

**THE STORY OF THE MANDEL TEACHER EDUCATOR INSTITUTE:  
FROM PROBLEM TO IDEA TO PRACTICE**

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**The Origins of MTEI**

In response to anxieties concerning the future of Jewish life, in August of 1988, Mort Mandel convened a Commission on Jewish Education in North America to initiate a process that could bring about systemic improvement in the quality of Jewish education in the United States and Canada. Mort saw the inextricable link between Jewish education and Jewish continuity, a topic that was roiling the Jewish community at the time. Grounded in the conviction that strong Jewish education was central to any serious effort to sustain Jewish life, the Commission's goal was to bring together extensive new resources and energies so that Jewish education could make its fullest contribution to meaningful Jewish continuity.<sup>2</sup> In order to implement the recommendations of the Commission, a new entity, the Council for Initiatives in Jewish Education (CIJE), was created. The rationale behind this strategy was straightforward. CIJE would pilot some of its major ideas in three communities in order to provide images of the possible as well as to create laboratories for experimentation.

A key building block of this effort was Mort Mandel's commitment to serious educational research. He insisted that whatever initiatives the Foundation might sponsor be supported by research findings and that the initiatives would be in keeping with the best of what was known to address these issues.

One of CIJE's first activities (1993) was to design and administer a survey of educators in formal settings and to conduct interviews with a subset of this group in the three communities selected<sup>3</sup>. In total, over 1000 teachers and educational leaders in pre-schools, day schools and supplementary schools responded to the surveys, and 125 educators were interviewed.<sup>4</sup>

The distillation of what was learned about teachers was published in a policy brief in 1994.<sup>5</sup> Not surprisingly, some of the findings provided empirical support for the

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<sup>2</sup> *A time to act: The report of the Commission on Jewish Education in North America* (Lanham MD, New York, London: University Press of America, 1990), p. 21.

<sup>3</sup> Atlanta, Baltimore and Milwaukee.

<sup>4</sup> Previously, there had been smaller communal studies (notably in Boston and Los Angeles), but there had been no cross-community studies. CIJE's survey design drew on an earlier survey of supplementary schools in Los Angeles: I. Aron and B. Phillips, *Findings of the Los Angeles Bureau of Jewish Education's Jewish teacher census*. Fourth annual conference on research in education, New York, 1990.

<sup>5</sup> See Adam Gamoran et al., *CIJE Policy Brief: Background and professional training of teachers in Jewish schools* (New York: CIJE, 1994). More extensive information about the findings can be found in Adam Gamoran et al., *The teachers report: A portrait of teachers in Jewish schools* (New York: CIJE, 1998); and

conventional negative impressions about Jewish educators that many had, based on anecdotal reports and personal experiences: in particular, that Jewish educators are underprepared for their roles and responsibilities and that a majority of learning opportunities offered to students were boring and repetitive. There was also some surprising good news: Jewish educators stayed in the field for many years,<sup>6</sup> and fifty-nine percent of teachers and ninety-five percent of educational leaders viewed Jewish education as their career, *whether they worked in the field full- or part-time*.

Taken together, these findings suggested that it might well be worth investing in strengthening the educators in the field so as to improve the quality of Jewish education. In addition to the direct contribution this effort would make to the quality of Jewish education, we hoped it would communicate to young people already working in schools and camps, or considering such work, that the Jewish community placed value on the Jewish educational enterprise and was prepared to invest in those who wanted to contribute to this effort. More specifically, we hoped this would encourage these young people to consider Jewish education as a meaningful career option that offered continuing opportunities for powerful professional growth.

Mort's advice to our small leadership team was: Think global, act local! Create projects that target educational leaders, leverage projects that can build capacity for the field of Jewish education as a whole. Among the important questions about which we deliberated were: How could a small national organization like CIJE have an impact on the quality of teaching and learning in educating institutions across North America? What might such a program – a *feasible* program – look like? What goals would it have? And, in keeping with Mort's vision of research, what would be the nature of the research that would accompany the project every step of the way so that we could know we were making a difference?

As a result of these deliberations and with Mort Mandel's strong commitment to Jewish education, his vision and commitment to excellence, and his financial and emotional support, the Mandel Teacher Educator Institute (MTEI) came into being.

### **Birth of the MTEI Educational Program**

In addressing these questions, the CIJE team (Alan Hoffmann, Barry Holtz, and Gail Dorph) benefited from research in the field of general education<sup>7</sup> as well as the research

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in Ellen Goldring et al., *Educational leaders in Jewish schools: A study of three communities* (New York: CIJE, 1995).

<sup>6</sup> 38% of teachers had been in the field over 11 years; another 29% had been in the field over 6 years.

<sup>7</sup> E.g., L. Darling-Hammond and M. W. McLaughlin, "Policies that support teacher development in an era of reform," in M. W. McLaughlin and I. Oberman (Eds.), *Teacher learning: New policies, new practices* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1996), pp. 202-218; J. W. Little, "Teachers' professional development in a climate of educational reform," in *Educational evaluation and policy analysis* 15:3 (1993), 129-151; B. Lord, "Teachers' professional development: Critical collegueship and the role of professional communities," in *The future of educational perspectives on national standards in America* (New York: College Entrance Examination Board, 1994).

conducted under the auspices of the Council for Initiatives in Jewish Education. These studies revealed the profound, if not surprising, inadequacies of professional development opportunities for educators in general and for Jewish educators in particular.<sup>8</sup> The CIJE research revealed that the most prevalent form of professional development was the one-time workshop open to all teachers in the community, devoted to generic teaching skills and devoid of Jewish content.<sup>9</sup> These findings strengthened our emerging belief that a new approach to professional development might be a promising way to strengthen Jewish education, and helped define our basic purpose: From the very start, MTEI was designed to transform this reality and to demonstrate the possibility of an effective alternative aligned with current research about professional development. This ideal has guided the project down to the present.

Although we were bold in our aspirations, it was clear that our small CIJE team could not itself provide for the professional development needs of the thousands of Jewish educators working in North America. We could, however, mount an initiative that would build the capacity of educational leaders responsible for professional development, so that they in turn could do the work on the ground.

Animated by this possibility, we moved forward. To help us imagine what a new kind of program might look like, we invited key Jewish educational leaders as well as two eminent professors from the world of general education,<sup>10</sup> Deborah Loewenberg Ball and Sharon Feiman-Nemser,<sup>11</sup> to join our deliberations. In addition to their academic roles at Michigan State University, they were deeply involved in their congregational religious school in East Lansing, Michigan. Deborah was the head of the education cabinet and Sharon taught in the afternoon religious school and led a project to train congregational members to teach in their school. In their academic work, both were engaged in designing groundbreaking initiatives to improve the preparation of novice teachers and experienced educators.

During a two-day consultation, we listened as Sharon and Deborah shared the work they were doing. When they asked at the end of the first day of our consultation: “Would it be helpful if we worked with you to plan the first seminar?” we were thrilled; and we (Barry and I as the CIJE educational team) began to imagine ways in which we

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<sup>8</sup> In 1995, we scanned the professional development opportunities available in the five communities (Atlanta, Baltimore, Cleveland, Hartford, and Milwaukee) that participated in the first cohort of MTEI. A total of 173 separate programs were tallied and analyzed. Of these, 141 programs were offered by central agencies and 32 additional programs were sponsored by synagogue schools.

<sup>9</sup> B. Holtz et al., “Education leaders as teacher educators,” *Peabody journal of education* 72:2 (2000), 147-166.

<sup>10</sup> Barry and I were inspired to invite scholars in general education into serious ongoing deliberations about Jewish educational endeavors. We had learned this approach from our teacher and mentor Seymour Fox, who had recruited professors of general education to serve as advisors and academic board members to a variety of programs at the Jewish Theological Seminary and Camp Ramah.

<sup>11</sup> Sharon had been my dissertation advisor. I had modeled my own dissertation on Deborah’s earlier research. I had also worked with both of them as a consultant to the Covenant-funded avocational teacher project in their synagogue school in East Lansing, MI.

could develop a Jewish educational project that would incorporate their expertise, their research on teaching and learning, their interest in collaboration, and their concerns about Jewish education. The excitement that we all felt grew even greater when, as Sharon and Deborah elaborated on their ideas, Barry and I intuited something that proved profoundly generative for the unfolding of MTEI: There was a deep connection between the way we studied Jewish sources and the way they were studying teaching and learning in the classroom.

Over the course of the next months, Barry and I worked together with Deborah and Sharon, planning for the first meeting of the MTEI cohort, which began its work in July of 1995. We gained a deeper understanding of Sharon's work on mentoring and its implications for Jewish educators in leadership positions. We learned more about the hypermedia project at Michigan State spearheaded by Deborah and her colleague, Magdalene Lampert, studying videos and other records of practice that they were producing to help teachers learn to teach. We absorbed the ideas that formed the basis for a chapter by Deborah Ball and David Cohen, 'Developing practice, developing practitioners'.<sup>12</sup>

Our work was also deeply informed by scholarship in Jewish education. Barry, at the Jewish Theological Seminary, and I, at the University of Judaism (now the American Jewish University), were involved in teacher and leadership education, and we shared our thinking and practice with our colleagues. Our practice centered on the integration of Jewish and educational content in order to help our students learn to lead educational institutions and to teach Jewish texts and ideas "for meaning". Our ways of working with future educators in their preparation programs were based on the principles of active learning that we wanted them to bring to the settings in which they would eventually work.<sup>13</sup> This meant that our students had to become *active* learners themselves, rather than passive absorbers of information. As it turned out, Sharon and Deborah also paid close attention to our practice and considered ways it might shape their work. As a result, we began to develop a pioneering program in Jewish education that married the collective experiences, expertise, commitments, and beliefs of the four of us. As this suggests, even as we were learning from Deborah and Sharon, they in turn were learning from us.

### **The MTEI Program: A Specific Kind of Professional Development**

The educational approach embodied in MTEI's practice is grounded in a constellation of convictions concerning high-quality education that are supported by contemporary

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<sup>12</sup> D. L. Ball and D. K. Cohen, "Developing practice, developing practitioners: Toward a practice-based theory of professional education," in G. Sykes and L. Darling-Hammond (Eds.), *Teaching as the learning profession: Handbook of policy and practice* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999), pp. 3-32.

<sup>13</sup> We both think we learned this orientation, which emanated from John Dewey's emphasis on the importance of the learner's experience of meaning making, from Seymour Fox and our experiences at Camp Ramah.

research<sup>14</sup> as well as by our understandings of progressive education and of the wisdom of Judaism. We deliberately capitalized on the parallels between the wisdom of Jewish texts and historical practice on the subject of teaching and learning, and principles of progressive education as we designed our MTEI program. Our intent was to help participants build skills and understandings that would make them stronger educators and professional development specialists, while also deepening their understanding and appreciation of Jewish texts, ideas, and practices. From the start of the program to the present day, we believed that these complementary achievements would strengthen the work of MTEI participants in their home institutions.

MTEI is a program which weaves together the following strands:

**1. Study of Jewish Texts and Content:** At MTEI, we make it a regular practice at each seminar to study carefully chosen Jewish texts, particularly rabbinic texts primarily focused on stories of teachers and learners. We have found that these texts convey and provoke ideas about Jewish education and about the roles and identities of leaders and teachers. Studying these particular texts both deepens participants' Jewish knowledge base and offers insights about the nature of authentic Jewish learning.

The learning experiences we offer MTEI participants are designed to help participants consider “what matters”. They reflect MTEI’s vision of the way Jewish ideas and practices can enter into and enrich the lives of modern Jews. We encourage participants to understand and reflect on a vision of Jewish life and learning that rests on meaningful ideas and practices, and to ask themselves how Judaism relates to their own aspirations and challenges as Jewish human beings, Jewish educators, and professional development leaders.

We have studied many of these texts primarily *b’havruta* [in dyads].<sup>15</sup> In MTEI *havruta* experiences, participants learn to generate meaning by listening carefully to the text and to each other, attending to what is said and what is not said by the text and their partner, questioning the text and each other, commenting, agreeing and disagreeing, and proposing new interpretations. With the faculty’s guidance, they learn all these practices “through doing” – through their active participation in *havruta* learning during each seminar. Equally important, participants learn, through their own experience, that if they want their own educators at home to work effectively in *havruta*, they will need to offer them comparable kinds of guidance and scaffolding.

In addition to studying rabbinic texts about teaching and learning, we also study knowledge that is core to school curricula for children, youth and adults in domains like Torah, prayer, Israel, and holidays. We ask ourselves “what matters” with regard to the ideas and practices associated with a given prayer, a particular holiday, a

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<sup>14</sup> See Appendix I for a brief review of the differences between the old and new paradigms of professional learning suggested by the research cited.

<sup>15</sup> E. Holzer with O. Kent, *A philosophy of havruta: Understanding and teaching the art of text study in pairs* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2013).

specific Torah narrative, or our relationship to Israel. Why are these topics interesting and important to teach? We look at curriculum materials that are in use in our institutions and investigate the ways in which current materials address – or fail to address – issues of meaning. A kindred spirit of inquiry animates our study of videos of classes in which these subjects are studied: As we strive to better understand the “live” challenges that teachers face when they teach these subjects, the task of making the ideas and practices associated with these subjects meaningful to learners is always central.

- 2. Core Practices Related to Teaching and Professional Development.** At MTEI we examine a range of assumptions, ideas, and practices that shape the approach to professional development that we model and encourage. Our approach is grounded in the latest thinking from general education about best practices in teaching and learning and in professional development. Participants also read and discuss some of the seminal academic research on Jewish educational theory and practice in regard to this field. Equally important, they engage first hand with some of the central practices that are associated with this approach. Some examples of what we do will concretize this point.

MTEI participants keep journals and share them with their MTEI colleagues as a strategy for developing reflective habits and skills. Journaling enables participants to support the development of reflective practices among their teachers. Participants also learn how to use various protocols for studying pupils’ art and written work, deepening their own understanding of the student writer or artist as well as thinking more deeply about the kind of assignments that elicit such work.

In addition to analyzing classroom videos and curriculum materials, we also engage in an abridged version of a professional development approach known as Japanese Lesson Study.<sup>16</sup> This practice spotlights student learning. It includes and integrates many of the separate professional development practices in which MTEI participants have already engaged during our program. Together they plan a detailed lesson, which one of the MTEI faculty members teaches to a group of students in a congregational school not far from the site where the seminars take place. (This school is directed by an MTEI graduate.) While observing the lesson, MTEI participants keep a careful record of the lesson, observing both teacher and individual students. After the lesson, participants interview the teacher and examine the work that the students produce. We study all these records of practice (the lesson plan, the written records of the event, the interview with the teacher, the student work) for insights about teaching, learning, and professional development.

Participants also develop and strengthen their understandings and skills as mentors by watching videos of mentors at work, analyzing transcripts of mentoring

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<sup>16</sup> J. W. Stigler and J. Hiebert, *The teaching gap: Best ideas from the world's teachers for improving education in the classroom* (New York: The Free Press, 1999).

conversations, and watching faculty members “publicly debrief” various lessons that occur as part of the MTEI seminars. Participants also have “homework”, which mainly involves trying out the ideas and practices they are learning during seminars in their own contexts and coming back to MTEI gatherings with transcripts or write-ups of what they have done and how it went.

- 3. Stance Toward Learning: Inquiry / Curiosity / Collaboration.** MTEI’s stance toward learning is a critical aspect of the story. The approach emphasizes viewing both the text and the acts of teaching not as exemplifications of good – or bad – practice, but as invitations to inquiry. These are opportunities to investigate questions and ambiguities as we seek to understand the multiple options facing a teacher at any decision point. Such investigations offer opportunities to reflect on pedagogical choices and what learning opportunities they might afford and inhibit. This approach is in sync with MTEI’s understanding of Jewish learning: A core Jewish practice – one that is simultaneously resonant with modern Jewish sensibilities and deeply anchored in Jewish civilization – is to *inquire* into our texts and our traditions, to interpret them and renew them for our lives and times in ways that will deepen our relationship with Judaism and Jewish life. Thus, this *stance of curiosity*, this inquiry-outlook, is reflected in both MTEI’s approach to teaching and learning of Jewish (and other) texts, and in its approach to classroom practice.<sup>17</sup>

While it has an individual dimension, the process of inquiry that MTEI embodies is also *collaborative*. We grow not just by pondering a text, an experience, or an episode in a classroom on our own, but through give-and-take with others who are also striving to draw out its significance and implications. Through listening to the varied and sometimes surprising questions, insights, opinions and perspectives of others, we not only become more aware of our own preconceptions, but also have the opportunity to grow, broaden our horizons, and develop new understandings.

Inquiring into such matters collaboratively is central to our approach to professional development. It is also at one with a strong current of traditional Jewish learning in *Beit Midrash* [traditional study hall] settings and with the cross-generational conversation between sages of different eras who have engaged with the same Jewish texts over centuries and millennia.<sup>18</sup>

### **Weaving the MTEI Threads Together**

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<sup>17</sup> D. K. Cohen, M. W. McLaughlin and J. E. Talbert (Eds.), *Teaching for understanding* (New York: Jossey-Bass, 1993); P. L. Grossman, *The Making of a teacher: Teacher knowledge and teacher education* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1990); D. Perkins, “Teaching for understanding,” in *American educator: The professional journal of the American Federation of Teachers* 17:3 (1993), pp. 8, 28-35.

<sup>18</sup> This emphasis on collaboration also has strong roots in general education, as reflected in the outlooks of educators as different as Socrates and John Dewey. In the case of Dewey, who is the inspiration for much contemporary progressive education, the strongest argument for unscripted social inter-change in the life of a democratic community made up of different kinds of people is that it offers us opportunities to grow and grapple with shared questions and problems that are simply unavailable when working alone.

MTEI is not a program of adult learning or a teacher education program. It is a program to build leadership capacity for the Jewish educational system. Our audience is those who are in a position to teach teachers; ours is a “train the trainers” program. It requires participants not only to learn new ways of thinking and acting but also to teach what they are learning to others. MTEI rests on several beliefs about learning: (1) people learn best when knowledge is presented in authentic contexts; (2) long-lasting learning requires social interaction and collaboration; and (3) learners need scaffolded opportunities to practice what they have learned. All of MTEI’s activities, including the seminar-based and home-based activities, are designed to situate learning within the “real lives” of educational leaders’ work, and to build in opportunities for feedback, critique and partnership. The program is designed to help participants change the nature of their program designs and teaching practices with groups and individuals in their home institutions. If our work is successful, Jewish educational leaders will work differently with diverse learners in a variety of settings in the Jewish world, always encouraging the same kind of active and meaningful learning modeled and practiced at MTEI, and thus gradually transforming the very cultures of the institutions in which they work. To take some liberty with our textual sources and their translation, it is a *ונעשה ונשמע נשמע ונעשה* (*nishma v’naaseh v’nishma v’naaseh*) approach – *first we will listen (learn), then we will do (practice); by practicing what we have learned, we will come to understand, and we will then be able to do (enact) these practices in our own settings.* The latest version of MTEI’s statement of Mission, Principles and Goals is in Appendix II.

### **Developing Our Own Records of Practice**

In MTEI’s early work, we were inspired by the hypermedia project at Michigan State University, which documented the work of third and fourth grade pupils in math lessons across an entire year. This project<sup>19</sup> generated various records of practice, including classroom videos, lesson plans, teachers’ reflections, and students’ work. It allowed viewers to study classroom interactions and to become students of teaching and learning. The videos allowed viewers to “rewind” interactions in order to consider the invisible aspects of teacher decision-making and student learning and to focus on issues of pedagogy and content knowledge.

This approach to video investigation rests on an understanding of teaching as a complex and uncertain practice. It suggests that one studies classroom videos and the other records of practice that accompany them as a way to encourage investigation and inquiry into subject-related issues, but also into teachers’ actions and thinking and students’ thinking. Studying videotapes helps educators become more aware of the nature of teaching. It can promote opportunities for observation, conversation, analysis and reflection about the complexities and dilemmas of teaching and learning. It can enable

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<sup>19</sup> M. Lampert and D. L. Ball, *Teaching, multimedia, and mathematics: Investigations of real practice* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1998).

viewers to focus both on pedagogic moves and on the relationship of teaching to children's learning of specific content. All of these are steppingstones in the service of improving the practice and outcomes of teaching. This approach differs greatly from a mode of study which assumes that educators view classroom videos as models to imitate.<sup>20</sup>

We soon realized that we needed records of practice situated in Jewish educational settings. True, we could learn a great deal about teaching from studying video materials situated in mathematics classrooms; however, such an inquiry would not help us promote Jewish content knowledge and understandings. Therefore, in 1996, we embarked on the ambitious project of producing our own set of video materials. With a grant from the Nathan Cummings Foundation, we hired a videographer from Michigan State University who had experience in filming classroom interactions, and we developed four classroom videos filmed in Jewish afternoon schools. Because we wanted to use these records of practice to examine the goals and content of substantive Jewish education, these first four videos dealt with teaching Torah and prayer. We decided to focus on after-school settings because we also wanted to show that, contrary to what some believed, serious teaching and learning were happening in these settings.

We piloted the four videos in MTEI seminars and used the feedback from participants in these seminars to improve them. We then distributed them to earlier graduates of the program and to each successive cohort of MTEI participants. We created a professional development curriculum called "Reading the Classroom as Text",<sup>21</sup> which included the videos themselves and also professional development "lessons" that MTEI participants could adapt for use in their own settings. Included were text study materials, lesson plans, interviews with teachers, transcripts of lessons, and students' work.

Later, as part of a grant from the Richard and Rhoda Goldman Fund to the Bay Area MTEI program (2006), we developed three more videos. This time we focused on lessons about Israel, in order to expand the subject matter areas we could study using video investigation. These materials were technologically more sophisticated than our initial videos. Two included the lesson itself, a version of the lesson with a voice-over of the teachers commenting on the reasons for their actions, and an introduction by the educational leader of the institution. The third followed all the steps of Japanese Lesson

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<sup>20</sup> The study of videotaped classrooms is not a new method in teacher education. In the past, teachers had been encouraged to view videotapes as models of effective practice designed to project images of good teaching that observers could learn to imitate. This approach to the study of videotapes mirrored the dominant paradigm of teaching and learning – what Philip Jackson has called "the mimetic" tradition in education. The underlying assumption of this paradigm is that the learner had only to receive the transmitted knowledge in order to become more knowledgeable. Thus, teachers learned to become better teachers by watching exemplary models and imitating them.

<sup>21</sup> Over the course of the years, Vicky Kelman, Amy Wallk Katz, Miriam Heller Stern, and Leah Strigler helped the faculty shape these materials. Our first videographer was Mark Rosenberg, who had worked with Deborah Ball and Magdalene Lampert on the development of the videos in the hypermedia project at MSU. The last two videos benefited from the work of Jonathan Gruber, a documentary videographer.

Study: It allowed for viewing a lesson in its entirety, as well as viewing and investigating different aspects of the planning/teaching sequence, including the lesson planning, the lesson's launch, the small group work, the debrief and the discussion that involved examining students' work after the lesson was completed.

### **MTEI Faculty**

A description of the faculty will help explain the dynamic, ever-evolving coherence of the MTEI program. The faculty members' on-going collaboration affects every aspect of the program, including seminar planning, the design of particular teaching segments, and interactions with MTEI participants. The remarkable inter-weaving of our program's various strands has been possible because of the nature of faculty participation. Faculty members attend all sessions; each comes with Jewish knowledge and a nuanced understanding of the principles of progressive pedagogy; each brings her or his own additional particular expertise; and all of them come with the conviction that they can learn a great deal from the others.

At the outset, there were four faculty members: Deborah Ball, Gail Dorph, Sharon Feiman-Nemser and Barry Holtz: Deborah brought her expertise in mathematics education and her work on the development of hypermedia materials as a resource in helping teachers learn about teaching and learning; Sharon brought expertise in teacher development, including the induction of new teachers and the training of mentors; Barry brought his expertise in making biblical and rabbinic texts more accessible to diverse learners; and Gail brought a broad and nuanced perspective from many years of experience working as a curriculum writer and teacher educator in a variety of Jewish settings.

From the start, we became a team of inquirers, trying to learn from educational and Jewish texts, from videos of math teaching and mentoring in other cultures, and from each other. Together, we incorporated the learning from each discrete session of each seminar into the next session, referring back to questions raised and comments made. We interrogated each other's work, both publicly and in our planning sessions, even creating in-seminar opportunities for faculty members to interview one another about their teaching.

Such practices were part of what made each cohort's experience unique and *alive*; and MTEI participants, who regularly witnessed and experienced the impact of faculty cooperation, expressed their surprise and appreciation of the collaborative faculty community committed to ongoing practice-improving inquiry – a model we hoped MTEI graduates would foster in their home institutions and communities.

As the faculty grew to include Elie Holzer, Jennifer Lewis, Miriam Raider-Roth, and Kathy Simon, this deeply collaborative mode of work continued. Once again, each person brought something unique from his or her own scholarship and learning: Elie, a focus on *havruta* learning and rabbinic texts that gave rise to important pedagogic

experiences; Jenny, a deep understanding of improving pedagogy through professional development, especially through aspects of Japanese lesson study; Kathy, insights into the possibility of varying our pedagogic strategies to match our content and goals, as well as a focus on deep listening and authentic expression; and Miriam,<sup>22</sup> a focus on the nature of relationship and presence in teaching as well as on listening to the voices of the learners. Once again, the synergy created through everyone's commitment to learning with and from one another, combined with our overlapping and complementary areas of expertise in Jewish learning and pedagogy, resulted in a program in which the whole was greater than the sum of its parts.

As the faculty team grew, we continued to plan together, to be present through each moment of every seminar, and to work together in the evenings to refine our plans, based on our own assessments and on participant feedback collected at the end of each day. As a faculty, we lived the ideas that we were trying to teach. Curiosity was our stance! And our mode of work demanded developing questions and hypotheses based on examining what we were seeing and doing, learning from one another, and plowing what we were learning back into practice – with every intention of repeating this process as we moved forward.

### **Structure of the Program and its Participants**

We designed MTEI as a two-year national program composed of six 4 to 5 day residential seminars. To date, there have been six national cohort groups ranging from 20 to 40 participants and two community-based cohorts, one in Boston and one in Northern California (these had a somewhat different structure). For some cohort groups, we were able to include one extended ten-day seminar in Israel planned in cooperation with the Mandel Leadership Institute in Israel. By 2010, the conclusion of Cohort Six, 250 educational leaders had graduated from the program. For a field as small as Jewish education, the infusion of so many educators animated by this new approach to professional development and learning that MTEI represents has considerable potential to foster change.

MTEI was designed as a cross-denominational program. When we began, most participants were educational leaders in formal settings, primarily in after-school programs. Central Agency directors and consultants and members of the Florence Melton Adult Mini-School national faculty rounded out that first group. As we observed the work of our graduates in the field and came to understand the power of the ideas and practices we were teaching and their applicability across Jewish educational settings, we also recruited day school educators, early childhood directors, family educators, and adult educators (including successive groups of leaders of the Florence Melton Adult Mini-School project).

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<sup>22</sup> Miriam Raider Roth became the director of MTEI in July 2018.

MTEI participants have come from a variety of educational and religious backgrounds. Some were second career educators with little formal educational training. Others had degrees in education, but no training in designing and implementing professional development for others. Some had modest Jewish knowledge; others were rabbis or PhDs in Jewish subject matter. All recruits were in career positions to have access to delivering substantive, innovative professional development for teachers and other educators, helping them to become more skilled at their work. We have learned from our research that graduates have been able to transfer their knowledge and skills to a variety of jobs that they go on to hold over time.<sup>23</sup>

### **Research and Evaluation in the Life of MTEI**

MTEI owes its existence and direction to important research findings – research that showed that teachers and leaders in Jewish schools, while committed to their roles, were professionally underprepared for their work and engaged in little professional development that could address these gaps. Moreover, the few professional development opportunities that were available to them were generally of mediocre quality.

Research and evaluation have always been integral to the day-to-day MTEI-process; an investigative ethos is at the heart of the culture of MTEI. It is reflected in the continuing inquiry, both individual and collaborative, among the faculty concerning our own practice. In this vein, the daily meetings among the faculty focus heavily on what can be learned from what has happened on any given day, and on how this might inform the way we will proceed the next day and into the future. MTEI’s achievements owe a great deal to this kind of practice-based, practice-enriching self-study. While such research has served to improve our practice in both immediate and long-term ways, some of our publications have also been built on this kind of ongoing learning.

More formal and systematic research and evaluation efforts have also been an integral part of the MTEI project. Recall that the findings of the monitoring, evaluation and feedback team (MEF) led by Adam Gamoran and Ellen Goldring had given birth to the development of the MTEI initiative. In the middle of Cohort Two (1997), the Mandel Foundation hired Susan Stodolsky, a professor of education, psychology, and human development at the University of Chicago, to head the research and evaluation initiative of MTEI. Susan brought expertise in educational program evaluation and had already done ground breaking work on the impact of subject matter on teaching and learning.

She suggested that the evaluation should focus on structural features of the professional development programs initiated by MTEI participants and graduates, meaning the number of hours and sessions and the MTEI practices that participants and graduates put into use in their own settings. It should also look at the “insides” of their programs, meaning what their professional development initiatives looked like and what

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<sup>23</sup> S. Stodolsky, *A decade of learning: An evaluation of the Mandel Teacher Educator Institute (MTEI)*. Internal report to the Foundation (2010), [www.mtei-learning.org](http://www.mtei-learning.org).

changes were evident in their practices. Susan and the faculty created an iterative research agenda.

At the end of Cohort Three (2003), all the MTEI graduates of the program were surveyed.<sup>24</sup> The response rate was 88%. The faculty and the Foundation were curious: What impact did MTEI have on changing the paradigm of professional development in the participants’ settings? Were graduates creating multi-session learning opportunities for their faculties rather than “one-shot” workshops? Were they extending the number of hours of professional learning from one or two hours to eight or more? Were they integrating Jewish content knowledge and collaborative, interactive learning into their initiatives?

To provide answers to such questions, Susan compared the learning opportunities that MTEI graduates were providing with those which had been described in the baseline survey administered in the five communities that were part of Cohort One.<sup>25</sup> A discussion of the important findings that she discovered will introduce the next section of this discussion, which focuses on MTEI’s multi-faceted *impact* – something we have tried to assess in multiple ways.

### **Impact**

**Changing the number of sessions and number of hours of professional development offerings:** *Changing the Culture of Professional Development*<sup>26</sup> revealed that Cohort One, Two and Three graduates had made significant strides in moving from the dominant paradigm of professional development to the MTEI-supported paradigm. Importantly, the professional learning opportunities that graduates were planning and implementing had many more sessions (Table A) and lasted many more hours (Table B) than those reported in the baseline survey 1995.

**Table A: Comparison of Total Number of Sessions per PD Learning Opportunity**

*This chart compares the number of individual sessions that were part of each PD initiative offered by MTEI graduates vs. the number of individual sessions per initiative offered in the five communities included in the Baseline Scan*

Individual Sessions per	Five Communities (1995)	MTEI Graduates (2001)
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<sup>24</sup> S. Stodolsky and G. Dorph, *Changing the culture of professional development: Results of a survey of the graduates of the Mandel Teacher Educator Institute* (2003). The report can be found on the MTEI website: [www.mtei-learning.org](http://www.mtei-learning.org).

<sup>25</sup> The data from the five communities that participated in the first cohort of MTEI in 1995 were reported in an unpublished study of professional development in the five participating communities. These communities included Atlanta, Baltimore and Milwaukee as well as Cleveland and Hartford. Data were collected by A. Gamoran and the CIJE monitoring and evaluation arm in 1995-96. The MTEI graduate data can be found in the 2003 report to the Foundation by Stodolsky and Dorph, *Changing the culture*.

<sup>26</sup> Stodolsky and Dorph, *Changing the culture*.<sup>27</sup> R. Elmore, “Getting to scale with good educational practice,” *Harvard educational review* 66:1 (1996), 1-26.

<b>Year</b>	% N=146	% N= 132
1 -2	39.0	12.9
2 – 5	42.0	22.0
6 – 9	6.0	8.3
10+	6.0	56.8

**Table B: Comparison of Total Number of Hours within each PD Learning Opportunity**

*This chart compares the number of total hours per PD learning initiative offered by MTEI graduates vs. the number of hours per initiative in the Baseline Scan of the five communities*

<b>Total Hours</b>	<b>Five Communities (1995)</b> (%) N= 146	<b>MTEI Graduates</b> (%) N= 132
2 hours or less	27.0	3.8
3 – 9 hours	38.0	18.5
10 – 19 hours	29.0	21.5
20 hours or more	7.0	56.0

Whereas one-shot workshops of short duration characterized the learning opportunities offered in the field at large, MTEI graduates moved toward more sustained, longer professional development experiences. This kind of professional development enhances the potential for participants to actually change their pedagogic practices.

Responses to the open-ended questions revealed that MTEI graduates had not only been successful in creating infrastructure changes, but also were thinking about their own educational work and the work of their teachers in more complicated ways.

*“The quick fix, one-shot programs are gone forever and a new, more reflective kind of teaching is our goal[...].”* (School Principal)

*“My staff meetings are all informed by a view of teaching that is more complex and less formulaic, with a search for more long-term reflection instead of band-aids. The view of the teacher as intellectual serves as the backdrop to this messy work. This all adds a very liberating, affirming and very challenging dimension to all my work.”* (Head of School)

*“[MTEI] has helped me to understand teacher development as a discrete universe of the work in the field of Jewish education in a more coherent way. It has brought me together with others in the professional learning community who care about this in a serious way.”* (Agency Consultant)

The survey data also revealed that graduates were including the study of Jewish content and using the new professional development strategies that they had learned in

the programs they were creating for their teachers. Along with this, individual conversations, interviews, and focus groups also revealed that graduates faced multiple challenges related to changing “the insides” of their professional development practice.

**Changing the core:** As we know from general education, it is easier to change the number of sessions and hours than it is to change the “insides” of education, that is, “the core of educational practice”.<sup>27</sup> As Elmore put it: *Much of what passes for “change in U.S. schooling is not really about changing the core[...]*”. As was the case with the new math, it could look like teachers and professional development leaders were implementing new strategies, but often the changes were superficial. Teachers who participated in professional development seminars might invite students to demonstrate how they solved a math problem, but in the end, the teacher still *showed them* the right way. There was none of the inquiry or investigation that supposedly was the hallmark of the new approach to mathematics teaching and learning.<sup>28</sup>

Even before we developed a survey for graduates of the first three cohorts, we wanted to understand the impact of MTEI was having on all graduates. In 2000, the research team<sup>29</sup> followed four graduates of Cohorts One and Two to learn first-hand about the “insides” of their professional development work. The cases of Ruth and Leila<sup>30</sup> have proven particularly instructive. They help us understand some of the challenges graduates face as they “try on” and adapt MTEI practices to their unique settings.

Ruth, a central agency consultant, prepared lead teachers in synagogues to be family educators. The MTEI video and curriculum investigation materials, which featured elementary school pupils in formal classrooms, were less relevant for her work. The basic principles of MTEI were applicable, but she had to adapt them for family educators who would work with a variety of participants in a variety of contexts, often including parents of young children.

When Ruth first began her work, she had helped family educators create fun activities for families to do together. In MTEI, Ruth began to rethink her basic goals and how she might reach them. She asked family educators to take on a new Jewish practice of their choice in much the same way that these educators were asking parents in their groups to try out new Jewish practices, like lighting Shabbat candles. She explained, “[...] if we, the family educators, know what it feels like to take on a new Jewish practice

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<sup>27</sup> R. Elmore, “Getting to scale with good educational practice,” *Harvard educational review* 66:1 (1996), 1-26.

<sup>28</sup> D. Cohen, “A revolution in one classroom: The case of Mrs. Oublier,” *Educational evaluation and policy analysis* 12:3 (1990), 311-29.

<sup>29</sup> The team of researchers was headed by Susan Stodolsky and included Gail Dorph, Elie Holzer, Daniel Pekarsky and Renee Wohl.

<sup>30</sup> All names of participants are pseudonyms.

*or dimension in our lives, we will be better able to help families do the same. After all, that is what Jewish Family Education is all about, helping families grow Jewishly[...].”*

As Ruth adopted radically new goals, she changed the way she planned her professional development sessions. *“I couldn’t come in with pages of notes of things to tell them to do, I had to think about what kinds of questions I wanted to ask them.”* Ruth also had to change her pedagogy: *“[...] the hardest thing I had to learn was to keep quiet. I like to teach and talk. I had to train myself to say, ‘I’m doing good teaching even if I’m not talking.’ [...] Talking less, having them talk more[...].”*<sup>31</sup>

Ruth also took on a new Jewish practice, the counting of the Omer.<sup>32</sup> Another family educator started to read a Jewish newspaper on a weekly basis. To Ruth, one of the most interesting examples of taking on a new practice was an Orthodox educator who started blessing her children on Friday night. *“She was embarrassed to admit that she didn’t engage in this practice already. She had tears in her eyes as she described how awkward it was at first – just like it might be for people whose Hebrew isn’t nearly as good and whose familiarity with prayer isn’t as developed [...] her sharing gave so many other educators permission to try on new things as well. It was so powerful.”*<sup>33</sup> The family educators in Ruth’s seminar were inspired to experiment with similar exercises for the parents participating in their family education programs.

Influenced by her MTEI experience, Ruth altered her pedagogy and created transformative learning opportunities as she worked to “grow” a new breed of family educators in her community. Other cases reveal the complexity of changing one’s practice. These include changing the “outsides” (for example, finding time for multi-session initiatives and providing stipends), and changing the “insides” (for example, learning to manage teachers’ desire for immediate solutions to the short-term and the enduring dilemmas of teaching). Ruth’s story is an example of the kind of transformation in thinking about and enacting professional development that MTEI is designed to promote.

It’s not always this smooth. As a consultant to multiple schools, Leila was ready to take the plunge and create a multi-session professional development program. She negotiated a three-session program totaling about eight hours. Because the teachers were teaching Torah narratives, she decided to use the MTEI video in which 8- and 9-year old children were studying the story of Rebecca at the Well (*Genesis 28*). She thought that this would help her teachers talk about teaching and learning as well as about teaching Torah.

Leila decided to follow the sequence we adopted at MTEI seminars: Whenever we used classroom videos at MTEI, we first studied the subject matter or text that pupils

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<sup>31</sup> A more extensive description of Ruth can be found in G. Dorph et al., “Growing as teacher educators,” *Journal of Jewish education* 68:1 (2002), pp. 65-69.

<sup>32</sup> The Omer period refers to the 49 days that are counted between the end of Pesach and the festival of Shavuot.

<sup>33</sup> Oral communication from Ruth.

were learning before looking at the curriculum material that was to be used in class. We tried to understand the material, and we also asked ourselves what questions, confusions, and challenges might children of eight or nine have about a given narrative (or prayer). Leila loved the text study aspect of our MTEI work, but she worried that her teachers might be uncomfortable since they had never studied texts together and many had weak text backgrounds. Still she wanted to try. After the first session, she called to share her elation. The teachers had loved the Torah study and she felt confident about session two, which would involve watching the classroom video. She was looking forward to hearing her teachers' reactions to the students and the teacher in the video.

What Leila "forgot", probably because she had been re-socialized by her MTEI experiences, was that teachers mainly come to the viewing of classroom videos with the expectation of viewing a master teacher whom they could try to imitate. As mentioned, the MTEI approach to working with classroom videos is radically different. The videotape clips we created were excerpts of real lessons in real classrooms designed to provide "texts" for the study of teaching and learning in ordinary afternoon school classrooms taught by "good enough" teachers. They were not intended to represent the best or only way to teach these texts, or to present models of excellence for imitation.

Informing our decision to use these kinds of clips was the belief of the MTEI team that we could not give participants a bag of tricks that could be pulled out of one's pocket that would automatically work in most situations for most students. Rather, we believe that in order to become a better teacher, one needs to cultivate a deep curiosity about what sense students are making of the material being studied. The MTEI videos can be used to awaken the curiosity of viewers about the dilemmas and challenges associated with real teaching. We hoped that the study of these "texts" of live classrooms would work like the study of written texts – as stimuli for questioning, investigation, reflection, and interpretation. The purpose of this kind of viewing is to explore the complexities of teaching and learning and to make the challenges of teaching more visible.

Leila's teachers were deeply troubled by the video. They thought that the teacher had broken a "cardinal rule" of teaching by not answering a student's question: "How come back then parents got to choose who you married?" And in their judgment, adding insult to injury, although the teacher responded: "That's a very good question. We'll come back to it", she never returned to the question even though two other children asked the very same question in different ways at different points in the lesson.

Viewing the video made Leila's teachers anxious. They wanted answers: "How are we supposed to teach Torah to the children in this school?" "What do we do with unexpected questions that children ask?" "What happens when a child asks a question to which we do not know the answer?" Leila had only one more session scheduled in this series of workshops. What was she to do?

Leila decided to plan a “how to” session on teaching Torah. As she reported, she reverted to her default drive. This was the kind of session she would have planned before attending MTEI, but she felt that she could not in good conscience “leave them hanging” without answers to their questions. She said she did not feel prepared to engage the teachers in a conversation about, or an investigation of, this enduring dilemma of teaching: what should a teacher do when a child asks an unanticipated question?

The case of Leila illustrates at least two different kinds of challenges that MTEI participants and graduates face. The first relates to an infrastructure issue: finding time and funding for more long-term professional development. Perhaps if the third session had not been the last of the series, Leila would have felt more daring about trying an alternative approach. The second relates to helping graduates develop the confidence and competence to respond to the kinds of challenges posed by Leila’s teachers without, as happened in Leila’s case, abandoning or watering down the principles MTEI promotes. As a response to these challenges, our seminars now include more planning and “rehearsal” time, thus giving participants opportunities to try out and get feedback on their ideas for implementing various PD practices “back home” even before they leave each seminar. In addition, we have included more time to share what they have learned as they have tried out the various MTEI practices in between seminars.

**Changes in graduates’ leadership roles and the far-reaching nature of their work:** In 2008, after five national cohort groups and one community-based program, we again surveyed all MTEI graduates. Two-thirds of alumni responded to the survey. We were still interested in our earlier questions about the infrastructure and contents of their professional development initiatives. At this point, though, we also wanted to learn about their career trajectories, how their positions of leadership had changed, the general reach of their work and whether they were still “using” the MTEI principles and practices that they had learned.

We learned this about our alumni’s career positions: 40% were senior leaders of congregational or day schools, 36% were senior leaders of national or communal agencies, 10% were university faculty members or researchers, 9% were teachers and 3% were congregational rabbis.

One of the most remarkable findings that the survey<sup>34</sup> turned up was the astonishingly broad reach of MTEI: Graduates reported that they were involved with approximately 1,150 schools and their teachers, either directly or through those whom they supervised or with whom they consulted. Taking their reports collectively, graduates estimated that they had reached educators, including educational leaders, and others who served approximately 57,000 students or other constituencies through their consultations or direct services.

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<sup>34</sup> S. Stodolsky, *A decade of learning*. Report to the Foundation (2010).

MTEI graduates' influence also reached beyond their schools and communities. Many participated in national and community networks and organizations and held leadership roles on these boards, thus influencing the vision and implementation of high level learning among Jewish professionals of all kinds.

This survey also offered strong evidence that most MTEI graduates had internalized the basic principles and practices of the program and were using them to support teachers' work. Of particular note, graduates from the very first cohorts were still building on these techniques and ideas and using them in their current positions, which often differed from the roles and responsibilities they had held when they participated in the program. This strongly suggests that MTEI was continuing to influence their professional practice more than a decade after their participation in MTEI.

**Impact on professional identity:** From the beginning, participants often told us that they felt like imposters because they lacked Jewish knowledge and professional credentials. Findings from our surveys and interviews indicate that as graduates develop experience and expertise in designing and implementing learning opportunities for their teachers along the lines encouraged by MTEI, they also gained confidence in their roles as educational leaders. As we began Cohort Six, we were interested in learning more about the impact of the regular opportunity to study texts *b'havruta* on participants' perceptions of themselves as *Jewish* educational leaders.

To facilitate the desired research, we invited the participation of four NYU doctoral students in Jewish education who had expressed interest in participating in this cohort group. Together with Susan and other members of the faculty, interview and focus group protocols were developed. Susan and the graduate students interviewed 15 participants after each seminar (the same group was interviewed each time) and held focus group discussions with all members of the Cohort on two occasions.

We learned from these interviews and focus groups<sup>35</sup> that the experience of text study had deepened their sense of being Jewishly-knowledgeable educators and thus contributed in discernible ways to their capacity to lead. They felt empowered to use the texts we had studied, as they taught other educators, their lay leaders, families, and even their rabbis.

For example, Jill, a congregational school educator, reported that she no longer had to “wait” for the rabbi to teach “content”. Even more profound was the way that this knowledge led to her sense of empowerment:

*[...]text study is not just for rabbis to figure out. We can actually figure out the same text – on a different level maybe, but you can still figure things out. I used to think that text study seemed to be something that rabbis did with each other, and then talked to the congregation about. The text was something I was scared of, but*

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<sup>35</sup> These data were presented at the 6th International Conference on Research in Jewish Education: *Challenges in Jewish education: Cultural vitality*, December 2010, Bar Ilan University.

*now I know that text is very important [...]. I feel more confident in being the teacher for my faculty instead of using other people all the time [...].*

For many, this sense of confidence was coupled with a new sense of authenticity. Ellen, another congregational educator, talked about the imposter feeling, calling it “the fraud factor”. Although she herself had a rich Jewish educational background and told us that she was “always into text study”, she said that she now had so much more to offer.

*[...] Now I have tools, you know, I have something to offer. It's like that fraud factor. Now I have tools, in a teachers' meeting I don't have to go over 'So how are things going, what's new?' I can really offer them something. I have an education background, I went to XXX (name of institution of higher learning that prepares Jewish educators), but I was never given these tools before.*

The research and evaluation effort associated with MTEI has incorporated varied approaches to studying the impact of the program and to answering questions about the efficacy of parts of the program. The evaluation work has been both formative and summative – sometimes the main audience has been the Foundation, other times it has been the faculty, while in other cases the results have been of import to the broader Jewish educational community. Sometimes the evaluation has consisted of close-in case studies while at other times it has been a survey with structured questions. As a program committed to inquiry as a central principle, it is appropriate that the MTEI research and evaluation effort reflect that same commitment and seek answers to questions about the program as they arise. We anticipate evaluation will continue to inform the program, the Foundation and its faculty in the future.

### **Looking Back and Envisioning the Work Ahead**

Looking back, one cannot fully re-experience either the bumps on the road or the “Aha!” moments, but there were plenty of both for MTEI participants and faculty. During one of the seminars of Cohort One, which took place in Cleveland, Mort Mandel asked for a meeting with Sharon and Deborah. He wanted to have a chance to get to know them and to learn more about their thinking about this new endeavor. I will never forget when he turned to them and asked what they thought about the length of the program – did it need to be this long? After all, we were taking a big risk creating a long-term program with multiple meetings over the course of two years. He wanted to know what they thought about the goals of the program as related to its length. I remember Deborah saying that she thought the ambitious goals of the program could only be reached in a program of this design and depth. Sharon added that they both thought the goals of the program were worthy of the investment of time and could make a substantive contribution to the quality of Jewish education. Mort saw the wisdom of this kind of investment and supported it.

Another early episode that turned out to combine both a bump *and* an Aha! moment began on the third day of our first seminar in July 1995. I still vividly remember the pain and frustration expressed by members of Cohort One, who assumed that they

were coming to MTEI to learn best practices in professional development which they could then enact in their own settings. Instead, it seemed that they were only getting more questions and more complications. Their sense of frustration came to a head in a discussion following an open-ended writing assignment: “Write down two or three things that stood out for you during the last few days”. The post writing debrief began with a positive sharing of some lessons learned, but quickly turned into a barrage of grumbling and pointed questions: “What were we supposed to be learning anyway?” One person expressed the group’s sentiment when she said:

*I loved seeing the video of Deborah’s class. I loved seeing those 3rd graders learning math and trying to figure out which numbers were odd and even. I loved how seriously all the students engaged in trying to understand the question and how they tried to explain their thinking to each other. I loved especially when Sean raised his hand and suggested that 6 might be both an odd and an even number.<sup>36</sup> [...] Just now though I had an “Aha!” moment. Although I loved watching Deborah’s students, **I did not like being one of Deborah’s pupils** being asked, ‘Why do I think that? How would I know or explain my position to another?’ I hated having my questions thrown back at me, asking me what I thought. It made me insecure and nervous. I wanted you, Deborah, to answer my question with **an answer** not with an investigation.*

For this person and many others, embracing cognitive dissonance as part of the learning process was not easy; nor was this easy for me as the head of the program and other members of the MTEI team. But the faculty hung together. We were committed to a robust notion of inquiry-oriented teaching and learning which we wanted to see in Jewish classrooms, and to the special kind of professional development of educators we thought could make it possible. We were committed to building a culture of inquiry marked by reflection and curiosity, rather than providing answers – even our own carefully considered answers. It would have been easy – but a serious mistake – to abandon this stance in the face of the discomfort it initially called forth in some of our students. Fortunately, most MTEI participants, like the one just quoted, came to understand and appreciate this.

That said, over the course of the eight cohort groups (six national and two communal), participants began to realize from their attempts to enact the MTEI approach to professional development back home, that it would not be easy. It required changes in **institutional structures** (*no more one-shot workshops*), in **goals** of professional development (*focusing on meaningful learning for both faculty and students*), in **content** of professional development (*including Jewish content integrated with pedagogy*), and in **their stance** as educational leaders (*an investigative stance based more on exploring questions than giving answers*). It meant inviting the teachers they were seeking to

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<sup>36</sup> E. Green, *Building a better teacher: How teaching works* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2014), pp. 69-79.

strengthen into a collaborative inquiry, a process which is often messy and where the outcomes are not always known in advance. It meant treating these teachers as learners at the same time that they were asking them to focus on children as learners; and it would also mean continuing to view themselves as learners in this same process. (The case of Leila provides a vivid sense of how difficult this could be.)

In addition, it is important to add that to the present day, MTEI graduates still actively participate in the MTEI graduate listserv and the graduate study sessions that we offer regularly. Each year, groups of graduates learn Jewish texts at regular intervals and have opportunities to participate in conversations and study groups on issues of concern and interest. A few examples can serve to give a flavor of the variety of themes and topics addressed in these sessions. Periodically, often before holidays, we study Jewish texts that enrich both the personal and professional lives of graduates. For another example, in 2012-2013, a group of graduates participated in a 1½ year study group which met monthly to read and discuss the works of John Dewey and the implications of his work for Jewish education. The work of this group led to a spotlight session at the 2014 annual conference of the Network for Research in Jewish Education and included both a philosophical introduction by Daniel Pekarsky and cases written by two members of the study group. We then circulated a version of Daniel's paper to MTEI graduates and Daniel wrote a popular piece which was distributed via *EJewish Philanthropy*.<sup>37</sup> Another instance of an ongoing study group topic is: "On the having of hard conversations". This group deals with issues of mentoring and coaching, and also with teaching our graduates ways to engage with parents and students around challenging issues. Another kind of ongoing activity has included small groups of MTEI graduates who live in close proximity scheduling visits to each other's schools to learn from one another. Others have even planned and jointly led professional development sessions for faculties of their schools and their communities.

Ultimately, MTEI's mission cannot be fully realized unless the Jewish community as a whole invests more in the serious professional development of educators in all settings and not in magic bullet solutions. We cannot give up on any setting in which serious, content-rich Jewish education is taking place. In the spirit of Dewey's response to critics of early attempts at progressive education, I would respond to those who are dismissive of these settings: "How can you judge their potential until we have equipped front-line educators with the skills and understandings necessary to do a better job?"

Many problems and challenges need attention if we are to attend to the needs of front-line educators. But awareness of them should not stand in the way of appreciating MTEI achievements – achievements that relate to the quality of the program, its impact, and the important insights about education and professional development that have

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<sup>37</sup> D. Pekarsky, "From 'experiential education' to 'experience-savvy education'," *EJewish philanthropy* (September 3, 2014).

emerged from our work and that we have sought to disseminate to the field of Jewish education.<sup>38</sup>

As I conclude the writing of this paper, I'm excited to say that we are in the middle of a eighth national cohort group, which began its work in November 2017. We are poised to begin the recruitment of a ninth cohort to begin in November 2019. We continue to recruit educational leaders from across the US (and Canada and Brazil) to be part of this exciting group. From my conversations with these individuals, it continues to be clear that, even though a plethora of on-line MA-offerings are currently available to them, they recognize that MTEI can offer them something different. Building on what we have learned in our first 20 years and on recent research in general education,<sup>39</sup> we have strengthened the curriculum of the most recent cohorts. The faculty is placing even more emphasis on helping participants practice their skills and understandings during the seminars, before they try them out in their work settings. We are also placing more emphasis on what might be called the relational aspects of building collegial learning communities. We are curious about these new emphases in our work and look forward to learning more about its impact.

One of the most remarkable aspects of MTEI is its longevity. I would not be surprised if it is the longest free-standing program funded by philanthropic funds and commitment. The personal commitment of Mort Mandel and the Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel Foundation has allowed it to grow in terms of program, faculty and participants. Although MTEI's past is impressive, the future needs attention. What will it take to create an infrastructure that can allow it to continue to survive and flourish? The creation of such an infrastructure is a major challenge on the horizon.

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<sup>38</sup> Three examples of sessions at Jewish educational conferences are: 'Studying the complexities of change in professional development: Implications for further research,' Research report by Gail Dorph, Sharon Feiman-Nemser, Shirah Hecht, Susan Stodolsky, Network for Research in Jewish Education (NRJE) Annual Conference, June 2003. 'Professional development and professional culture in two communities,' Paper Session, Gail Dorph, NRJE June 2007. 'The Impact of *havruta* study on educational leaders,' Paper Session, by Susan Stodolsky and Gail Dorph at the Israel Association for Research in Jewish Education, Bar Ilan University, December 2010.

<sup>39</sup> P. Grossman and M. McDonald, "Back to the future: New directions in teaching and teacher education," *American educational research journal* 45:1 (2008), p. 184.

## APPENDIX I

### A Comparison of the Older and Newer Paradigms of Professional Development

When we began MTEI, existing professional development programs in Jewish and general education had followed an old paradigm that relied on single workshops that were disconnected from teachers' work and that emphasized the technical features of teaching. Topics of such workshops included issues such as classroom management, asking better questions, or working with children in small groups. Rarely did they include content. And even more rarely were content and pedagogic issues combined.

Best practices in professional development for teachers suggested a different paradigm.

<b>Old (Training) Model</b>	<b>New (Learning) Model</b>
One-shot workshops	Sustained, ongoing deliberations
Disconnected from teachers' work	Integrated/situated in teachers' work
Focused on generic strategies and/or increasing subject matter knowledge	Focused on subject matter and the teaching/ learning of subject matter
Participants as isolated individuals who are receivers of knowledge	Participants as members of learning communities who generate knowledge
Oriented around answers and solutions	Oriented around questions and investigations of practice
Based on a view of teaching as technical work	Based on a view of teaching as intellectual work
Teacher Educator as expert	Teacher Educator as facilitator of teacher learning and co-learner

It was clear that we had our work cut out for us. The goals, the structure and content of professional development would all need to change. We would not only have to teach educators and lay leaders the elements of a new, more robust paradigm; we would also have to train a cadre of educational leaders who could implement it.

## APPENDIX II

### MTEI's Principles of Professional Development in Jewish Settings

(Revised May 10, 2018)

These principles, taken together, articulate our vision of teaching and learning for students, teachers, and professional developers. Just as this vision guides our educational program, we hope to inspire those we work with to adopt it as their own.

1. **Jewish learning at the core.** We value Jewish literacy, broadly conceived, and the exploration of central themes and concepts of Judaism and Jewish history. In particular, we consider interpreting and dialoguing with traditional texts, while interpreting and dialoguing with fellow learners, to be an essential component of Jewish education. We see this learning as having the capacity to foster habits of mind, hand, and heart in both educators and students. Thus, we also believe that deepening fluency in dialoguing with Jewish texts is one of the core aims of professional development for Jewish educators.
2. **Learning rooted in collaborative inquiry.** We highlight both “inquiry” and “collaboration”. Inquiry is at the core of studying texts, investigating teaching practices, learning about learning, and learning from each other in community. Adopting an “inquiry stance” includes, among other things, engaging in an open-minded search for evidence upon which to build ideas and to explore multiple interpretations. We believe that collaborative learning has a variety of strengths that individual learning does not; that learning with colleagues deepens understanding, builds community, adds meaning and purpose, and improves practice. We take our place in the lineage of Jewish learning across time, which values a moral and practical commitment to our colleagues’ learning, through practices such as supporting and challenging each others’ ideas with sensitivity and intellectual honesty.
3. **Intentional creation of community.** Creating a community of collaborative inquiry is on-going, intentional work that supports and is supported by the relational environment we create. To “create a community”, we consciously set up structures aimed at helping participants have time to learn together and feel comfortable taking risks, being vulnerable, and developing trusting relationships. This kind of community environment – what we call a “relational learning community” – fosters learning. Just as a sense of community fosters learning, so, too, does learning together foster the creation of community. Thus, building a professional and relational collaborative learning community is both *how* we do our work as well as an *outcome* of our work.

4. **How we talk matters.** Normal discourse patterns often impede learning. Some of these habits include speaking more than listening or listening without speaking; leaping to judgment of a person or of the meaning of a text or a practice; or falling into predictable power dynamics (e.g., where some people are seen as having the “right” answers). Actively developing and practicing skills of deep listening, encouraging everyone to find his or her voice, and honoring multiple perspectives strengthen trust, create a culture of productive challenge, and promote learning.
5. **Teacher, learner and content – in a context.** These four interrelated elements exist in all learning situations, and the connections between them are fruitful objects of collaborative inquiry. While all four of these elements are inextricably and dynamically linked, we focus on the four with an explicit intention to support MTEI participants in bringing more depth of learning of Jewish content into their settings. One of the crucial aspects of “context” in the realm of professional development is that schools need structures for teachers to continue learning through collaboration with colleagues and through their work with children.
6. **Teachers learn and learners teach.** For the MTEI faculty, part of the value of teaching at MTEI has been our own sense of growth as we have planned and taught together and learned from our students. In other words, we learn as we teach. And because we all, faculty and participants, share our diverse perspectives and interpretations with each other, we all teach as we learn. We celebrate this blending of teaching and learning, teacher and learner.
7. **Leading for change and empowering new leaders.** For educational communities to embody the principles above, they need inspired leaders. When communities do succeed in embodying these principles, they empower new leaders. Both parts matter. Initiating and sustaining changes in culture implied by the principles articulated above require a particular kind of leadership. It is a leadership that brings clarity of vision, an ability to inspire and connect with others, a robust understanding of teaching and learning, knowledge of how to help others grown in their capacity as teachers, skills in conflict-resolution and creative problem-solving, keeping one’s own flame alive through on-going personal and professional development, and more. But this is not all. An essential feature of this kind of leadership is that it also nurtures others in their own capacity for leadership. This is a leadership whose essential feature, in fact, is empowering others, helping to hone the vision, skills, and capacity of each community member. Indeed, an underlying virtue of “intentional communities of collaborative inquiry” is that such communities – because of the connected, creative intellectual work that the leader facilitates – give rise to many new leaders.

8. **There is moral meaning in the work we do.** We believe that Jewish education is ultimately about creating a more just, equitable way of being in the world (among other things). We try to model this in the work we do and to support Jewish education's capacity to contribute to social justice in the world more broadly.