were recognized for a job well done.” While a variety of reasons may explain why teachers report a lack of recognition, the issue deserves attention. Clearly, serious conversation between teachers and principals about their work—particularly with regard to issues of teaching and learning—is desirable in promoting the kind of professional culture we are advocating.

### Professional Development Activities

To affect student learning, teachers must have significant opportunities to incorporate new ideas and practices into their classrooms. The survey results described the kinds of professional development opportunities experienced by teachers in the eleven Boston MTEI schools during the year before the program began. In addition, all members of the MTEI teams, including administrators and teachers, also reported on their professional development experiences.

Many professional development opportunities available to teachers at the beginning of the program were not tied to teachers' actual practice. In addition, many of these learning experiences were limited in scope occupying only a few hours of teachers' time. About half the experiences reported by the teachers had 3 or fewer sessions and lasted 6 hours or less. Educational research<sup>8</sup> suggests that such activities need to be of sufficient duration to allow teachers to deal with issues of real educational significance in order to have an impact on teacher's practices.

### Comparing Boston MTEI Schools with Research on Public Schools

Overall, the professional climates of most Boston MTEI schools seem rather similar to those described in studies of public schools. Although some elements of a productive learning community are in evidence in some of the schools, the majority is not very advanced. Our research supports the need for a sustained effort to make Jewish schools better places for teacher learning and growth.

The MTEI program was designed to promote a new conception of professional development and to help members of school teams develop new understandings and skills needed to design and implement more powerful learning opportunities for teachers. Below we describe what we did to realize this goal.

## **BOSTON MTEI: DESCRIPTION OF THE PROGRAM**

Boston MTEI provided three kinds of professional activities:

1. Monthly seminars for members of the eleven school-based teams and their Advisors<sup>9</sup>
2. Regular school-based meetings between members of the team and their Advisor
3. Monthly seminars for Advisors

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<sup>8</sup> Knapp (2003) reports that Garet et al (1999) found "teachers were more likely to implement what they learned when they experienced professional development that was continuous, on-going and long-term (i.e., minimum of 40-50 hours)" among other features. (p. 121)

<sup>9</sup> Advisors included Gail Dorph, Judy Elkin, Sharon Feiman Nemser, Marion Gribetz, Barry Holtz, Annette Koren, Jeff Liberman, Naomi Towvim, Vivien Troen and Serene Victor. During the first year of the program Debra Cantor and Penni Moss, both BJE consultants, also served as Advisors. Holtz, Baumritter Professor of Jewish Education at the Jewish Theological Seminary, was a core member of the MTEI faculty as well.

### Monthly Seminars for School-Based Teams and Advisors

Each month 40 people (teams from the eleven schools and Advisors) met at Brandeis University for the MTEI seminar. They spent five hours learning together. Even during lunch and breaks, participants met with colleagues from other schools to talk about staffing, curriculum and other professional matters often generated by the topic of the morning seminar.

The seminar itself modeled the kind of learning community that we hoped participants would create in their own schools. The core of the program consisted of educators exploring new ideas about professional development and learning new strategies which they could take back to their schools.

The seminar gave participants a taste of what serious collaboration on issues of teaching and learning could be like. They learned new frameworks for analyzing teaching. They read and discussed Jewish texts about teaching and learning. They examined classroom videotapes, clarified goals, examined curriculum, and studied students' work. These experiences not only deepened their own understanding of teaching, subject matter and learning, they also gave participants new images and ideas about the kinds of collaborative learning opportunities they could create for teachers in their schools. The homework between seminars required and challenged participants to experiment with these new strategies with the teachers in their own schools.

The design of the program embodied the essential features of "best practices" in teacher professional development (see footnote 1):

- It was sustained, ongoing and intensive.
- It fostered inquiry, reflection, and experimentation.
- It focused on teaching and learning of Jewish subject matter (e.g., Bible, prayer).
- It promoted the sharing of knowledge among educators.
- It was connected to teachers' work with their students.
- It modeled the practices it advocated.

### Monthly Team Meetings with Advisors

Advisors assigned individually to the schools included the core faculty of the program as well as several Brandeis faculty members and senior BJE consultants. These Advisors joined school teams at the monthly MTEI seminar and met with team members on a regular basis to help design small scale professional development programs in their schools based on MTEI principles and practices. Advisors helped participants

- deepen their understanding of these new professional development strategies,
- develop collaborative skills as they experimented with new professional development strategies in their school, and
- promote new norms of professional work in their schools.

### Monthly Seminars for Advisors

Advisors met monthly to develop frameworks and ideas for helping schools apply the principles and strategies learned in the seminars to their own schools. During the second

year of the program, the advisors' group worked with Susan Shevitz, Associate Professor and Director of the Hornstein Program in Jewish Communal Service at Brandeis University, to help schools create plans for embedding professional development into the ongoing life of their schools.

## **EFFECTS OF THE PROGRAM**

In April and May of 2004, almost two years after the program began, the MTEI research team interviewed at least one member of each school team and collected brief written descriptions of some of the MTEI-inspired professional development initiatives that participants had tried out at their schools. These interviews and descriptions provide insight into the personal and professional learning MTEI members experienced and the successes and challenges they faced as they began to incorporate new professional development practices into their institutions. The following summarizes key results of this data collection phase of the project.

### Growing as a Professional Jewish Educator

The program was geared to experienced educators. Although there were a few participants who had taught for as few as six years, many others had been in the field in a variety of teaching and administrative capacities for more than twenty-five years. Both newer and more veteran members of the groups reported increased self-understanding and empowerment as they incorporated MTEI views about teaching and learning into their work with colleagues. Individuals expressed satisfaction with their growth as Jewish educators, growing in personal and professional dimensions.

One teacher-participant, who had been teaching for 6 years, explained how the program enhanced her professional self-esteem:

*Now that I've been working in MTEI, being placed in a semi-leadership role, working with [names of the members of her team who were in administrative positions] as a team... I'm no longer the green-horn. I feel much more confident and I'm helping other people. The team – in the second year – helped my self-esteem professionally.*

One very experienced head of school commented on how the program pushed him to think more deeply about teaching.

*It was insightful to probe the teaching relationship in the depth that we did; it reinforced for me how I learn and my understanding of the soul of teaching – it was exciting to study that in some depth. Maybe I needed to be listening and allowing myself to change.... I would attribute that to what I've gained from MTEI.*

Several other principals commented on ways in which the program got them to rethink the nature of educational leadership. Even seasoned professionals in administrative positions found themselves thinking and acting differently as a result of their MTEI

experience. Comments pointed directly to taking on changed roles as a result of MTEI learning. As one head of school explained:

*I'm not the fix-it man anymore. I'm much more of the educator-resource.... It's really to help them gain the skills for critical self evaluation. To help them grow in their thinking, I tried not to answer their questions but share with them.*

#### Trying new professional development practices

As the previous quotations suggest, the Boston MTEI program challenged participants to think more deeply and analytically about teaching and learning and to develop a more inquiring, less didactic stance when working with teachers. Participants were also expected to figure out ways to use new professional development strategies in their work. During the two year program, participants experimented with a number of professional development techniques that were new to them.

In the spring interviews, participants described real changes in their practice, citing specific new strategies that they learned in the program. The comments below give a sense of some of the strategies they tried, some of the challenges they faced and their effects.

Curriculum investigation, an analytic strategy for choosing, probing and adapting materials, was widely embraced.

*Starting with the curriculum investigation – that was a big push for us, to re-evaluate our curriculum, and look to see what our teachers need in order to teach our curriculum. We're still working on it. That was a huge thing that came out of MTEI. Re-evaluating our Judaica and our Ivrit (Hebrew) curriculum – what do we need to work on, in order to make it more comfortable for our teachers.*

*The curriculum investigation was a good wake-up call...making a connection between the teachers and the subject matter.*

Participants also described how they worked to foster curiosity about students' learning. Particularly valuable in this regard was the learning of specific protocols<sup>10</sup> for approaching a variety of educational problems. Some of these protocols help groups of teachers study students' work in order to learn more about what and how students are learning and how teachers can improve assignments and assessments (e.g., Collaborative Assessment Conference and Looking at Student Work protocols). Other protocols provide strategies for raising dilemmas about more general school-wide problems (e.g., Consultancy protocols). What these protocols have in common are systematic ways to raise problems for group-review and receive feedback from colleagues.

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<sup>10</sup> Many of these protocols are described in D. Allen (1998), *Assessing Student Learning*, Teachers College Press and J. McDonald et al. (2003), *The Power of Protocols*, Teachers College Press.

*We've done a lot of consultancy, collaborative assessment conferences [protocols]...with the teachers and it's gotten a lot of positive feedback from them.*

Many commented on how the program altered the way they observed in classrooms, shifting from an evaluative stance to a more descriptive, analytic approach. This included using some of the MTEI videotapes<sup>11</sup> of Jewish classrooms to help teachers develop a shared vocabulary for describing teaching and learning. In addition, they created opportunities for teachers to observe each other and productively discuss these peer observations.

*I learned about observing from an investigative stance.... Going into a classroom, not to evaluate somebody, but rather going in and observing what I had seen and asking questions, trying to be curious about what I had seen instead of just being evaluative about it. To help the teacher arrive at possible alternatives in a given situation and be more reflective about the choices that they made and what was guiding that decision.*

#### Integrating MTEI ideas into school settings and structures

One of the biggest challenges facing MTEI participants as they tried to develop their new skills and experiment with innovative approaches to professional development was nurturing new norms of collaborative work as well as finding appropriate times and contexts for teachers in their schools to meet and work together.

Commenting on the complexity of bringing what she had learned back to her school, one of the participants noted how long and hard it had been for the MTEI group to develop the kind of culture that nurtured and sustained collaborative work—and the implications of that for her work in her own school.

*Creating a culture of learning takes a lot of reflection and deliberate process oriented practice.... Taking that sense of collegiality and that sense of reflective practice that we've cultivated in our group of three in our MTEI team, and bringing it back to the school—The trust, safety and openness that it took 1½ years to develop in MTEI--trying to implement that in the school takes time.*

Most schools are not structured to provide teachers with these professional opportunities. MTEI participants looked for a variety of solutions to meet the challenges of limited time and new expectations. MTEI principals talked about transforming faculty meetings and reshaping their school bulletins to advance their new professional development agenda, shifting the focus of faculty meetings and school bulletins, as well as creating new times for teacher learning and collegial interaction.

One head of school reported that in her weekly faculty bulletin article, she now focuses on the relationship of teachers, students and subject matter, a key theme in MTEI.

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<sup>11</sup> The national MTEI project produced four videotapes, facilitator's guide and ancillary materials, (including lesson transcripts, lesson plans, etc) which were used in the program and distributed to each school for their use in developing learning opportunities for their teachers.

Another described how she changed the nature of her faculty meetings from a concentration on administrative and logistic issues to learning opportunities for her teachers. A third talked about engaging faculty in voluntary, regular text study sessions.

One participant commented that the regularity of the MTEI seminars taught her the value of meeting together with regularity and consistency:

*The fact that it (MTEI) met every month. The experience of having it consistently, with the same group of people, over a long period of time – that works quite well and spoke to the need of doing that with staff on a regular basis at our school.*

Another was moved by the importance of peer observation as a strategy for making teaching more public. MTEI provided the impetus to think more creatively and expansively about finding opportunities for teachers to observe each other and talk about their teaching practices:

*We worked out certain mechanisms this year for how to observe each other – because we all teach at the same time.... This was important, to think it through, to make it possible to do this – to work out the mechanical, time-bound issues.*

Other comments focused on the benefits of sustained professional development. One participant commented on a set of sessions that she instituted involving both novice and experienced teachers. Speaking about a six-session program in which Hebrew teachers analyzed student work, she reported:

*We got really good feedback, especially from the veteran teachers, which was really satisfying, because that's always a concern when doing professional development – that it will be useful for the novice teachers and still meaningful for the veteran teachers.... It really had the feel of an ongoing group working together and that was something new for us, that we probably would not have tried without the kind of push from MTEI.... The feedback from the faculty was actually really, really good and more positive than I expected.... Because it was an ongoing thing, we were able to get a little bit more content than we would have with kind of a scatter-shot approach.*

#### Developing a community of teacher-educators in Boston

The MTEI program modeled the process of becoming a community of learners. One of the important benefits and achievements of the program was its success in creating a sense of shared purposes among its participants. With diversity in the size, type and denominational affiliation of the schools, as well as the types of professionals involved, participants expressed satisfaction with the sense of collegiality and the richness in the seminar atmosphere.

*It was helpful to hear in this very diverse environment the different concerns – pointing out the commonality of all of our vocations and types of challenges that we face as educators.*

*The networking alone that goes on in the meetings is so valuable! To be with people with all these different personal and professional backgrounds – Orthodox, Reform, Conservative ...and at different types of schools—that was enormous for me.*

Becoming part of such a community provided members of the group with a window on the kind of work they would have to do with their own faculties to create such learning communities.

## **NEXT STEPS**

### Networking and Seminars

When researchers asked interviewees what would help them continue to work on MTEI-inspired professional development, two of the central issues raised were the importance of additional learning opportunities and continued support. Participants asked for additional seminar meetings, networking opportunities with the MTEI group, and the continued use of consultants and mentors.

*Continued support as a group... saying this is the Boston Mandel MTEI group—and that the group has an identity and maintains that identity.... That kind of networking builds in certain kinds of support that enables us to keep professional development as a priority. Your connectedness builds in some sort of accountability.*

*Staying connected and keeping in touch and creating that kind of network keeps people on track. One of the things I'd hate to see happen is that we've spent these intensive two years together and then we don't have the support from the foundation or from the network, or the connection to the people we were originally connected to who motivated us. Then things fall by the wayside.*

To help nurture, sustain and strengthen the serious professional development work which participants started, the BJE with support of the Combined Jewish Philanthropies and the Mandel Center for Studies in Jewish Education at Brandeis University has committed to continue supporting these schools and their professionals by providing the resources (both human and financial) for participants to continue meeting in seminars and to network with one another for at least one more year.

### Professional Development Initiatives in Schools, 2004-05

The Boston MTEI educators and their schools are now positioned to begin implementing professional development plans. At our final gathering (May 2004), school teams presented proposals for the coming year rooted in their MTEI work. School teams presented a variety of initiatives. Five of them are highlighted below. Each addresses a different challenge. Taken together, they give a sense of the variety of strategies that schools have adopted and the issues that they are tackling.

Developing a new planning structure: In order to empower teachers and democratize professional development planning, one MTEI team has worked with



teachers and administrators to develop a steering committee. This committee will plan school-wide professional development for the coming year. Until now, administrators have chosen the topics and invited outside guests. This is a strategy for creating learning opportunities more directly related to teachers' needs.

Enhancing teacher knowledge through ongoing collegial conversation: To overcome the isolated nature of teaching and the lack of opportunity for teachers to work together on issues of teaching and learning, one school plans to devote its monthly teachers meetings next year to professional development rather than administrative matters. Each time teachers meet, they will study topics like lesson planning, classroom management, etc in *hevruta* (pairs). Administrative issues will be dealt with by email or in additional meetings for that purpose only.

Coordinating curriculum and standards: One school is developing an initiative for its Torah teachers. Teachers and school administrators will meet on a regular basis to study a new set of standards dealing with student knowledge about Torah and select the ones that are applicable to their school. They will analyze their own curriculum and develop strategies for adapting, enhancing, and revising it in the light of these new standards.

Understanding student learning: At one school, teachers will meet together regularly to study student work. The purpose of this initiative is to help teachers better understand what students are learning, what poses challenges for students, and how to think more deeply about what students need to learn a given subject. Teachers will take turns presenting their own students' work. This will allow teachers to develop a language for describing student work, to analyze and reflect on issues related to student learning, and to give and receive feedback. These regular sessions will contribute to the development of a shared vision of good teaching and learning and will build norms for true collaborative work.

Developing mentors to work with new teachers: In order to deal with two enduring dilemmas, the retention and ongoing education of experienced teachers and the induction of novice teachers, four schools are collaboratively designing a plan to develop a cadre of mentors to work with new teachers. Each school will designate two mentors and two new teachers to participate in this pilot program. The principals of the schools as well as outside consultants will teach the mentor group and act as advisors to them throughout the year. Each mentor will agree not only to work in an ongoing way with a new teacher in her/his school, but also to attend 8 mentor workshops throughout the year.

#### Sustaining the Boston MTEI Agenda

In order to support and encourage school teams as they move into the next phase of this work, every school that participated in the Boston MTEI seminar program was eligible to apply for up to \$1,000 to offset expenses for implementing an MTEI inspired professional development plan for 2004-2005. This award program is sponsored by the

Bureau of Jewish Education on behalf of Boston MTEI with funding from Combined Jewish Philanthropies.

In the coming year, we hope this support will help MTEI participants and their colleagues take actions that make their schools more supportive of teacher learning. Developing a school culture that reduces teacher isolation and supports collaborative work on teaching and learning is essential to such efforts.

Building capacity for ongoing professional development in schools is a long-term process. Boston MTEI started this process with an important two-year intervention and on-site support to school teams. It is too soon to document the effects of professional development stimulated by this project on teachers and their practice, let alone on their students' learning.

Improving the quality of teaching and learning is the goal of the Boston Mandel Teacher Educator Institute. The project has also provided a new vision of serious and sustained professional development for teachers in Jewish schools. We have made a strong start in developing the capacity of participants to create school-based professional development initiatives and we must now solidify the gains we have made.

To sustain this effort for the teachers and children in our schools, a focus in four areas is required:

1. Communal and institutional plans to continue the work of Boston MTEI including sustaining the continued learning of Boston MTEI participants so that the progress they have made will not dissipate.
2. Appropriate incentives for teachers in congregational, after school and day school settings to participate in sustained and serious professional development.<sup>12</sup>
3. Ongoing evaluation to document the kinds of professional development programs initiated and their effects to insure accountability and to inform future efforts.
4. Education and mobilization of lay and professional leaders to champion the professional development agenda for Jewish schools.

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<sup>12</sup> This might include reconfiguring teachers' work by freeing up time on a regular or ad hoc basis; providing remuneration for additional work hours, etc.