

Analysis

Career Trajectories of Jewish Educators in the United States

An Invitation to Action

Conclusions and
Implications from Studying
the Career Trajectories of
Jewish Educators



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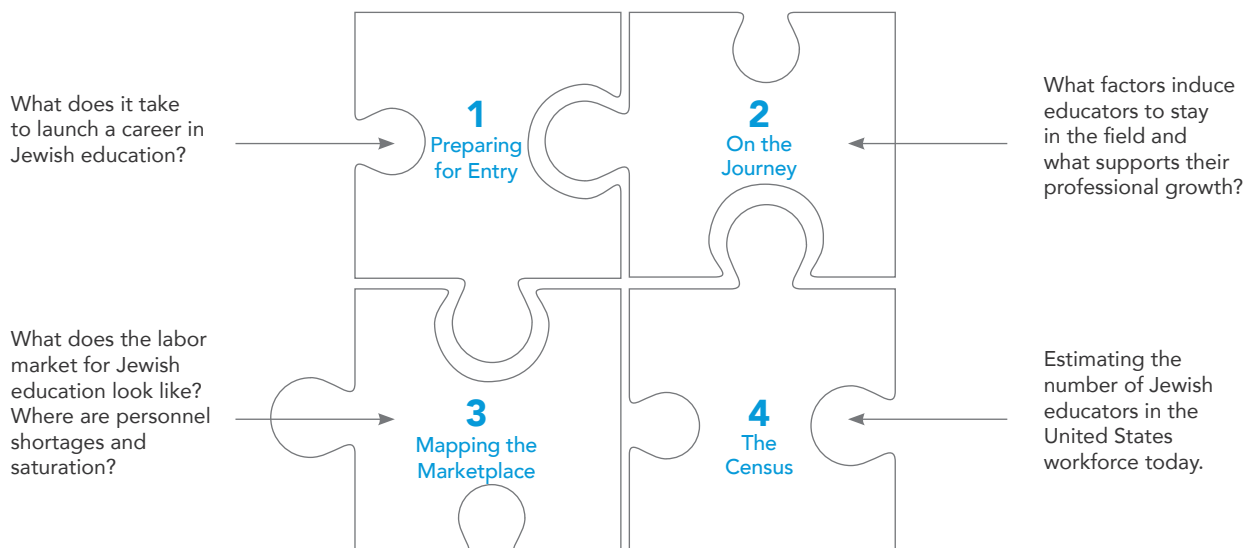
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About this Report

The Collaborative for Applied Studies in Jewish Education (CASJE) is a community of researchers, practitioners, and policymakers dedicated to improving the quality of knowledge that can be used to guide Jewish education and learning. CASJE is committed to developing high quality research that is responsive to critical questions across diverse sectors in Jewish education. CASJE's programmatic and fiduciary home is located at the George Washington University's Graduate School of Education and Human Development (GSEHD).

This report is the last in a series of publications that shares findings from the CASJE Career Trajectories of Jewish Educators Study. The larger CASJE study seeks to understand the recruitment, retention and development of Jewish educators in the United States. You can read more about this study at www.casje.org.

The Career Trajectories Study is organized around four central research questions:



This report seeks to synthesize key themes from across all strands of the larger CASJE study with critical implications for the recruitment, retention and development of Jewish educators in the United States.

You can read more about this study and access reports and briefs related to all of the strands at www.casje.org.

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Introduction

CASJE's *Career Trajectories of Jewish Educators* study is grounded in two assumptions. First, that the effectiveness of Jewish education is dependent upon the quality of its personnel. And second, that the ability to attract and retain such personnel has been undermined by a series of conditions and circumstances that (a) make the field unattractive to potential candidates, (b) deter those already practicing from remaining, and (c) limit opportunities for professional growth among those pursuing a career in the field.

Some of these conditions are not specific to Jewish education. They are shared, for example, by public education and other related professions; their redress calls for a broad societal reorientation to how education and care-providing work is valued and compensated. Some challenges are, however, particular to the Jewish context and, if better understood, might be addressed through well-conceived interventions fueled by significant philanthropic investment.

The *Career Trajectories of Jewish Educators* study was conceived, then, to identify the obstacles preventing the field of Jewish education from becoming more effective in recruiting, retaining, and growing professional Jewish educators.¹ The study is grounded in an operational definition of the Jewish educator as a paid professional who works directly with people of any age who identify as Jews, in settings—whether virtual, brick-and-mortar, or outdoor—that aim to help participants find special meaning in Jewish texts, experiences, and associations. Data were therefore gathered from five sectors within which such individuals might conceivably be found:

Sector 1: Formal Jewish Education: Day schools, supplemental and afterschool programs, and early childhood centers.

Sector 2: Informal/Experiential Settings: Day camps, residential camps, Jewish community centers, youth-serving organizations, and campus organizations.

Sector 3: Engagement, Social Justice, And Innovation: National organizations such as Honeymoon Israel, OneTable, Moishe House, Repair the World, Avodah, and Hazon.

Sector 4: Communal Institutions And Agencies: Federations, Jewish Community Relations Councils, and Jewish Vocational and Family Services.

Sector 5: Non-Organizational Networks: Predominantly made up of self-employed individuals.

The overall project yielded data from three separate, interwoven, and substantial strands of inquiry:

- *Preparing for Entry*, an examination of what draws individuals to become Jewish educators and what turns them away.
- *On the Journey*, an exploration of the career paths Jewish educators take once they choose this field and the conditions of the workplaces in which they're employed.
- *Mapping the Market*, an investigation of the work of Jewish educators in the context of a labor marketplace.

In this concluding report, we weave together our learnings from these three strands and draw on the learnings produced to address the questions that have animated this work from its start. Summaries of the main findings from each strand can be found in the reports and briefs previously released. Here, we bring these findings into conversation with one another.²

¹ An unknown number of people serve as Jewish educators voluntarily, especially in supplemental schools, youth-serving organizations, and some residential camps. Their profiles, motivations, and circumstances are not explored in this study.

² Citations referenced in this report are referred to by the name of the report (for *Preparing for Entry* and *Mapping the Market*) or the specific *On the Journey* brief, rather than author-date format.

Learnings

1 Time to Recognize that Jewish Education is No Longer a Single Field

When Jewish education took root in America, it did so primarily in schools: Sunday schools and afternoon schools. Today, schools continue to provide the context in which American Jews are most likely to experience Jewish education. For those raised in Orthodox Jewish homes, over the past several decades, these schools have been primarily private Jewish day schools; for those raised in non-Orthodox Jewish homes, they continued to be primarily Sunday schools or Hebrew schools.³ These facts hold true despite the contraction of supplemental Jewish education in recent years and despite the tremendous diversification of Jewish education over a much longer period, first—at the start of the last century, and primarily for school-age children—through youth-serving organizations, summer camps, JCCs, and early childhood programs; then—in the last few decades—in many venues that serve young adults: on campus, on Israel experience programs, and in all manner of socially-oriented programs.

This context helps explain why the majority of those who work as Jewish educators today do so as teachers, in supplemental schools, day schools, and early childhood settings (a phenomenon reflected in the makeup of respondents to the *On the Journey* survey). Yet, as all strands of the study confirm, working as a Jewish educator today also has a dizzying array of meanings. So great is that variety in terms of the content and contexts of the work that the term “Jewish educator” may have lost all stable sense. And to confuse matters further, some who do this work today do not like to describe themselves as “Jewish educators.” As reported in the working paper that supported the *On the Journey* strand of the study, “many who are working or have worked on the front lines [of Jewish educational organizations] prefer to describe themselves as facilitators, engagers, social entrepreneurs, or Jewish communal professionals. While they acknowledge ‘Jewish educator’ to be a meaningful descriptor of their professional identity, it is neither sufficient nor complete.”⁴

In the conclusion of the *Mapping the Market* strand of our work, in light of the diversification of Jewish education in recent times, we proposed the following analogy: If until the start of the 20th century, it was possible to conceive of Jewish education as a unitary landmass largely characterized by a set of uniform practices, today, different continents have broken off, each with its distinct ecosystem. This tectonic process has meant that in some sectors, it is more fitting to describe the work of Jewish education as that of Jewish engagement, an activity centered on cultivating a connection to Jewish life and living. Those who inhabit such places believe that almost anyone can be a Jewish educator. This work does not require special or specialized craft-knowledge; it requires a more generalized set of dispositions and life skills. For these reasons, when employers in such places look for new staff, they prioritize the personal and dispositional (who educators are) or the relational (how educators interact with others).⁵ These are the assets that enable Jewish educators/facilitators/engagers to fulfill their employers’ purposes.

3 85% of adult Orthodox Jews who were raised Jewish by religion or had a Jewish parent attended a full-time, Jewish school (day school or yeshiva) for at least one year. 80% of adult Conservative and 74% of adult Reform Jews who were raised Jewish by religion or had a Jewish parent participated in some other kind of formal Jewish education program for at least one year, most commonly a Sunday School or Hebrew School (i.e., afternoon school). See Pew Research Center (2021), p.108–109.

4 Rosov Consulting (2019), p.4.

5 *Mapping the Market*, p.39.

In other places, however, those from which new continents separated, Jewish education continues to be concerned with cultivating cultural literacy and religious or ethnic commitment. The individuals who serve as educators in these places are expected to be Jewishly literate and sufficiently adept in the educational practices they're supposed to employ. This is not work that everyone is expected to be able to do. When employers look for new staff, of course they're not disinterested in who educators are or how they relate to colleagues and customers, but they place a greater emphasis on professional or technical know-how (what educators know): in day schools, for example, they want to make sure that educators come with subject-matter knowledge and in early childhood education, that they bring an understanding of child development.

Even more than where an employer is located in the country or in what size community, these organizational goals strongly influence how challenging it is to find appropriate personnel. In venues where Jewish educators are expected to possess specialized skills and distinct pedagogic content knowledge, new hires are harder to find than if their most desirable assets are an ability to communicate, relate engagingly with peers, and model an appetite for Jewish growth. To put it succinctly, engagers are a lot easier to find—though they're also harder to retain—than are educators.⁶

Not surprisingly, the personnel who come to work in these different systems find their way from different points of departure. Sector 1 educators (those who work in day school, supplemental school, and early childhood education⁷) were socialized in educationally rich Jewish environments, about which they felt more positively, than their peers in other sectors of Jewish education.⁸ Their "origin stories" as Jewish educators differ markedly from their peers in other sectors. While only a minority identified as being "born and bred" Jewish educators, they're much more likely to attribute their decision to become a Jewish educator to a range of positive experiences with Jewish education and Jewish role models in their early years. Sector 2 educators experienced somewhat similar pathways to the field, inspired by early experiences at camp, for example. But Sector 3 educators recount different career narratives: they more commonly highlight experiences in college, on a trip to Israel, or with an organization much like the one where they work today. They were often late arrivals in the field, too.⁹ In related fashion, Sector 1 educators also report significantly higher levels of Jewish and Hebrew knowledge than do their peers in other sectors of Jewish education. Although they may have gained this knowledge on the job or while preparing for entry, interview data suggest that these gaps likely reflect their different backgrounds.¹⁰

The tectonic processes we describe above affect almost every aspect of the marketplace for Jewish educators, including where employers look for staff, how they go about recruiting, and how long people are likely to stay in the work once hired. Here, we highlight the profound implications of these divergences for the kinds of professional development staff are encouraged or required to experience once hired. Because Sector 3 and Sector 4 organizations can frequently choose from a surfeit of candidates or can wait to find the ideal candidate, they tend to assume that their new hires are already quite competent. In these settings, where the prized attributes of educators are personal and relational, rather than technical, professional development focuses more on sustaining the overall personal and intellectual growth of team members or is intended to upgrade their sensitivities and skills in relation to specific topics or issues. There's a different dynamic among Sector 1 and Sector 2 organizations, especially among those organizations that

6 *Mapping the Market*, p.11-12.

7 Of those early childhood educators who identify as Jewish.

8 *Preparing for Entry*, p.16-17.

9 It is difficult to make similar generalizations about Sector 4 (communal or Federation educators). They are fewer in number, and their roles are diverse.

10 *Preparing for Entry*, p.18-19.

struggle to hire optimal candidates. For these employers, professional development takes on a more educative or even remedial function. In the case of supplemental schools, for example, where many of those who serve as teachers or facilitators of learning do not have an educational background, professional development is heavily concentrated on inculcating core practices or developing pedagogic content knowledge.¹¹ Although staff who work in these various sectors might all be characterized by the term “Jewish educator,” their professional development needs appear to be ever more distinct.

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

The fracturing of the field of Jewish education constitutes a major departure from its historic composition. This change has resulted in a reality where employers seek wholly different sets of skills in those they hire, and educators have profoundly different professional development needs, depending on where they work. It looks, increasingly, as if the preparation of educators and their professional development in these different fields of endeavors need to be tailored to the specific practices and purposes associated with those fields.

2 Why a Sense of Mission Matters

Despite the fracturing of the field and the unevenness of the market landscape, Jewish educators are nevertheless motivated by a common mission (what some call a common calling) to enhance others’ lives with Jewish meaning. Remarkably, whatever the sector in which they work and whatever form their work takes, this sense of mission seems to be widely shared by Jewish educators and is significantly less widespread among those who either once worked as Jewish educators and have left the field or those who never worked in the field to begin with but had “reasonable potential” to do so. In this section, we discuss why this finding is not just an inspiring curiosity but a key to understanding educator retention.

The *Preparing for Entry* strand compared a sample of early career Jewish educators (people within their first five years in the field) who indicate they plan to continue with this work with two similar populations: individuals who once worked in Jewish education but left within five years and do not plan to return, and individuals who never worked in the field at all. These survey data reveal that those who work as Jewish educators today and plan to stay express a heightened enthusiasm for Jewish learning, for continuing to grow in Jewish terms, and for working in places that are compatible with these enthusiasms. Even more important (since in principle such passions might just as readily be shared by people who lead rich Jewish lives without becoming Jewish educators), the enthusiasm that Jewish educators express for Jewish life and learning exists alongside an additional passion to share the sources of this enthusiasm with others, what can be characterized as a sense of “personal Jewish mission.” This analytical construct, “personal Jewish mission,” is made up of survey items such as “I want to share the value of Jewish life with others” and “I want to contribute to the Jewish people” and is something with which educators are significantly more likely to agree than those who have left the field or never worked in it.¹²

Further data from the same survey show that these expressions of Jewish commitment and Jewish mission are interwoven with additional values, among them, an impulse to contribute to the lives of others. Of course, this vein of altruism is not unique to Jewish education; almost by definition, all educators seek to contribute to the lives of others. For Jewish educators, this universal disposition

¹¹ *Mapping the Market*, p. 26–27.

¹² *Preparing for Entry*, p.18.

is fused with particularistic concerns, whether in the form of the subject matter on which educators draw, the contexts in which they work, or the persons they seek to engage. In practice, we can distinguish between those educators for whom “education” is in the foreground (“I see the impact that I can and do have on the kids, shaping them through the most vital time in their life”) and those for whom the “Jewish” is front and center (“I find a lot of meaning in bringing up the next generation of Jews”).¹³ In conceptual terms, however, these distinctions are artificial: Jewish education is the dialect within which educators give expression to universal values, or to state it differently, education is the most effective means by which to make a contribution to the Jewish community.¹⁴ One way or another, this commitment runs deep and is remarkably pervasive among Jewish educators, and—this is the key point—it is significantly stronger among Jewish educators who plan to stay in the field than among those employed today in other fields of work or who once worked in the field but left. In this respect, educators differ more from those not involved in this work than they do from one another regardless of whether their primary concern is education or engagement.¹⁵

Interview data with current educators make visible how the sense of mission to be a Jewish educator can be ignited at any moment in a person’s life. This mission is frequently associated with the contribution of an inspirational person, a family member, an educator, or a Jewish role model, perhaps someone who tapped them on the shoulder and said, “you really should consider working as an educator or rabbi.”¹⁶ It might come about from a positive or enlightening Jewish experience at camp or with peers at college, resulting in the realization that “I can do this,” or the thrill of seeing “the impact I can have with my life.” In some cases, negative experiences of Jewish education might also awaken a desire to ensure that others shouldn’t miss out or suffer in the same way. How the fire first gets started is often idiosyncratic and unpredictable, making it hard to know how to ignite the same passion in future generations of educators; but once the passion has been awakened, it can be nourished with appropriate support.

On the Journey data, drawn from people who have been working in Jewish education for more than five years, reveal the extent to which people enter the field without necessarily having planned or prepared to do so first. Half of survey respondents report that they originally decided to become a Jewish educator because among other reasons, “I had a job opportunity and decided to take it.”¹⁷ (These people strongly resemble those who come into education as tourists, as depicted in classic studies of teachers’ career trajectories.¹⁸) This finding suggests that many such people did not become Jewish educators initially inspired by a mission to contribute to the lives of others. Indeed, those who joined this profession by chance and stayed for at least five years are more likely to agree with the statement: “If I could do it all over again, I would choose to work in a different profession” than those who didn’t enter by accident (i.e., did not choose the response option “I had a job opportunity and decided to take it”).¹⁹ Evidently, some Jewish educators never really develop a sense of mission for the work, while others, if they come to this work because the opportunity presented itself, only develop that feeling of being on a mission in the course of the work. Immersed in the field, they discover meaning they had not realized was possible.

It is entirely possible, then, that most people who start work as Jewish educators are not initially brought to it by a sense of personal mission. What seems clear, though, is that however this passion originates—whether long before someone starts work as a Jewish educator or only once they’ve spent time in the field—few people stick with the work without being propelled by these

13 “The Journeys of Jewish Educators” (*On the Journey* Brief #1), p.18–19.

14 *Preparing for Entry*, p.21–22.

15 *Preparing for Entry*, p.26–30.

16 Rosov Consulting (2020), p.9.

17 “The Journeys of Jewish Educators” (*On the Journey* Brief #1), p.7.

18 See Huberman (1993).

19 “The Journeys of Jewish Educators” (*On the Journey* Brief #1), p.7.

commitments. This is surely what explains the differences between the values and commitments of those who plan to stay in the field and those who once worked in it but do not intend to return. It is as if these values enable those who hold them to persist with the work even when it, or the workplaces in which it unfolds, is challenging.

In our analysis of *Preparing for Entry* data, and specifically of what leads people not to enter the field or to leave after only a short time, we conceptualized and then saw borne out a distinction between structural and circumstantial inhibitors. Structural inhibitors are those features endemic to the field, such as poor pay, mediocre benefits, or parochialism, that drive people away from it. Circumstantial inhibitors are features of specific workplaces, such as toxic staff relationships and unreliable leadership. While circumstantial inhibitors can result in people leaving their places of employment and sometimes even leaving the field altogether, there are usually interventions and solutions near at hand to address these challenges. Structural inhibitors are more challenging to address; they're built into the field, and they're exceptionally hard to ignore without some propulsive force pushing for retention or redemption. That, it seems, is where being driven by a sense of mission—by an educator's calling—is so important. When the work is challenging and the pay and benefits can be modest, it is hard to sustain a career without such commitments. A sense of mission is an important contributor to educator retention.

Survey responses indicate that educators who plan to remain in the field are not naïve about these inhibitors. They are more likely to agree that the field involves “poor work-life balance,” and they are less likely to agree that this is a field with “good benefits.” Jewish educators are not, then, uninformed or unrealistic about the conditions under which they work, or the demands made of them. It just seems that they're sufficiently committed to the ultimate purposes of their work that they don't let these challenges deflect them from their path. As one early career interviewee succinctly explained: *“It's a really meaningful field, but one that is really demanding, in terms of time, energy, personal commitment. You do it because you love it. It's something that's really hard to fake.”*²⁰

The challenge for those who seek to increase educator recruitment is that it is difficult to ignite a sense of mission in someone in the first place; what might light the spark is unpredictable. Once, however, the spark has been lit, there are ways of keeping it alight. And this is crucial since a sense of mission is even more important in sustaining educators' commitment to their work than initially drawing them to the field. As we will argue below, there are interventions that have a history of sustaining such a sense of mission in Jewish educators. Mission, it turns out, is not an all-or-nothing quality. The heat can be turned up or down, and a sense of mission that starts out as “naïve passion” for the work can become something more mature: deep and abiding even in the face of challenging realities.

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

Despite the fracturing of the field and the unevenness of the landscape, Jewish educators are nevertheless motivated by a shared mission or a common calling. This sense of mission distinguishes educators from those who have never worked in the field at all, and, even more so, from those who once started work as Jewish educators and then left. Mission is a key element in resisting the structural inhibitors that drive people away from the field. To improve rates of educator retention, it is vital to ensure that those who entered the field because “the opportunity was available” have occasions to find such a personal sense of mission themselves. Mission can indeed be cultivated and sustained. It's not all or nothing.

²⁰ *Preparing for Entry*, p.24.

3 Mission Has a Dark Side

A sense of mission is critical, then, to ensuring educator retention, and yet, ironically, the prevalence of this sense of mission seems to be a factor in one of the most troubling features of the field: the poor pay and inferior benefits that educators receive.

First, to establish some facts: generally speaking, despite decades of outrage and periodic efforts to address the problem, Jewish educators are poorly compensated for their work. The mean salary among the almost 1,300 respondents to the *On the Journey* survey who work full time is \$62,500. At such levels of compensation, many educators cannot afford to pay full tuition for their own children at the organizations where they work. At the high end, average pay for full-time educators in supplementary schools is \$72,500;²¹ and at the low end, in early childhood education, it is \$40,000. 9% of full-time educators report receiving no additional benefits at all as part of their work (including 27% of those who work in supplemental schools). To offer a few specifics, overall 35% do not receive a paid vacation, 38% do not receive medical insurance, and 73% must pay for their professional development and must do so “on their own watch.”

The salaries and benefits of some educators have improved in recent years—those who work full time in supplemental schools and in informal education venues have profited from efforts to professionalize those fields—but overall, the general situation is not much different from what it was when these matters were explored by the *Educators in Jewish Schools Study* (EJSS) in 2007. The sad reality is that certain deep social forces shape this situation. Jewish education is not taken very seriously by most members of the Jewish community in the United States; education more broadly is also not taken very seriously, when compared with other countries. And like other professions where most members of the labor force are women (83% of the *On the Journey* survey respondents) and where a high proportion of employees work part time (about a third of *On the Journey* respondents), those who do this work are not well paid. To make matters worse, consistently, across the field, women are paid less than men. As we noted at the start, it will take a profound reorientation in social values to address these issues.

Beyond these depressing facts, our exploration of the career journeys of Jewish educators revealed an additional troubling phenomenon, something we called in the *On the Journey* strand “the dark side of calling.” It seems that because so many Jewish educators are driven by a sense of mission, or a higher calling, they can be financially exploited. The fact that educators derive rich intrinsic rewards in the course of fulfilling mission-driven work enables employers to skimp on the extrinsic rewards: good pay and benefits, reasonable work hours, and even professional respect. As one early childhood educator noted during an interview, Jewish institutions have come to expect that their staff will go “above and beyond” because they are so dedicated to their work and the Jewish community:

*I think, as is probably true for most Jewish professionals, that my role and investment and sense of belonging and identity being wrapped up in this community mean that I am constantly going above and beyond my employment role and that Jewish institutions depend on that.*²²

By the same token, it is notable that the few interviewees who referenced the term “calling” in their interviews did so to highlight challenges they have faced. The following observations from a Sector 3 (innovation) educator capture a feeling that one’s good intentions are being exploited:

21 This relatively high salary is likely inflated by the high proportions of respondents in this venue who also play an administrative role, a position that comes with an enhanced salary.

22 “The Journeys of Jewish Educators” (*On the Journey* Brief #1), p.22

*Salary has long been an issue in day school education tiers, in nonprofit work, and in some Jewish innovation startups. We do this work because it is our calling, our life's work, and we are committed to it—not because we think it can pay the bills.*²³

Against this backdrop, it's tempting to suggest that nearly a quarter of job announcements in most sectors or venues of Jewish education don't advertise salary because employers predict that the educators they're trying to recruit are less interested in what they'll be paid than in simply being given the opportunity to make a contribution.²⁴ Those educators are seen to be more interested in existential rewards than material rewards. More bleak still, the pay and conditions are so unattractive, it's possible that publicly announcing them would drive away prospective candidates by calling attention to something neophyte educators are ready to overlook. As a supplemental school director confessed in a focus group, the work is not exactly something that many would be happy advertising:

*Lack of compensation, not knowing for sure if I am going to be there the next day. Where is it going to take me? How far can I go? It's not attractive. It's not sexy. If I'm going to go out to the bar with my friends, what am I going to say? I'm a religious-school teacher? Are you kidding me? That's what you're doing today? We don't have enough money to offer. So you offer very little money with a lot of expectations, and people don't want to go into it. There are less and less people to choose from.*²⁵

These phenomena may have a less obvious but possibly more profound source, one that, challengingly, is baked into the sociology of work. As reported in the working paper that supported the *Preparing for Entry* study, sociological literature contrasts the sense of having a "calling" with that of having a "job" or having a "career." The following formulation has been widely cited in this respect:

People who have jobs are only interested in the material benefits from work and do not seek or receive any other type of reward from it...people who have careers have a deeper personal investment in their work and mark their achievements not only through monetary gain, but through advancement within the occupational structure.... A person with a calling works not for financial gain or career advancement, but instead for the fulfillment that doing the work brings to the individual.²⁶

What distinguishes a career from a job, in these terms, is a temporal dimension. The concept of career indicates that the work one is doing today has meaning over the course of a sweep of time. One can think of it as building toward something more significant than the rewards one receives in the moment. Moreover, professional development acquires real meaning when thinking about one's work within a temporal dimension, as part of a career. The long-view enables educators to see how their professional learning today will have special value in the future. Viewing work as an expression of one's career stimulates the appetite to improve and to advance. And yet, at least in this formulation, a sense of calling (what we dubbed a sense of personal mission) is somewhat incompatible with these features too. When work is viewed as a calling, it gains a sense of ultimacy, of higher purpose, but it lacks a temporal dimension. No doubt the sense of calling would benefit from being refueled or reignited, but it does not presume the need for continued growth. In this sense, "calling" supplants "career" and upgrades the motivations that launch and sustain a career. If a person is moved by a higher purpose, the accessories of professionalism can lose importance. A lack of professionalism can be excused if the educator's work is suffused with an admirable passion. Based on the data from this study, that's a trade-off that many employers, and many consumers of Jewish education, seem prepared to make.

²³ "The Journeys of Jewish Educators" (*On the Journey* Brief #1), p.20–21.

²⁴ *Mapping the Market*, p.23.

²⁵ *Mapping the Market*, p.23.

²⁶ Wrzesniewski et al. (1997), p.22.

The tension between calling and career is especially visible in certain venues of Jewish education. In the fields of camping and youth work, most educators are not expected to stay for long—two or three years at the most. The turnover is extreme, but not typically seen as a problem. Those who enter these fields arrive fueled by deep passion for the work—a true sense of calling—and at the same time, they rarely think of this work as a career. It’s literally a passion project before they move on with the rest of their lives. In contexts where such altruism is celebrated and cultivated, professional development seems less urgent and material rewards (what someone would expect to earn in a “decent job”) are also less important.²⁷

In other venues where it is hoped that educators will stay longer, it is not clear how much room there is for both professionalism and passion, a career sensibility, or a sense of calling. If, however, cultivating a sense of calling or mission is seen as the task of employers and not just a private matter for educators (as something educators either have or don’t have), then a fusion of professionalism and passion is possible. It may be that through purposeful nurturing, this fusion of the personal and the professional can be brought into existence.

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

A sense of mission or calling is a critical factor in educator retention, and yet it also contributes to one of the most problematic aspects of Jewish education as a field of employment: the poor compensation educators receive for their work. When a sense of calling is viewed as an all-or-nothing quality, it also seems to suppress investment in professional development; its presence can be used to excuse a lack of professionalism. When educator development intentionally fuses the personal and the professional, it can harness the best possible outcomes of the educator’s sense of personal mission.

4 Challenging the Mental Models that Obstruct Recruitment

We already noted the paradox that while the work of Jewish educators today is probably more varied and diverse than at any time in history, there are still more Jewish educators in North America working as teachers in schools (Sector 1) than in any other role. We previously highlighted the definitional challenge this poses (clarifying who is and is not a Jewish educator), and we indicated the challenges created by these circumstances for the design of professional development when the work of Jewish educators has become so diversified. Today, it requires great craft to create common learning experiences that can be equally useful for the full range of roles played by Jewish educators.

Commencing our study of entry into the field, we had assumed that the diversification of Jewish educators’ roles had made it easier to attract potential recruits to this work than in the past. We expected that with a greater variety of positions available, more people had opportunities to imagine themselves as Jewish educators and organizations would find it easier to source candidates. This certainly seems to be the case for Sector 3 organizations that serve young adult populations. For these employers, recruitment is much less of a challenge than for others. Their organizations have extensive alumni listservs that provide access to large numbers of mission-aligned candidates. They operate on a national stage and draw from wide pools, even when looking to make a local hire. These organizations are also often structured to hire some staff for

²⁷ The work of the Jewish Teen Education & Engagement Funder Collaborative, with its focus on providing substantial professional development for those working in the field, provides a counternarrative to the expectation that educator turnover will remain high and that compensation and training matter less.

shorter-term fellowship or internship tracks that then generate pools of candidates in which they can fish for permanent positions when those become available.²⁸

This, it seems, is only part of the story. Because *Preparing for Entry* was designed to learn about those who had “reasonable potential” of entering the field but did not do so, we became aware of several important populations that had not attracted much attention in research on recruitment to the field of Jewish education, which until now, had been almost exclusively focused on individuals who had become educators. We characterized one previously overlooked population as “fellow travelers,” young people who had spent time in “seed sectors,” settings from which, historically, Jewish educators have come—camps, Hillel student boards, Israel experience programs—but who chose to work in other fields.²⁹ These people were not deterred by Jewish education’s structural or circumstantial inhibitors; they were simply more attracted to other fields of work. There is a substantial number of these “fellow travelers,” and they could yet be mobilized as advocates for, funders of, and volunteers in Jewish education.

More unexpected, we found a sizable number of people who had actually been interested in becoming Jewish educators but, as we put it, did not possess a map or model to find their way into this work.³⁰ These people, despite their interest in Jewish life and learning, and in enabling others to enjoy such things (two of the most prevalent characteristics among educators in the strands of our study), presumed they would not fit in the field or that the field would not be a good fit for them. Many supposed that work as a Jewish educator necessarily involves teaching in a day school or supplemental school or serving as a congregational rabbi. They didn’t imagine that Jewish educators performed other roles. They therefore concluded they would be grossly unqualified for such roles, or the roles themselves didn’t sufficiently appeal to them. Here’s how one of them explained this perspective:

To be honest, even if I wanted to, I wouldn’t know exactly how to get involved in the Jewish world. I did apply for some positions at Hillel, but that didn’t go anywhere ... lack of opportunities, but also lack of knowledge of how. I wouldn’t know where to start, what I should major in in college? After I do that, where do I go as a career path? What’s the chain of events that leads there? And also knowing it’s not just becoming a rabbi.³¹

These people have been left stranded by what we earlier called the tectonic shifts in the field. Their perceptions of the field of Jewish education—their “mental models”—are shaped by an era that has passed. In one of the most influential studies of what it means to be an educator, Dan Lortie discussed how teacher education is challenged by what he called an “apprenticeship of observation”: all prospective teachers have spent thousands of hours observing teaching from the other side of the teacher’s desk, and they presume to know what it involves.³² The types we describe here are impacted by the same problem: their perceptions of what a career in Jewish education might look like are distorted by a long apprenticeship of observation; they’re limited to whatever models of Jewish education they personally experienced themselves. Even if their own experience of Jewish education was as little as ten years ago, the field has changed a great deal since.

Addressing this perception problem is more easily said than done, as we found when recruiting educators who had been in the field for more than five years for the *On the Journey* survey. To reach the widest possible pool of educators in the eight communities where we conducted this strand of the study, where possible we contacted staff at the local agency or bureau for Jewish education, or at least the primary body for support and services to Jewish educators in that

28 *Mapping the Market*, p.22.

29 *Preparing for Entry*, p.26.

30 *Preparing for Entry*, p.27–28.

31 *Preparing for Entry*, p.13.

32 Lortie (1975).

community.³³ We found that primarily those agencies only served Sector 1 educators (those in day schools, supplemental schools, and early childhood centers). If we wanted to reach educators who worked in camps, let alone those who worked in organizations in the innovation or social justice sectors, we had to do so via staff members at the local Jewish Federation who were not necessarily responsible for education but for various forms of teen or young adult engagement. These data-gathering challenges might seem trivial, but they illuminate the extent to which the communal organizational support structures have reified traditional conceptions of who a Jewish educator is. Effectively, communities communicate that if you don't work in a school or with young children, you're not really an educator. Today, that is further from the truth than it has ever been. The challenge is that not enough prospective educators are aware of this truth.

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

Prospective Jewish educators are often limited by their own early experiences of Jewish education, their own "extended apprenticeship of observation." They cannot imagine the wide variety of opportunities for work in various sectors of this field which they never experienced themselves, and simply don't apply for positions. A general marketing campaign is needed to communicate the great variety of opportunities and roles that do in fact exist the field. (More challengingly, where support for Jewish education is positioned within community ecosystems also needs to be updated to reflect the field's diversification.) If more "Seed Sector" alumni knew what the work of Jewish educators involves today, they might give it a serious second look.

5 The Erosion of Enabling Opportunities by Market Forces

One of the strongest areas of alignment between the *Preparing for Entry* and *On the Journey* strands was in demonstrating a positive association between participating in what we called "Enabling Opportunities" and educator retention. Enabling Opportunities are early career experiences—degree-granting pre-service or early career in-service programs—designed with the specific intent of translating an already stimulated appetite to work as a Jewish educator into a willingness and ability to be one. At the same time, the *Mapping the Market* strand shows diminishing demand among both employers and employees for these experiences, as currently constituted. These interventions contribute to Jewish educators being able to survive and thrive in their work, but market forces are eroding their capacity to do so.

In the field of Jewish education, Enabling Opportunities take various forms: fellowship programs, internships (paid or not), accessible first experiences of work, or university-based programs. Some occur before educators join the workforce, while some serve educators during their very first years on the job. All these opportunities enable people to reach the threshold of "career entry" (the five-year mark) and then perhaps to see themselves, unambiguously, as Jewish educators and not just temporary explorers of the field. Almost half (46%) of *Preparing for Entry* survey respondents who are currently working as Jewish educators and who plan to continue to work in the field participated in an Enabling Opportunity of this kind. By contrast, fewer than a quarter (23%) of respondents who started work as Jewish educators and then left the field within five years participated in a similar experience.

33 See "On the Journey: Study Methodology and Data Collection Instruments," p.6.

It is quite likely that participating in an Enabling Opportunity increases the likelihood that someone will enter and stay in the field. Graduates or alumni of these programs, when compared with educators who did not participate in them, exhibit—in their survey responses—a greater love of Jewish learning, a more expansive sense of personal Jewish mission, and a greater desire to contribute to the lives of others. Their interview responses indicate that, while prior to their enrollment, they were often the most determined to become Jewish educators, these experiences helped clarify their values or deepened an existing passion for Jewish education and Jewish learning (what we previously called a personal Jewish mission). By providing scaffolded practicum experiences or on-the-job support, or by introducing critical skills, theories, and know-how, these programs help their graduates or alumni not only survive but thrive as skilled professionals. Interviewees indicate that the programs also provide one further benefit: they nurture support systems of peers and mentors who can be invaluable aides when the work gets hard or when the workplace conditions are subpar. These supporters and allies often play a decisive role in ameliorating the impact of constricting circumstantial inhibitors.

Given the many benefits accruing from participation in these experiences, it is unfortunate that fewer and fewer employers expect new hires to complete such a program as a prerequisite for getting a job. This is not a new phenomenon. Almost twenty years ago, when Cousens reviewed the state of the field, she reported that tackling the challenges of recruitment and retention was less about ensuring there were enough “bodies” and more about the quality of those coming into or staying in the field.³⁴ Quality was undermined by efforts to bring people into the field, no matter their qualifications. One of the interviewees in the *Mapping the Market* strand, a university dean, reflected on a similar phenomenon:

*The hurdle is convincing people it's worth their time and thousands of dollars to actually prepare for the job they are looking to have. I can't say "without this you can't teach." In Jewish education, you don't have to be at all prepared in any professional way. You can get a job without being prepared.*³⁵

In recent years, the phenomenon has become even more widespread. There has been a kind of race to the bottom with employers expecting fewer and fewer prerequisites of prospective hires. This was confirmed by our interviews with employers across the field's many and varied sectors. Today, this is not so much a problem of supply and demand, with diminished supply lowering expectations. Rather, it stems from a fundamental change in what employers are looking for. With candidates' relational and dispositional assets becoming ever more important, employers have begun devaluing pedagogic content knowledge and the kinds of know-how prospective educators can learn in a university classroom or a structured practicum. The primary considerations for employers have become *who* prospective educators are and *how* they relate to others, not what they know. As we noted in the *Mapping the Market* report, in those Sector 3 institutions geared to disrupt or innovate across Jewish life, some employers even prefer that new hires not be trained by what they perceive to be out-of-touch legacy institutions. Better that those new recruits learn on the job.

A second contributor to the erosion of pre-service or early career preparation programs has been the decline in their perceived economic value. It simply doesn't pay to invest funds in a degree or some other form of preparation when the salary will not be commensurate with the costs incurred, especially if one hopes to remain in a teaching role and not become an administrator. The rising costs of such experiences has long been camouflaged by philanthropic subsidies. When philanthropy moves on to other beneficiaries, the flaws in the business model become more readily

³⁴ Cousens (2003).

³⁵ *Mapping the Market*, p.30.

visible. This is the essence of the reflections of a college faculty member whose institution no longer offers a program that once produced a steady number of new educators each year.

This is all tied to money. If a teacher is earning \$55K–\$65K a year, they cannot afford themselves to pay for an MA that is going to cost \$25K per year. It’s not a business plan that works. If we want people to develop their skills and capacities, and to be lifelong learners, like we do in medicine, we need to invest in this....There is a mismatch between what places are offering and what people need. Putting the financial burden on the teachers makes it impossible.³⁶

Market forces are irresistible, and they have steadily eroded investment in and appetite for experiences that help improve the field.

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

Educators who participate in “Enabling Opportunities”—early career frameworks that provide their participants with know-how, enhance their sense of personal mission, and build professional resilience—are more likely to commit long term to the work of Jewish education and be successful at it. And yet, today, fewer and fewer employers require new hires to be formally prepared in this way. While it won’t be possible to turn back the clock in the face of the market forces that have shaped this reality, it is critical to find other ways of assisting and incentivizing early-career educators to participate in such experiences given the special benefits associated with participating in them. If preservice is no longer an attractive paradigm, then it’s worth exploring how an in-service model might gain traction.

³⁶ *Mapping the Market*, p.30.

Conclusion

Applying Research Findings

CASJE's *Career Trajectories of Jewish Educators* study is an instance of applied research. Data were gathered in the hope that they will inform policies, practices, and philanthropic investment to increase the numbers and quality of people recruited to work in the field of Jewish education and ready to continue with that work. In this final section, we suggest some preliminary practical implications of the study, recognizing that CASJE intends to convene broader conversations about the study's implications with communities and individuals with a stake in these issues. These recommendations offer a place from which those conversations can start.

1. Encouraging the Continued Diversification of the Supply Side of the Marketplace

With the field of Jewish education having fragmented to the degree that the term "Jewish educator" no longer conveys a singular meaning, and with educators entering the field with such varied "origin stories," the continued diversification of the supply side of the field is worth encouraging. Educators (however these people are labeled) have different preparation and professional development needs, depending on the sectors in which they work. Yes, this diversification has challenged legacy institutions that historically designed programs and degrees to serve the field of Jewish education as a whole, a process documented in the *Mapping the Market* strand. While those institutions still have an important role to play, their roles should be more sharply focused on serving the needs of specific sectors. Alongside these institutions, newer and newly emerging providers can service the diversifying needs of the field, too, and should be encouraged to do so. If the services offered meet consensus standards for effective professional development, the competition will be good for the field.

2. Nourishing a Mature Passion

While the field diversifies, those who work in it do nevertheless share a distinguishing and distinguished passion, what we characterized as a sense of mission to enhance others' lives with Jewish meaning. It is critical to spark and nourish that sense of mission. It brings many educators into the field and keeps even more of them there. The most powerful forms of professional development deepen professional know-how and at the same time fuel this sense of mission—they cultivate both skills and commitments. This dual task is not easy to accomplish. Organizational and individual consumers of professional development should make sure that the services they employ deliver on this dual promise, providing both utility and ultimate meaning.³⁷ By means of this duality, professional development helps contribute to career commitment, professional self-efficacy, and educator satisfaction (which have been shown to be strong predictors of educational outcomes), ultimately keeping a sense of personal mission aflame in its most mature forms.

3. There Must be Better Ways to Reward Educators

It is unlikely that the pay levels of Jewish educators, or of educators more generally, will ever significantly improve. The costs involved would be unsupportable, especially if they have to be passed on to the fee-paying consumer, as is invariably the case in private, parochial systems. Surely, though, it is possible to improve the benefits packages many Jewish educators receive and to ensure that educators' passion for their work does not enable employers to take advantage of

³⁷ The Jim Joseph Foundation's Professional Development Initiative supported ten programs, many of which accomplished this dual task. Case studies of these programs can be seen at <https://jimjosephfoundation.org/learning-resources/research-and-evaluation-on-educator-professional-development-initiatives/>.

them economically. Such measures can be financially sustainable. Moreover, investing in improved benefits packages and paying greater attention to workplace conditions (providing educators with more opportunities for professional development, more intensive mentoring, a career ladder with leadership roles, and greater recognition for their efforts, for example) would not only be morally correct, it would contribute to greater educator retention and cultivate career commitment, satisfaction, and self-efficacy—a trifecta that research suggests will surely enhance outcomes for learners and other program participants.

4. Updating the Model

Jewish education has an image problem, and that problem is reinforced by the structure of Jewish community systems. Jewish educators are widely assumed to be either teachers or rabbis. If more people knew that there are many more ways to enrich others' lives with Jewish meaning, they would probably explore entry to this field in greater numbers. A broadly imagined marketing campaign to communicate this changed reality, targeting the thousands of young people located in what we called Seed Sectors (settings like summer camps and Israel experiences from which historically Jewish educators have disproportionately come) would help challenge the mental models that keep prospective recruits away. Similar campaigns have changed perceptions about teaching science and math.³⁸ The image of Jewish educators' work would benefit from a similar makeover.

5. Enabling Opportunities: Getting the Timing Right

Enabling Opportunities contribute to educator retention, resilience, and sophistication. And yet, employers and educators have a diminished appetite for these experiences as entry ramps into the field. If educators who have made it beyond an induction phase (years one and two) but are still relatively new to the field (within the first five years) had more opportunities to participate in such programs, many more of them might choose to stay in the field longer and would make a positive contribution in doing so. It's all about timing. Currently, very few programs serve educators at the liminal moment between induction and being truly settled in the field. If educators could participate in such experiences between their third and fifth years in the work, our data suggest that the odds in favor of retention and growth could shift profoundly.

38 The communications strategy of 100Kin10 is an outstanding example in this respect. See <https://100kin10.org/>.

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