



LIBRARY COPYRIGHT NOTICE

www.huc.edu/libraries

Regulated Warning

See Code of Federal Regulations, Title 37, Volume 1, Section 201.14:

The copyright law of the United States (title 17, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted material.

Under certain conditions specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to furnish a photocopy or other reproduction. One of these specific conditions is that the photocopy or reproduction is not to be “used for any purpose other than private study, scholarship, or research.” If a user makes a request for, or later uses, a photocopy or reproduction for purposes in excess of “fair use,” that user may be liable for copyright infringement.

This institution reserves the right to refuse to accept a copying order if, in its judgment, fulfillment of the order would involve violation of copyright law.

**SUPPLEMENTARY EDUCATION RE-IMAGINED:
THE JEWISH AFTER-SCHOOL**

Anna Meyers Burke

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for Ordination

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
Rabbinical Program
Cincinnati, OH

Date: March 13, 2023
Adviser: Rabbi Dr. Jan Katzew

ABSTRACT

The following capstone provides an analysis of interviews with five educational leaders of Jewish after-school programs that operate five days a week. Through the interviews, I sought to better understand the effect of supplementary educational programs that devote more time to Jewish learning on both participants and the field of Jewish education. Throughout the capstone, I highlight program trends and offer information specific to each using quotes and anecdotes from the interviews. In the introductory chapter, I discuss my motivation and rationale for investigating the programs, provide an overview of the interview process, including the interview questions, and present an overview of each program. The second chapter details the educational goals and approaches of the program directors, while the third chapter describes the educational content and curricula of the programs. The fourth chapter portrays the profiles of Jewish families utilizing the programs and addresses the educational impact on them. The conclusion summarizes my findings and shares my reflections and ideas for further research.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincerest gratitude to my capstone adviser, Rabbi Dr. Jan Katzew, for devoting significant time to learning with me, teaching me, guiding me, and encouraging me throughout the entire capstone process. Thank you for always being a mentor, friend, and trusted colleague. I am also indebted to the faculty of the Rhea Hirsch School of Education at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institution of Religion for inspiring me to pursue both capstone research and a career in the field of Jewish education. I offer a special thanks to the staff, faculty, and students of the Cincinnati campus for creating and sustaining a learning environment that nurtured me and allowed me to grow as a person and a rabbi. Finally, I thank my husband, Rand, for his endless support over the past year with my capstone and for embarking on the journey toward the rabbinate with me.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	1
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	2
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	4
RATIONALE	4
PROCESS	7
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS	9
OVERVIEW OF PROGRAMS	11
CHAPTER TWO: EDUCATIONAL GOALS AND APPROACHES	12
EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT	13
COMMUNITY, BELONGING, AND INCLUSIVITY	17
KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS FOR LIFELONG JEWISH LIVING AND LEARNING	22
CHAPTER 3: EDUCATIONAL CONTENT	27
JEWISH CALENDAR & HOLIDAYS	28
JEWISH TEXTS	34
HEBREW & TEFILAH	36
ISRAEL EDUCATION	41
CHAPTER FOUR: EDUCATIONAL IMPACT	46
PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS	46
ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING	52
MEASURING IMPACT	55
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION	58
BIBLIOGRAPHY	63

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

RATIONALE

The story of my Jewish upbringing is one that may feel familiar to many other young Jewish people in the United States. I was raised outside of Providence, Rhode Island, where my primary avenue for Jewish education and engagement was through the largest local Reform congregation. I attended religious school from kindergarten through confirmation, sang in the junior choir on Friday nights, became a bat mitzvah, served as a teacher's assistant, and participated in youth group events in high school. I enjoyed holiday dinners and Pesach seders with extended family, and although the only Jewish ritual my family and I practiced at home was lighting the *chanukiah* during Chanukah, I considered myself to be a religious Reform Jew, confident in my Jewish identity. Still, when I went on to college and started to participate in Hillel programs, I began to notice that my Jewish education was inadequate. I did not feel Jewishly fluent. I did not know the words or melodies of Kabbalat Shabbat or *birkat hamazon* (blessings after meals). I was shocked when I learned about Orthodoxy and *halakhic* (Jewish law) observance, and I felt entirely illiterate as a Jew amongst my peers. While I acquired a great amount of Jewish knowledge and fluency in college through my Hillel experiences and Jewish Studies major, I felt betrayed by my religious school education for failing to prepare me for participation in Jewish life. How could I have spent at least one day nearly every week at my synagogue throughout my adolescence and know so little about Judaism? And how could this be the case for so many others with similar supplementary Jewish educational experiences?

Since then, through my studies and fieldwork in Jewish education at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, I learned to appreciate that educators who have only a few hours a week with students must make intentional decisions about the Jewish content to include and exclude in their curricula. I do not blame my religious school teachers or administrator for the gaps in my Jewish education; I imagine that they did their best given the time constraints, resources, and experience they had in the classroom. The short amount of time that many supplementary Jewish educational programs are afforded to their students on a weekly basis creates a significant problem for educators, as it limits their ability to achieve deep and nuanced Jewish education. Though this is not a new challenge, it is and will continue to be improbable that educators can provide students with a comprehensive Jewish education in just a few hours a week. The current system for childhood education in many synagogues and religious schools is inadequate for children and educators like me who are committed to deep and meaningful Jewish learning, and therefore, I do not wish to replicate or perpetuate this system in my rabbinate and work as a Jewish educator. We must change the paradigm by striving to offer more robust and immersive educational experiences for Jewish children.

The problem with supplementary Jewish education seems to arise specifically within models centered around one to two days a week of formal Jewish learning through synagogue religious schools. When exploring other models of supplementary Jewish education, I was intrigued to learn about after-school programs offering Jewish learning nearly every day after school that could potentially triple the amount of time spent learning. There are at least five Jewish educational programs offering childcare up to five days per

week across the United States, and I wondered, could these programs offer Jewish learning with more breadth and depth? Are they rooted in childcare or education? Who utilizes these programs and how accessible are they to families of all backgrounds? Will the handful of programs that have opened in the last fifteen years grow in popularity where they are located and in other cities of the United States, or do particular circumstances limit their reach? How successful are they at achieving their goals, my ideal goals for Jewish education, and parents' goals for their children's education? In researching the afterschool programs and interviewing their educational leaders, the aims of Jewish education I sought to explore included:

- Establishing a positive association with Jewish education to encourage lifelong learning and engagement with Judaism
- Encouraging children and families to bond and engage in a social network
- Inspiring a love for Judaism along with Jewish places and spaces
- Promoting feelings of inclusion and belonging to the Jewish community
- Instilling sacred Jewish values
- Exposing students to fundamentals of Jewish life (holidays, text, language, history, and culture)

PROCESS

In the fall of 2022, I interviewed the educational leaders of five afterschool programs across the United States. The programs were selected based on their profiles as independent educational institutions offering at least five days a week of Jewish learning and childcare after regular school hours. While other supplementary Jewish educational programs utilize similar pedagogical methods and offer models for learning distinct from more normative congregational religious education, it was important to me to narrow the scope of my research to these specific organizations.

All five educational leaders I requested to interview agreed to speak with me, and prior to conducting the interviews, I compiled a list of literature to review on supplemental Jewish education in the United States and thoroughly researched the programs. I studied all website pages, read articles published in Jewish news sources, listened to podcasts featuring educational leaders, and watched footage of program participants shared with me by the directors. Additionally, I read essays previously written about these types of educational programs; to my knowledge, only two studies analyzing several of these programs have been conducted and published to date. In 2017, Rabbi Laura Novak Winer issued an article in the *Journal of Jewish Education* titled “New Partners in Jewish Education: Independent Afterschool Jewish Education Programs and Their Relationships With Congregational Supplementary Schools,”¹ and in 2020 Dr. Laurie Fisher submitted her dissertation to Gratz College titled “‘So exciting, so rich and right’: A Constructivist Grounded Theory of the

¹ Rabbi Laura Novak Winer, “New Partners in Jewish Education: Independent Afterschool Jewish Education Programs and Their Relationships With Congregational Supplementary Schools,” *Journal of Jewish Education* 83, no. 3 (July 3, 2017): 173–95, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15244113.2017.1344822>.

Jewish Afterschool Program.”² As both articles provide great insight on the programs, and Dr. Fisher’s work comprehensively outlines the pedagogical approaches applied at the programs, I sought to learn more about educational leadership, curricula, and impact. Also, since one can find basic information such as program logistics, costs, financial aid, and daily activities on promotional materials and websites, I wanted to better understand how the programs are not only operating but shifting the paradigm in Jewish education.

Using the interview questions outlined below, I spoke with each educational leader for approximately one hour through a virtual meeting platform and recorded our sessions. Upon reviewing the interviews and notes, I compared the programs to notice trends and draw inferences about them.

² Laurie Fisher, “‘So Exciting, so Rich and Right’: A Constructivist Grounded Theory of the Jewish Afterschool Program” (PhD dissertation, Gratz College, 2020).

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Educational Leadership

1. Tell me about yourself. What drives you personally and professionally? What are sources of inspiration for you?
2. In your time as the educational leader (and founder if applicable) of your program, what have you learned about Jewish education and yourself in this role?
 - a. What have you found to be particularly challenging or surprising?
3. What is your educational vision for your students?

Educational Content

4. Will you please tell me about the program's educational goals?
5. I'd like to ask about your program's educational content.
 - a. Do you have (a) formalized curriculum/a? If so, how do you implement it?
 - b. What content elements/emphases are included in your program?
6. How do you define and assess the success of students' learning?

Educational Impact

7. Paint a picture for me of the families who utilize your program.
 - a. How many are affiliated with specific synagogues/denominations or other Jewish communities? Are all students Jewish?
 - b. With which denominations do member families affiliate, if any?
 - c. Are they involved in the Jewish community at large, formally or informally?
8. Why do families share that they send their children to these programs instead of or to complement other religious school programs?

9. What feedback do you receive from parents/caregivers about the program, regarding what they appreciate and what challenges them?

Closing

10. What else would you like me to know that I haven't asked?

OVERVIEW OF PROGRAMS

	<i>Edah</i> Berkeley, CA San Francisco, CA “Hebrew-infused, Experiential learning”	<i>Jewish Enrichment Center (JEC)</i> Chicago, IL	<i>Jewish Kids Groups (JKG)</i> Atlanta, GA “Independent, FUN, Camp-Style Jewish Education”	<i>Makom Community</i> Philadelphia, PA “Joyful Jewish Learning”	<i>MoEd</i> Greater Washington, DC Area “Jewish Afterschool Reimagined: A fun and creative community experience”
Educational Leader(s) Interviewed	Yafit Shriki Megidish	Rabbi Rebecca Milder	Ana Robbins Rachel Dobbs Schwartz	Beverly Socher-Lerner	Orna Eldor Gerling
Founding Date	2010	2011	2012	2014	2012
Number of Program Sites	2	1	4	2	3
Days of Instruction	Monday - Friday	Sunday - Thursday	Monday - Friday	Monday - Friday	Monday - Friday
Minimum Days of Attendance	2 days/week	2 days/week	1 day/week	2 days/week	2 days/week
Annual Cost (estimate)	\$5,517-\$11,841	\$2,625-\$6,038	\$2,570-\$6,530	\$3,800-\$6,000	\$3,680-\$8,340
Transportation	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Tefilah	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
BMitzvah	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Enrichment During School Closures	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

CHAPTER TWO: EDUCATIONAL GOALS AND APPROACHES

The educational leaders of the five Jewish after-school programs each seek to accomplish an array of long-term goals for their students. In their interviews, they all communicated, implicitly or explicitly, their commitment to two goals: embedding knowledge and skills for lifelong Jewish living in their students and fostering a community of belonging and inclusion. Each leader approaches their goals differently, utilizing a variety of methodologies and practices. For example, some leaders hope to teach students skills for engaging with Jewish texts and incorporate text study as a primary program feature. Others focused less on text study and instead aimed to provide students with a basic familiarity with Judaism by exposing students to broader Jewish content. Though the learning content and approaches differ between the programs, each program's director expressed their desire to equip their students with the tools and knowledge necessary to engage with Judaism throughout their lives and, most importantly, to build communities where students know they matter.

EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Each of the five Jewish after-school programs is led by individuals with extensive backgrounds in Jewish education and leadership. Four of the five executive directors founded their programs, and each executive director possesses extensive knowledge in the field of education. With backgrounds in both formal and informal Jewish education across the United States and Israel, and with four of the five holding master's degrees in some type of educational leadership, those responsible for the after-school programs are highly qualified for their positions. The five women are confident, determined, passionate, and deeply invested in their work and educational approaches.

While the programs' educational leaders are present after school, they rely on the staff members teaching the program's students to deliver thoughtful and intentionally designed lessons. The executive directors assume responsibility for their teachers' effectiveness; for nearly all of the after-school programs, **paid professional development is a critical component of their success**. Finding and training teachers has been a consistent challenge for supplementary Jewish education; often, one might be qualified as an educator but lack the Jewish knowledge to be effective in the classroom, or vice versa. In Jewish after-schools, executive leadership recognizes the need for ongoing teacher education and ensures that instructors receive the necessary support while being compensated for their time.

In the programs that integrate regular text study into their students' education, the educational leaders described their commitment to teachers' learning of the texts they present to students. At Makom Community in Philadelphia, program teachers dedicate

nearly two hours every week to their own text study. They gather to obtain a framing of the text study prepared by the educational leaders, then study in *hevruta* (learning pairs) knowing the enduring understandings and big ideas for the unit in order to prepare for setting learning goals for students. As a team, with the support of the executive director and director of teaching and learning, the instructors participate in setting goals for lifelong literacy, spirituality, and relevancy for all learners, and then prepare short-term content learning goals that are age-appropriate for their students. With the two sets of goals outlined in collaborative text studies, teachers are then equipped to prepare their lessons for the week. The lessons are reviewed by the director of teaching and learning, who provides feedback to teachers, and upon editing the plans the teachers implement them in the classroom. According to the executive director, “paid prep time is a significant feature of how our staffing structure works, and how we can teach the way that we do it. It means that our staff have pretty darn close to one-to-one prep to teach time.”³

Professional development is also a central component of the Jewish Enrichment Center in Chicago, where teachers, most of whom are full-time employees, are paid for eight hours per week of professional development and collaboration. Rabbi Rebecca Milder shares, “Because what we are doing is so different, there’s a huge investment in developing the educators. We have a robust educator development platform that we work on, and it takes time, and it takes some real drive to become a Jewish Enrichment Center educator... We started at year one, and the board has been really supportive. **That’s just not a piece that’s up for conversation.**”⁴ MoEd in the greater DC area and Jewish Kids Groups in Atlanta

³ Beverly Socher-Lerner, interview by author, November 14, 2022.

⁴ Rabbi Rebecca Milder, interview by author, October 19, 2022.

also support their professionals through in-person gatherings and curricular mentorship. As both programs have set curricula either for specific age groups or for the entire learning community, they empower their teachers to create their own lesson plans utilizing available organizational resources. Additionally, teachers at Jewish Kids Groups participate in staff retreats, and those at MoEd attend professional development sessions in three-hour increments once per month.

Similarly, at Edah in Berkeley and San Francisco, staff development is a critical component of ensuring that its teachers are equipped with the necessary knowledge to educate effectively. With the director of the program, staff members learn the Jewish texts they will be teaching and then think through how they each might teach the text given their interests and skill sets. Edah's recent emphasis on studying Jewish text stemmed from both staff and participant interest in doing so, exemplifying how the program is particularly responsive to the needs and goals of its educators. In another instance, the executive director, Yafit Shriki Megidish, addressed staff discomfort with Israel education through professional development. When a few new educators who were uncomfortable talking or teaching about Israel joined the team at Edah, Yafit both employed external professional development to educate and facilitate staff conversations on Israel and adapted the educational approach to teaching Israel to blend the needs of the educators both hesitant and excited about Israel education.

As the Jewish after-schools and their leaders invest in the professional development of educators, the educators are in turn able to spend their afternoons fostering relationships with children, and ultimately, loving them. At Jewish Kids Groups, founder Ana Robbins

shares that “there’s a loving staff, and when you walk in it feels like you’re walking into a Jewish hug.”⁵ Staff members cultivate students’ feelings of connection and belonging, not only at JKG, but in all of the programs. Directors speak confidently about their programs’ ability to create a loving, caring community.

⁵ Ana Robbins, interview by author, October 6, 2022.

COMMUNITY, BELONGING, AND INCLUSIVITY

The Jewish after-school programs serve a plurality of children and families, and their educational leaders aspire to instill a sense of belonging in all who participate. They pride themselves on creating communities for their constituents by actively seeking to include minority groups, involving parents and caregivers in programming, and teaching children values and skills for managing conflict. Through relationships with other children, families, and educators, the programs aim to form caring Jewish communities and establish positive associations with Jewish communal engagement for their learners.

At Edah, Yafit not only seeks to create inclusion within the walls of her institution but has engaged communities that may not otherwise join or have an access point to the Jewish community. For example, Yafit was curious why more Israeli families were not registering for Edah. As an Israeli herself, she decided to meet with some other Israeli families to understand their perspectives and how the program might adapt to meet their needs. Over the last couple of years, Yafit sought to “have conversations with Israeli families and learn why [they are not participating] and try to reach out more and welcome them and think, ‘How do we make it that they will feel comfortable and not adjust themselves to the Jewish community?’ So that’s something that I’m invested in: in thinking a bit more and creating more opportunities for those kinds of conversations as an individual and an organization and a leader.”⁶ Yafit proactively engaged Israeli families in pursuit of making Edah a program that embraces and supports Jewish people from all backgrounds, demonstrating the program’s commitment to both pluralism and inclusivity.

⁶ Ibid.

The significance of building and sustaining the Edah community also became central to Yafit's work during the COVID-19 pandemic. Throughout the pandemic, the needs of families changed. According to Yafit, parents who once worked in-person full-time learned how to navigate both parenting and working from home. With more parents working from home, fewer families enrolled their children in Edah for the full five-day week like they did before the pandemic. Though children may no longer attend Edah five days a week, Yafit shares that in some ways, the experience has become more meaningful:

"Any opportunity we created to engage as a community, less about the content, was precious for everyone, and giving the emotional support to our families, to our students, understanding that some lost their jobs, some had a hard time at home, and at the same time also seeing a change in the product we are offering, because the need for childcare has changed... I think what I'm learning is that unlike other childcare [where] the parents are still sending their kids five days a week, I think parents in our community view this program as a Hebrew opportunity, as Jewish learning, meaningful learning, and as a Jewish community... It's very moving for me to understand how parents value that community and kind of learning, and what we're offering here. That they will say, 'Okay, I'm paying more; I might not have the service for a full week, but I still do everything I can to send my kids to that place.'"⁷

With the support of staff throughout the pandemic, and the opportunities for gathering as an Edah community, the value of the program increased for parents.

⁷ Ibid.

Their perception of Edah shifted from viewing the program as childcare to a meaningful education and Jewish community, even though social engagement may have taken some precedence over content delivery as parents became more involved during the pandemic. By placing the greatest emphasis of the program on fostering a sense of community when its members were in great need of connection with others, both the community and the program were strengthened.

The Jewish Enrichment Center also uses frequent family involvement as a tool for building community. At the end of each unit, when students have completed their learning projects and created a public display of their work, families are invited to a “family exploration celebration.” Through this gathering, children and their families celebrate the work of the students while reflecting and conversing about insights gleaned from the unit. Rabbi Milder notes that this experience “[raises] the child’s voice in Jewish life and [honors] them as full participants and what they give to our ancient and ongoing Jewish conversation... [In] these moments the families have, they’re connecting about really deep and important things, [and] when we open up that opportunity to them it’s pretty profound.”⁸ As families connect intellectually, communally, and socially about their children’s perspectives on the Jewish tradition, they build relationships with one another that extend beyond the Jewish Enrichment Center. As the JEC offers other opportunities for families to gather in addition to the family exploration celebrations, participant families have formed communities of their own. According to Rabbi Milder, many of them now connect

⁸ Rabbi Rebecca Milder, interview by author, October 19, 2022.

socially outside of the JEC, celebrating holidays together and continuing their Jewish experiences in their homes.

The desire for connection and community has been expressed by parents of children participating in the Jewish Kids Groups in Atlanta (JKG) as well. Parents have shared that “a lot of [what they are looking for in this program] centers around connection and feeling a connection [and] community ... One of the things that [JKG] continues to do well is to create that kind of community, feel that feeling, [and] that then translates to Jewish learning.”⁹ JKG builds community primarily through its experiential learning model and mixed-age, mixed-level classrooms. With the camp-style model for learning, children learn through play and work on projects with students in other grades. One reason that the educational leaders at JKG utilize this model is because it inherently builds community. Rachel Dobbs Schwartz, Chief Innovation Officer, shared that “the empowerment of [this model] is that [students] are creating community. They're meeting up [and] they're building not only the knowledge, but they also are applying it to their lives.”¹⁰ As the sense of community grows through consistent student interactions across the age spectrum, JKG also emphasizes that holiday celebrations, special occasions, and times of mourning be moments of community gathering. The program model at JKG organically fosters a caring community that enables students to engage in meaningful Jewish learning and build relationships with their Jewish peers.

At MoEd, the community component serves as the “backbone” of the program, which develops organically because of the amount of time that students have to connect

⁹ Rachel Dobbs Schwartz, interview by author, October 6, 2022.

¹⁰ Ibid.

with one another both in formal learning and downtime. However, the program actively cultivates community building through inclusion, responsibility, and time. In managing a diverse community, Orna Eldor Gerling shared, “We're a very inclusive community. So I have kids with special needs, and I have kids of color, and people [ask] me, ‘What policies do you have?’ I have one policy. Everyone belongs. That's it.”¹¹ MoEd embraces people of all backgrounds and experiences, forming a diverse community of students and families. As challenges arise, Orna teaches students to assume responsibility for their actions, which is another critical piece of the program and its goals. Granting children agency and responsibility is an aspect of Israeli culture that informs both Orna’s educational philosophy and the broader approach at MoEd. By allowing young children to walk themselves to the bathroom, set up and clean up program spaces, make their own snacks, and contribute to the sense of community at MoEd, they learn to be responsible for their own actions and develop independence and agency in a safe environment. The agency and responsibility that students possess teach them the meaning of belonging to a community where each member has a role in contributing to the collective. Building community is critical at MoEd and at all of the after-school programs, as their educational leaders recognize its impact on engendering learning and establishing positive associations with Jewish education.

¹¹ Orna Eldor Gerling, interview by author, December 6, 2022.

KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS FOR LIFELONG JEWISH LIVING AND LEARNING

משלי כ"ב:ו'

חֲנֹךְ לְנֶעֶר עַל־פִּי דֶרֶךְוּ גַם כִּי־יִזְקִין לֹא־יִסּוּר מִמֶּנָּה:

Educate a child in the way he should go, And even when he is old, he will not depart from it.

(Proverbs 22:6)

At Makom Community in Philadelphia, Founder and Executive Director Beverly Socher-Lerner hopes to enable program participants to “see themselves as ... links in an ongoing chain of interpreters of Torah [who are able] to articulate their own needs and be attentive to others' needs as an expression of how they are living Torah in their classrooms, homes, and the world.”¹² The program aspires to provide students with the tools to understand and interpret Torah so that they may apply its values to their daily interactions. Through Makom Community’s unique pedagogy of “Jewish Placemaking,”¹³ Socher-Lerner empowers students to engage with the Jewish textual tradition in a way that can be connected to all aspects of their lives. She describes the pedagogical method applied to studying texts as a process by which students first ask big questions about life and then look to the Torah to begin searching for answers. Students then enact the answers to their questions from the Torah in their lives and share their experiences with peers and teachers. As students interact and share answers, more questions arise from the experience, leading the students back to the study of Torah. Together with educators, students continuously repeat this process of developing a symbiotic relationship with Torah where students’ lives

¹² Beverly Socher-Lerner, interview by author, November 14, 2022.

¹³ “Makom Making: Jewish Education Professional Development,” Makom Community, January 4, 2023, <https://makomcommunity.org/makom-making/>.

are enriched by Torah as they contribute their voices to the ongoing tradition of its interpretation.

The Jewish Enrichment Center of Chicago (JEC) similarly aims to equip students with a framework to approach Jewish learning both during their time at the JEC and throughout their lives. In her interview, the JEC's educational leader Rabbi Rebecca Milder described her intentional and unique approach, emphasizing that students are "learning the skills and orientation and knowledge that allows [the approach] to be the truth of their Jewish relationship for the rest of their lives so that no matter where they grow or they go they still have this framework that [allows] them to be in dialogue with Judaism in a way that's meaningful for them."¹⁴ The framework that Rabbi Milder hopes learners are able to internalize and utilize beyond their time at the JEC employs "three voices in perpetual dialogue with one another: the whole child, the child's world, and a resilient, dynamic, and relevant Judaism."¹⁵ Children engage in the process of connecting their needs and interests, relationships and experiences, and Jewish ideas through learning a text over the course of 8-10 weeks. Like Makom Community, students are encouraged to ask questions and their educators help them to find answers through the learning process. Educators take detailed notes and use a recording device to reflect back to students their ideas, questions, and growth throughout the unit. Particularly at the beginning of a unit, student questions and interests inform how the teachers will shape the unit's curriculum and explore its big ideas. By participating in this process and being in constant dialogue with teachers and other students, the Jewish Enrichment Center provides students with the skill to apply this

¹⁴ Rabbi Rebecca Milder, interview by author, October 19, 2022.

¹⁵ Ibid.

framework well beyond their time at the JEC so that they can continue to engage with Judaism. The study of Jewish texts also serves as a unique selling point for families. Rabbi Milder recognizes that “the Jewish Enrichment Center holds Jewish study and connection through study as our primary mode of Jewish engagement, [and] I think for many families that just feels like exactly how they want to be engaging. It feels really right to them.”¹⁶ Particularly as the JEC serves many families in the University of Chicago academic community, the development of students’ ability to engage with Jewish texts and carry the JEC’s approach to learning with them is meaningful to both educators and parents.

While textual skills are not the emphasis of learning at MoEd in the greater Washington, DC area, the program does stress Hebrew learning to facilitate student participation in Jewish life. Through the informal approach to Hebrew education of using play and conversation, MoEd gives students the building blocks to engage with both Hebrew and Judaism outside of the classroom. As a result of participation in MoEd, Founder and Executive Director Orna Eldor Gerling shared:

“When [students] come home and then hear Hebrew on TV, if they do, or [speak] Hebrew at home, or if they go to day school where they learn Hebrew, or if they go to Israel, or if they interact with Hebrew in any way, they’ll realize they understand Hebrew and quite easily with time they will be able to speak Hebrew. We’re familiarizing them with Hebrew, we’re giving them the basics, the understanding, the words... and they’re not afraid of Hebrew anymore. It is a friend. And when they learn their *haftarah* they

¹⁶ Ibid.

might even understand what they're reading... It's going to make their life so much easier in the Jewish realm. And more importantly, it's going to make them part of a community that gives them socially, so much more, and is connected to being Jewish.”¹⁷

By situating students in an environment with Hebrew immersion at its core, MoEd fosters students’ connections with Jewish people in their local communities and across the world. Because Hebrew is the language of the Jewish people, is utilized today as the spoken language of Jews in Israel, is the primary language of Jewish prayer, and is the language of foundational Jewish texts, the acquisition of the Hebrew language serves as a lifelong skill and access point to Jewish life. On its website, MoEd describes its primary goal as “[providing] the kids with a ‘Jewish Tool Box’ so that our graduates will have an age-appropriate understanding of the fundamental building blocks of Judaism, enabling them to make informed decisions about their own approach to Jewish practice and communal involvement as they grow older.”¹⁸ Hebrew serves as a tool in MoEd students’ “Jewish Tool Box” as it helps them to connect with both the ancient Jewish tradition and modern Israeli and Jewish communities today.

Just as MoEd hopes to equip students with a “Jewish Tool Box” that will allow them to make educated choices about their Jewish practice in the future, Edah in Berkeley exposes students to a myriad of Jewish practices with the hope that the children will have enough Jewish fluency to feel comfortable in many Jewish settings. By teaching students about blessings over food, holiday rituals, prayers, Jewish texts, and more, Edah aims to

¹⁷ Orna Eldor Gerling, interview by author, December 6, 2022.

¹⁸ “Curriculum — MoEd,” MoEd, accessed March 6, 2023, <https://moedcommunity.org/curriculum>.

provide students with a sufficient baseline of Jewish knowledge so that “no matter in which Jewish community they will step in, they will feel comfortable and familiar.”¹⁹ Yafit Shriki Megidish, Edah's Executive Director witnessed the impact of the Edah environment on her own children when she took them to a Sephardic synagogue for the first time on Yom Kippur. Though Edah's culture is primarily Ashkenazi, Yafit's children felt comfortable enough to follow along and were able to recognize the traditions in the Sephardic synagogue because they were familiar with the words, the meanings of the prayers, and the structure of the prayer service. According to Yafit, this comfortability and familiarity with Jewish traditions is “exactly what [Edah] is aiming for.”²⁰

While there is an emphasis on educating on Jewish traditions, the staff members of Edah are not prescriptive in their approach to teaching about Jewish ritual practices; for example, while Edah educators might present the topic of *kashrut*, Jewish dietary laws, they will not tell the students that they must observe *kashrut* or how they must do it. Instead, Edah educators will offer different interpretations, explanations, and voices to the students, “so the kids at the end will take away what was appealing, interesting, right for them at that given moment... [and] it might evolve throughout the years.”²¹ Students at Edah are empowered to craft a relationship with Jewish practice that makes sense to them and that enables them to participate in Jewish life as they go beyond Edah.

¹⁹ Yafit Shriki Megidish, interview by author, October 6, 2022.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

CHAPTER 3: EDUCATIONAL CONTENT

One of the greatest challenges for Jewish educators, regardless of the type of school or program they lead, lies in deciding what content is most important for their students to learn. The Jewish tradition encourages and demands that its people engage in lifelong learning, for it teaches that the study of Torah has no limit and cannot be measured.²² Depending on how Torah is defined, even if one were to limit it to the study of Jewish texts and *mitzvot*, the body of Jewish literature and wisdom is expansive and perhaps impossible to master in a lifetime. Even the most learned scholars who study every day have more to read and consider. Therefore, Jewish educational leaders are in a unique predicament as they are tasked with determining what material is most important for their students to learn. In setting their educational goals and paring down the vast array of Jewish subjects into one curriculum, they must balance both what they value most in Jewish education and the needs of the children and families they serve.

²² Mishnah Peah 1:1.

JEWISH CALENDAR & HOLIDAYS

The specific approaches and content emphases in each Jewish after-school program interviewed reflect what their educators have deemed most important or valuable for their learners. In determining what pieces of Jewish knowledge matter most, the educational leaders construct identities for their programs that make them unique. The programs and their educators may not be able to teach everything that they would hope, so they must make choices reflecting their goals for Jewish education or for their specific communities. For many students, the Jewish after-school programs serve as their primary avenue for formal Jewish learning, and for all students, home ritual and synagogue affiliation vary by family. Since the after-school programs are pluralistic and open to any Jewish or Jewish-adjacent child, the schools to some extent must make content accessible to all. The diversity of families participating in the schools, with some not practicing Judaism at home or participating in any other Jewish communities, might also contribute to the Jewish holiday and calendar framework that is the foundation of the curriculum at three of the five after-school programs.

At Edah, Jewish Kids Groups (JKG), and MoEd, curricula and content are based on the Jewish calendar, and learning centers around rituals, traditions, and holidays. While children who attend public schools live according to the secular calendar year, enjoying school vacations on Christian and national holidays, the Jewish after-schools immerse students in the rhythm of Jewish living, marking major festivals and preparing for holiday celebrations. Two of the educational leaders interviewed, both born and raised in Israel, commented on the challenge that many people face living in the United States as Jews. In Israel, a state

Jewish in identity where approximately 75% of the population is Jewish,²³ almost all people live according to the Jewish calendar, even unintentionally. In many parts of Israel, Jewish public schools close early on Friday afternoons for Shabbat, public transportation does not operate on Jewish holidays, and many students learn Jewish texts in their public schools. In diaspora communities, where Jewish people are not the majority, such immersion into Jewish culture and living by the Jewish calendar is rare. When Orna Eldor Gerling moved to America, she realized what it meant to live outside of the Jewish state when her five-year-old daughter, who had attended pre-school in Israel before moving, no longer had any idea about or connection to the holiday of Passover. Orna shared that “[it’s] a different state of mind when you live in a Jewish state [than] when you live in a state that you have to be active in order to be Jewish or to hang onto your Judaism or your identity... [and] I understood that if I want my children to stay Jewish [and] to have some kind of a connection to their heritage or their tradition, there’s something I have to do about it.”²⁴ Orna recognized that for her children to form Jewish identities, she would have to proactively pursue and create Jewish experiences. This, in part, led her to establish MoEd, and perhaps influenced her decision to base the curriculum on the Jewish calendar.

As the Jewish after-school programs operate in relationship to the Jewish calendar, they do so in intentional ways that deepen students’ understanding of the holidays each year. The learning that occurs seeks to not only introduce students to the traditions, symbols, rituals, and stories of the holidays but make them meaningful and relevant to

²³ “Population, By Religion,” Central Bureau of Statistics, September 15, 2022, accessed February 24, 2023, https://www.cbs.gov.il/he/publications/doclib/2022/2.shnatonpopulation/st02_02.pdf.

²⁴ Orna Eldor Gerling, interview by author, December 6, 2022.

students' lives. Edah structures its program so that younger students in kindergarten through second grade understand the major components of the holiday celebrations, and then introduces more complex holiday concepts as the children mature. Yafit Shriki Megidish offered that holidays might be taught to older children through "[having] conversations about the role of the individual in the community or [talking] about freedom in a much more complicated way so [the students] can think and really reflect on the story that they learned and find the connections to their own life right now."²⁵ During this group learning time at Edah, called *zman kvutzah* in Hebrew, students are divided by age cohorts²⁶ and synthesize their learning from other crafts and activities relating to the holiday theme. The program educators help students to understand the deeper meanings of the holidays and discover their own connections to the Jewish tradition so that they may become more meaningful for students beyond their time at Edah.

The educators at Jewish Kids Groups in Atlanta also aim to facilitate student connections to the Jewish calendar, its holidays, and rituals through their curriculum and methodology. Approximately two-thirds of JKG's curriculum units are dedicated to learning about the Jewish calendar and holidays, and educators approach the holidays each year through a different value lens. The values are derived from Avi Orlow's "Making Mensches: A Periodic Table"²⁷ below, and include character traits such as wisdom, courage, and justice. Every year, with values changing quarterly, the holidays are taught using the framework of a particular value, prompting new conversations and understandings for students so that

²⁵ Yafit Shriki Megidish, interview by author, October 6, 2022.

²⁶ Studio 70, "About Edah," February 24, 2022, <https://studio-70.org/edah/about/>.

²⁷ "Making Mensches: A Periodic Table," Foundation for Jewish Camp, accessed February 21, 2023, <https://jewishcamp.org/making-mensches/>.

there is no repetition in lessons or activities over the course of six years. In structuring the curriculum this way, JKG strengthens students' moral character while preventing repetition in learning.

Making Mensches: A Periodic Table

Inspired by Tiffany Shlain's *Periodic Table of Character Strengths*. Watch *The Science of Character* and learn more at LeffRipple.org. Adapted by Rabbi Avi Ortow. For additional resources, contact avi@jewishcamp.org.

1 Wisdom חכמה Hochma	2 Courage אומץ לב Ometz Lev	<p>"The Maharal of Prague [Rabbi Yehudah Loeb, d.1609] created a golem, and this was a great wonder. But how much more wonderful is it to transform a corporeal human being into a mensch!" — Rabbi Israel Salanter, Founder of the Modern Mussar Movement</p>				3 Wonder מוכח Malchut
4 Understanding בין Bina	5 Zest & Zeal זריזות Zerizut	6 Decency & Social Intelligence דרך ארץ Derech Eretz	7 Reverence & Awe יראה Yira	8 Sensibility דעת Daat	9 Confidence בטחון Bitachon	10 Compassion רחמים Rachamim
11 Justice דין Din	12 Calm & Composure מנוחה הנפש Menucha HaNefesh	13 Contentment הסתפקות Histapikut	14 Love אהבה Ahava	15 Curiosity סקרנות Sakranut	16 Discipline & Will Power גבורה Gevurah	17 Kindness חסד Chesed
18 Community Mindedness ערבות Areyvut	19 Organization & Order סדר Seder	20 Humility ענוה Anavah	21 Gratitude חובת הטוב Hakarat HaTov	22 Creativity יצירתיות Yetzira'ut	23 Conviction אמונה Emunah	24 Loyalty נאמנות Ne'emanut
25 Social Responsibility אחריות Achrayut	26 Patience סבירות Savlanut	27 Modesty עניות Tza'nut	28 Joy שמחה Simcha	29 Appreciation of Opposition הערכה של מנוקדת Machloket	30 Perseverance & Grit נצח Netzach	31 Pursuit of Peace רדף שלום Rodef Shalom
32 Compassionate Criticism תוכחה Tochecha	33 Forgiveness סליחה Machilah	34 Piety חסידות Chassidut	35 Wholeness & Peacefulness שלמות Shlaimut	36 Foresight רואה את הנילד Roeh et HaNolad	37 Integrity ישר Yosher	38 Leadership מנהיגות Manhigut
39 Righteous צדק Tzedek	40 Amiability חן Chan	41 Balance & Inner Beauty תאמת Tiferet	42 Groundedness יסוד Yesod	43 Majesty כבוד Keder		

KEY

- Wisdom
- Courage
- Honor
- Justice
- Moderation
- Transcendence

★ These 7 Midot, or character traits, are keys to success, according to Paul Tough in his book, *How Children Succeed*.

Jewish ethics are based on the idea that we are created in the Divine Image. The Kabbalah imagined that HaShem is revealed in a number of attributes, or *sfirot*, which correspond to our highest aspirations for human character.

∞ The highest *sifah*, attribute, not understood in a human context.

JKG implements a spiral curriculum, meaning that learning is centered around “recurring, ever-deepening inquiries into big ideas and important tasks, helping students come to understand in a way that is both effective and developmentally wise... The same ideas and materials are revisited in more complex ways to arrive at sophisticated judgments and products.”²⁸ Through the spiral curriculum, students are encouraged to engage with content repeatedly so that it is reinforced and understood in greater depth each time it is

²⁸ Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe, *Understanding by Design* (Pearson Education, Incorporated, 2006). 297.

studied. This is critical for a program that teaches the same core content on an annual basis. Rachel Dobbs Schwartz noted that JKG emphasizes the Jewish calendar as core content both because it is a component of the “ideal religious education”²⁹ and because children arrive at JKG with varying degrees of Jewish knowledge. Some parents seek higher-level Jewish education for their children, while others join JKG as their “first foray with Judaism.”³⁰ To meet the needs of all families, JKG scaffolds the learning so that students with any background may engage with the content. Particularly as students participate in learning activities in mixed-age cohorts at JKG, teachers provide support and resources for students of different ages and knowledge levels to create an inclusive and effective learning environment.

Makom similarly approaches holidays and significant moments in the Jewish calendar through the framework of the unit’s big idea or enduring understanding. Conversations are framed with the same values and understandings of the Torah learning that happens in the bulk of the formal learning at Makom. While text study and related project-based learning are the primary modalities for learning at Makom, the program does facilitate the communal marking of Jewish time by intentionally relating holidays to the other learning occurring through Makom’s seven-year spiral curriculum. The Jewish Enrichment Center’s model, also grounded in the study of Jewish texts and project-based learning, approaches holidays through the themes with which students are already engaging. The curriculum at JEC is not designed with holiday learning at its core, which has served as a surprise or challenge for some families. Rabbi Rebecca Milder explains that “a lot

²⁹ Rachel Dobbs Schwartz, interview by author, October 6, 2022.

³⁰ Ibid.

of families come in with this conception of, 'Well, my child's going to learn [the basics of Judaism]' and yes, in fact, they are. But they're not going to do it in a way that you recognize as the way that you did it. Holidays are folded into the theme. We celebrate every holiday as it comes up. We still have sessions on Sukkot and Simchat Torah because that enables us to celebrate with the children."³¹ Rabbi Rebecca is explicit with families about the educational methodology at JEC, where children's growth and learning are at the heart of the approach rather than specific content goals.

³¹ Rabbi Rebecca Milder, interview by author, October 19, 2022.

JEWISH TEXTS

The Torah and the literature that derives from it have served as the foundation of Jewish living for millennia. Through the study of Torah, one may discover the origins of most Jewish holidays and commandments, learn the ancient language of Hebrew, engage with the stories of Jewish matriarchs and patriarchs, and much more. At Makom and the Jewish Enrichment Center, learning is based on the introduction of students to Torah and Jewish texts. Though students do not spend the majority of their time reading and studying Jewish literature, the texts serve as a point of inspiration for students to grapple with big ideas that relate to their lives in the twenty-first century. Students are exposed to the basis of the Jewish tradition and learn how to be in relationship with Torah so that they will know how to access it later in life if they so choose. Both Makom and JEC facilitate project-based learning to help students engage with the text, and their approaches to text study are outlined in greater detail in Chapter 2.

A different style of Torah study occurs at MoEd and Edah as students hear and learn about weekly Torah portions. At Edah, one of the learning stations that children may decide to visit any day of the week is about *parashat hashavua*, the Torah portion. Children are granted autonomy at Edah and choose learning activities that most interest them, and Edah ensures that those who wish to learn about the weekly Torah portion are able to do so. Torah stories are also interspersed throughout the curriculum at Jewish Kids Groups, though JKG incorporates Torah indirectly as it teaches the values from the Making Mensches Periodic Table. Since the values stem from Torah, Kabbalah (Jewish mysticism), and other Jewish texts, JKG seeks to “give [their] kids a holistic understanding of how the values are

derived from Judaism " through an exploration of the values in learning activities and prayer.³²

³² Rachel Dobbs Schwartz, interview by author, October 6, 2022.

HEBREW & TEFILAH

Just as the after-school program educational leaders have developed different approaches and goals for teaching Jewish content, they also have varying aims and rationales for Hebrew education. Many Jewish supplementary schools teach some form of Hebrew because of its relevance to the Jewish religion, tradition, and people. For many students in supplementary schools, learning how to decode and even write in Hebrew helps them to participate in and lead religious services and prepare for reading Torah at their b'nei mitzvah.³³ While for some educators and parents, the primary goal for Hebrew learning is to grant students access to reading Torah, Jewish texts, and liturgy, others seek to foster students' connections to Israel and the Jewish people by teaching spoken modern Hebrew. Of the Jewish after-school programs, all teach Hebrew to some extent, but for Edah and MoEd, Hebrew education is at the forefront of children's learning.

Edah and MoEd integrate conversational Hebrew into as many interactions as possible, immersing students in a Hebrew language environment. Children are likely to walk into these after-school programs and receive greetings from teachers, request their snacks, and follow instructions all in Hebrew. At MoEd, nearly every staff member is Israeli, which enables students to gain familiarity with the accents, flow, and pace of Hebrew as spoken by native speakers. Yafit Shriki Megidish at Edah and Orna Eldor Gerling at MoEd acknowledge that students may not understand everything that teachers say to them initially, but over time they become accustomed to the environment and acquire greater comprehension and

³³ Netta Avineri, Sarah Bunin Benor, and Nicki Greninger, "Let's Stop Calling It 'Hebrew School': Rationales, Goals, and Practices of Hebrew Education in Part-Time Jewish Schools," *CASJE* (CASJE, July 27, 2020), accessed February 26, 2023, https://www.casje.org/sites/default/files/docs/hebrew_education_report_july2020.pdf.

responsiveness in Hebrew. Although the programs are language immersive in nature, Hebrew instruction is still an intentional part of the formal curricula. Within both programs, there are specific times in the schedule for Hebrew learning each day. At Edah, students are divided by level for Hebrew instruction and participate in conversational Hebrew that becomes more sophisticated as students enter higher grade levels. For example, the teachers use similar vocabulary, questions, and root words with each group, which are simpler with younger children and more advanced with older children because they are able to build on their existing knowledge each year. Edah also begins Hebrew reading and decoding in first grade as an integral part of their language instruction.

At MoEd, children are divided by Hebrew level only one day of the week and learn in mixed-age groups the other days of instruction. Often, students learn about the holidays and other content areas in Hebrew and play games to advance their Hebrew language skills and knowledge. One of MoEd's physical locations is based in a Conservative synagogue, with whom MoEd regularly collaborates, and where the majority of students also participate in the synagogue's Hebrew school on Wednesdays in preparation for b'nei mitzvah. The primary goal for constructing an immersive Hebrew environment is for students to gain conversational Hebrew skills, rather than simply learning how to decode Hebrew and recite the alphabet. At MoEd, Orna Eldor Gerling reiterated that the rationale for immersive Hebrew learning is a part of the greater purpose of the program of instilling in children positive associations with Jewish life and community. At MoEd, Orna teaches:

“being Jewish doesn't have to be painful. It can be fun. You can come after school. You can go to a place where you meet your friends. You

can play with them, and you can have a good time with [them], and it can be in Hebrew. It doesn't have to be, 'you know, wait, we have this time crunch [to learn for b'nei mitzvah]! We have to make you learn how to spit this out,' which is totally meaningless. Let's actually connect you to where you want to be."

MoEd deliberately focuses on students' speaking and listening skills in Hebrew so that they may understand the Hebrew they encounter, rather than be able to read words aloud without comprehension.

In contrast, the Jewish Enrichment Center and Makom Community emphasize Hebrew learning for access to Jewish texts and prayer. At Makom, students encounter decoding and reading from the time they enter the program and build their Hebrew vocabulary through text study. Though students primarily learn Torah and texts in English, the teachers always include keywords in Hebrew in "an intentional and cataloged way that builds a vocabulary of several hundred Hebrew words by the time the kids [are] in middle school."³⁴ The Hebrew words the children learn are related to the textual and liturgical Jewish traditions, so the learning supports the program's goals of equipping students with skills for engaging Jewish texts beyond their time at Makom. Though the JEC also aims to provide students with Jewish-life vocabulary for access to Jewish texts, it also seeks to lay the foundation for students to learn Hebrew in greater depth later in life. Therefore, the Jewish Enrichment Center has created a "very auditory and visually robust Hebrew environment"³⁵ in addition to their regularly scheduled time for Hebrew learning, when

³⁴ Beverly Socher-Lerner, interview by author, November 14, 2022.

³⁵ Rabbi Rebecca Milder, interview by author, October 19, 2022.

younger children participate in Hebrew games and older children learn decoding along with prayers. The JEC also offers families optional one-to-one online Hebrew instruction in which most students participate.

Makom and the JEC seek to provide students with the Hebrew skills to participate in *tefilah*, or prayer, especially in their educational settings. Both programs feature daily *tefilah* at the end of their sessions, giving children the opportunity to sing and learn the prayers with the whole program community. Students gain familiarity with Jewish prayers during *tefilah* while making meaning of the words with the program educators, as both programs intend for students to learn about the content and meaning of the prayer rather than to have them simply memorize the words in preparation for b'nei mitzvah. Jewish Kids Groups primarily approach *tefilah* in small groups rather than in all-school communal participation. Though children sometimes join in song during the all-school community time at the beginning of each day, they typically learn prayers and songs that align with each curriculum unit in their regular learning groups. Teachers select one or two new *tefilot* to introduce to children throughout the unit while reviewing prayers they already learned. The Jewish Kids Groups curriculum dictates which prayers and songs meaningfully accompany the values and holidays of each unit, and the educators are given the autonomy to teach the ones they find most interesting and that they think the children will enjoy most. The *tefilah* learning includes prayers from weekdays and Shabbat services along with songs from old Yiddish-speaking communities and modern Jewish communities outside of the United States. JKG educators incorporate both traditional melodies and new ones into their

curriculum, offering a variety of access points for students to connect with Jewish practice and ritual.

The *tefilah* curriculum also incorporates the Hebrew that students at JKG are learning in their Hebrew groups. For example, students learn words related to *ahavah* (love) in their Hebrew groups while learning the prayer *V'ahavta* in their regular learning groups. At JKG, students acquire Hebrew decoding, reading, and speaking skills according to their Hebrew level in multi-age groups through interactive and engaging instruction. Its educators employ several strategies, including word, phrase, and sentence repetition, pneumatic devices, and learning through games. Given that students arrive at Jewish Kids Groups with varying Hebrew knowledge and different learning needs, the students are sorted into Hebrew groups by their level so that students of all backgrounds may be accommodated. Children at JKG learn for approximately 25-30 minutes per day in their Hebrew groups, and the learning is reinforced through *tefilah*, community gatherings, and the visual Hebrew environment of the classrooms.

ISRAEL EDUCATION

Israel education is a part of every after-school program interviewed, though the extent to which the educational leaders incorporate it into their curricula and their range of goals for Israel education are diverse. According to Barry Chazan's relational approach to Israel education, the purpose of teaching Israel is "educating people to think, feel, and integrate Israel into their overall character as Jews and as human beings. It is about the attempt to help young Jews study their particular culture in an attempt to find meaning in a place, an idea, a people, and a value that has been dear to their [particular] tradition."³⁶ Israel education is important because Israel has been relevant to the Jewish people throughout history. From the land of Israel that God promised Abraham in the Torah, to the naming of the Jewish people as the "people of Israel," to the modern state of Israel, the only Jewish nation in the world, Israel is a critical component of the Jewish tradition. Each of the Jewish after-school programs interviewed addresses at least one of these pieces of Israel education if not all.

MoEd most explicitly highlights Israel education as a vital element of its program. On its website, the program states,

"We teach children a love for Israel. Israel is a core element of the MoEd after-school program. We not only teach the children where Israel is on the map, but Israel becomes the fabric of a tapestry of learning and storytelling in our classrooms. Our teachers focus on Israel as a homeland and as a part of

³⁶ Barry Chazan, *A Philosophy of Israel Education: A Relational Approach*, 1st ed. 2016 (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016). 11.

Jewish identity. Combined with the immersive Hebrew language, Israeli culture, music, food, and art is interwoven into the MoEd curriculum.”³⁷

Through immersion into spoken Hebrew with Israeli teachers, engagement with modern Israeli culture, and the incorporation of Israel into daily interactions at MoEd, the program inculcates a feeling of connection to Israel within its students. In part, MoEd is responding to the disconnect that some American Jews feel from Israel. Orna Eldor Gerling shared, “I understand the need in today’s American Jewish community for an Israel connection. It’s a real need because we have lost a whole generation, especially with the way Israel behaves. The younger generation wants nothing to do with Israel, despite the fact that they might be Jewish... [so] we provide that connection in a very strong, fun, loving way.”³⁸ As MoEd seeks to foster a connection between Jewish children and Israel, its educators recognize the deep complexities of the modern state in particular and present material in an “unbiased” and “objective” way. Though she did not offer examples, Orna acknowledged that she believes some content cannot be presented in an objective way, and therefore she omits it from the curriculum entirely.

Edah also grapples with the complexity of Israel education and the challenges that arise when program stakeholders have different levels of comfort with it. Parallel to Orna Eldor Gerling’s statement that younger Jews are alienated from Israel, Edah faced a challenge when it hired three young adult educators who were very resistant to teaching about Israel. As Yafit Shriki Megidish addressed the challenge, she remembered asking, “‘Why are you a part of Jewish education if you can’t teach about Israel?’ And for them the

³⁷ “Israeli Culture,” MoEd, accessed February 27, 2023, <https://www.moedcommunity.org/#israeli-culture>.

³⁸ Orna Eldor Gerling, interview by author, December 6, 2022.

question itself was unclear. ... They were looking at our website. They didn't see anything about Israel, so they thought, 'We will not teach about Israel,' which was fascinating for me."³⁹ Since Israel is an integral part of the Jewish tradition, Yafit was committed to including it in Edah's curriculum and finding a way to teach about Israel that worked for all staff members. At Edah, students learn about the state of Israel's people and places through a dedicated curriculum unit as they take virtual tours of Israel and learn about various communities living in the country. Students also learn about Palestinians, with the goal of teaching that "there is no one narrative."⁴⁰ On issues such as celebrating Israel's national holidays and displaying the Israeli flag on site, Yafit tries to make decisions that respect both the comfort and discomfort of the program's teachers.

Ana Robbins, Founder and Executive Director of Jewish Kids Groups, shared that programs like Edah, JKG, and other schools are experiencing the trend of Israel resistance in their programs. She notes that

"[where the young] teachers who are working in Sunday schools around the country are on Israel is so misaligned with the institution, and there is major tension between the teaching teams and the institutions. We, of course, experienced that, too, [as] we have very young liberal teachers, and [it's] so challenging to get a huge group of people aligned on how you're going to teach [Israel.]"⁴¹

³⁹ Yafit Shriki Megidish, interview by author, October 6, 2022.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ana Robbins, interview by author, October 6, 2022.

While institutions like Jewish Kids Groups conduct Jewish and Israel education on teams with diverse staff attitudes and navigate the challenge of misalignment, they continue to maintain a commitment to teaching about Israel, emphasizing the history of the land of Israel and the Jewish people's connection to it. For Rachel Dobbs Schwartz, the goal for Israel education at JKG is for students

“to understand the connection between their Judaism and what is considered an important place for many Jewish people... Our approach is not to make them love it, not to make them hate it, but for them to start to understand that their identity as Jewish people is connected to the history, and the history talks about this land frequently... It is my belief [that] Israel is a really important part of understanding Judaism and understanding where we fit as diaspora Jews in the grand scheme of Jewish history, and that's what I want them to know.”⁴²

Though JKG does not aim to teach children about all facets of Israel or instill specific feelings toward Israel in students, the program dedicates approximately four units, or six weeks, to Israel education. The content includes pre-state history, modern statehood, and Israeli national holidays.

Similarly, Makom Community educates on the modern state of Israel as students are introduced to Israeli art, culture, and diversity. In learning about modern statehood, Makom presents Israel as the “diverse place that it is” through the program's commitment to “a Jewish justice-oriented willingness to challenge as part of a Jewish practice, where

⁴² Rachel Dobbs Schwartz, interview by author, October 6, 2022.

[challenging] doesn't threaten your Jewish practice or threaten your ability to relate to Israel.”⁴³ As Makom encourages students to grapple with Israel’s diversity and the challenges facing the state. The program more strongly emphasizes the land of Israel, including its role in the Torah and in the covenant between God and the Jewish people. Beverly Socher-Lerner describes Israel and its presentation to students as “a mythological, communal, spiritual, [and] textual place.” Similarly, the Jewish Enrichment Center teaches about the historical and geographical significance of Israel to the Jewish tradition as it arises in the study of Torah and holidays, but the program does not explicitly teach about Israel in its core content.

⁴³ Beverly Socher-Lerner, interview by author, November 14, 2022.

CHAPTER FOUR: EDUCATIONAL IMPACT

Each of the five after-school programs serves niche markets within the Jewish community. Their directors report that families choose to enroll their children in Jewish after-school programs because they fulfill parents' need for childcare, desire for community, and goals for Jewish education. Some of the educational leaders formed their programs with their own vision and goals in mind, while others responded to the hopes and needs of families seeking alternative Jewish educational experiences for their children. The educational leaders shape their programs and goals and in turn, their programs reach families that want to invest in the programs because they most closely align with the educational goals of parents and the needs of their children. The after-school programs also engage families who choose them for their childcare and community-building elements. Given the plurality of reasons that caregivers choose to enroll their children in these after-school programs, they serve diverse groups of Jewish people.

PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS

"Families stay because they find that [our approach] **matches what they are looking for.**"

- Rabbi Rebecca Milder, Jewish Enrichment Center

Many of MoEd's participants arrive at the program through the synagogues with which they are affiliated. Two of MoEd's sites are housed at Conservative synagogues, with whom the program director works collaboratively and cooperatively. At the Chevy Chase

location situated at Ohr Kodesh Congregation, Orna Eldor Gerling attends synagogue staff meetings, co-hosts synagogue programs, and shares an Israeli emissary with the congregation. The preschool at the synagogue serves as a feeder for students to join MoEd, and some MoEd families choose to become synagogue members as a result of their participation in MoEd. While many students at MoEd are also members of the synagogue, there are approximately twenty students who arrive from a local Jewish day school, and others who are unaffiliated and members of interfaith families. According to Orna, approximately 35% of program participants are children of interfaith and/or unaffiliated families, and MoEd serves as their primary source of Jewish education and engagement.

Makom in Philadelphia primarily reaches two audiences: families who are disconnected from the greater Jewish community and those who are very engaged in Jewish life and learning. Beverly Socher-Lerner lovingly calls the latter group “super participants” in the Jewish community, and they comprise approximately 30% of Makom participants. According to Beverly, “super participants” are “every Shabbat synagogue go-ers, they are board members in every denomination, and they want more than their home congregation, and they are not choosing day school.”⁴⁴ For these families, Makom offers something different from their home congregations, particularly in their approach to text study and prayer. While some families still register their children for religious school at congregations, they do so because they are at the synagogue already for Shabbat services, providing Jewish engagement for the whole family by offering childhood education on Saturday rather than Sunday morning). However, once the children enter second or third grade, and their Makom

⁴⁴ Beverly Socher-Lerner, interview by author, November 14, 2022.

learning really takes off, they tend not to continue “[participating in Shabbat school] because they're in such a different place learning-wise than their congregational school peers... They're *davening* (praying) every day with me... from third grade on out of an adult *siddur* (prayerbook), and they're like, ‘I don't want to be in the junior congregation. I know how to do *shul* (synagogue). I want to be in *shul*.’”⁴⁵ Students gain access, understanding, and appreciation for adult-level prayer at Makom from a young age, and therefore, Makom becomes the primary place for learning when children and families begin to opt out of their congregational religious schools.

For the other 70% of families who are not “super-participants,” Makom functions as a refuge from negative perceptions of and experiences at other Jewish institutions. Of this group, many of whom are not otherwise connected to the Jewish community and have not been for over a decade, a considerable amount parents are queer and/or in interfaith relationships and they have often felt excluded from Jewish communal life. These parents “have real stories of bumps and bruises of specific moments where they felt pushed out [by the Jewish community].”⁴⁶ Because of Makom’s orientation toward inclusion, diversity, and justice, parents find a safe haven and intentional community through participation in the after-school program. In addition to experiencing exclusion, many of the parents who are not engaged in the Jewish community at large “also had negative experiences in congregational schools as kids, and are not willing to even have the possibility of their child having that kind of a negative congregational school experience.”⁴⁷ Though Beverly

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

acknowledged that many congregational schools have changed over the last forty years, she understands that offering an alternative for parents with cynical attitudes toward them is imperative to encourage them to offer their children Jewish learning outside of the home.

For both the families that are very involved in the Philadelphia Jewish community at large and those for whom Makom is their central Jewish community, Makom serves one of their major logistical needs: after-school childcare. For families who need after-school childcare, Makom staff members pick up children from their schools and provide them with a nurturing environment until the end of the work day. By infusing the after-school program with Jewish education, parents also do not need to sacrifice family time on the weekend by enrolling them in Shabbat or Sunday religious school. According to Beverly, dedicating half of a day on the weekend to religious school, which might amount to a quarter of the entire weekend, “is, in fact, too costly for a lot of parents.”⁴⁸ Jewish enrichment at Makom after school enables parents and children to invest in quality family time and leisure activities that are important to them on the weekends.

Unlike the families of Makom, a large percentage of families participating in the Jewish Enrichment Center (JEC) are involved with other Jewish communities. Over 60% of JEC families affiliate with synagogues of all denominations or other independent spiritual communities. In addition to synagogue membership, a small number of families enroll their children in a Jewish day school, Hebrew immersion program, or their synagogue’s religious schools. While these families are highly engaged in the Jewish community, the JEC serves as the primary place of Jewish learning for most of its participants. With the JEC situated in

⁴⁸ Ibid.

Hyde Park, a neighboring area to the University of Chicago, many parents of JEC children are academics working for the university who “really prize independence of thought.”⁴⁹ Many parents report that they join the Jewish Enrichment Center because its values align with what they are teaching their children at home and the education is non-prescriptive; it does not teach students what to believe and instead equips them with tools for engaging in Jewish learning and community. They also recognize JEC’s education as “really deep, [really] strong Jewish learning, [and] that’s what they are looking for, [and] for many families that just feels like exactly how they want to be engaging. It feels really right to them.”⁵⁰ In addition to aligning values and the caring, compassionate environment that fits a child’s needs after school, families share similar sentiments to those of Makom who are nervous about joining a Jewish institution. Through the Jewish Enrichment Center’s reputation and word-of-mouth recommendations, families have “heard [that JEC] is a safe entry to Jewish life”⁵¹ that may not replicate a negative experience they had in the past. For some of the families who do not participate in Jewish communal life, they express their Judaism through practices at home outside of institutional life. With the JEC as their primary place for learning and gathering, they continue to cultivate Jewish community with other JEC families outside of the formal learning experience.

Like Makom, Jewish Kids Groups (JKG) primarily reaches two audiences: interfaith families who might be otherwise unaffiliated with institutional Judaism and families who are very committed to Jewish life and learning. JKG began as an organization seeking to reach

⁴⁹ Rabbi Rebecca Milder, interview by author, October 19, 2022.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

interfaith and unaffiliated families to avoid competition with other supplementary educational programs and today, approximately 60% of children participating in JKG belong to interfaith households. However, Founder and Executive Director Ana Robbins shared that the leaders of JKG “designed a stellar program that does serve a ton of interfaith families, *and* it’s the best program in the city. So it also serves the people who are most... eyes open, awake, and engaged because they want the best for their kids, [so] we serve a ton of families that do go to [synagogue]... who are looking for a deeper engagement [and connection] for their kids.”⁵² As JKG became a highly reputable educational program in Atlanta, the organization shifted its target audience to anyone seeking great Jewish education and experiences for their children.

While Jewish Kids Groups is certainly meeting the needs of families by providing after-school childcare, people are primarily choosing JKG for their Jewish education and childcare “because it’s the most premium program in the city [that is] bright and shiny and well executed.”⁵³ After first visiting one of the JKG sites, approximately 95% of families who tour JKG subsequently enroll their children in the program. Parents do not choose JKG for its affordability; in fact, the program costs an average of 15-18% more than after-school childcare plus supplemental Jewish education. Ana Robbins acknowledged that “You would never take [JKG] because it’s the most affordable option. You would have to make a conscious decision to want it... [The] clientele choosing this program [are people] who know what quality looks like.”⁵⁴ The families who choose JKG include those across the

⁵² Ana Robbins, interview by author, October 6, 2022.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

religious spectrum who are committed to Jewish education and those who seek quality after-school care for their children and may not be necessarily looking for Jewish education.

Edah features the highest percentage of families who are already affiliated with a specific denomination or synagogue. Approximately 80% of them identify as Conservative or Orthodox Jews and most do not participate in a religious school at their synagogues. More Reform families participated in the past, though changing B'nei Mitzvah requirements at local synagogues came into conflict with participation in Edah, decreasing the number for Reform families. Of the 20% of families who are not affiliated with a synagogue, most are Israeli. The Israeli families primarily enroll their children because of the immersive Hebrew environment, and for others, the choice to participate in Edah is based in both Hebrew learning and the Jewish community. Many parents are committed to public school education given the quality of public schools in the area, but are dissatisfied with the religious schools offered by local synagogues. Edah offers a program that is a better fit for their children's supplemental Jewish educational program.

ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING

Two of the five after-school programs typically evaluate student learning through authentic assessment or informal checks for understanding. Authentic assessments may be ongoing throughout the learning process as teachers ask questions, observe student behaviors and responses, and evaluate the information acquired by reviewing student work. At Makom in Philadelphia, lesson plans include content-based learning goals, and educators regularly assess how well they are meeting these goals by building assessments into

students' learning activities. Meanwhile, at Edah, teachers evaluate student learning through the authentic assessment concept of "performance of understanding," in which "understanding is revealed as the transferability of core ideas, knowledge, and skill, on challenging tasks in a variety of contexts. Thus, assessment for understanding must be grounded in authentic performance-based tasks."⁵⁵ The engaging ways that Yafit encourages staff to create performances of understanding at the end of each unit include tasks such as creating a piece of art, acting in a play or skit, or verbally responding to prompts. In addition to the components of authentic assessment that Edah employs to evaluate learning, the educators formally evaluate for Hebrew learning to identify how much students have learned by the end of the year. The educators also connect with families for mid-year parent-teacher conferences to provide feedback on Hebrew learning.

Jewish Kids Groups similarly evaluates the amount of information absorbed by children at the end of each unit, but they do so through review games and activities such as freeze dance, tag, and Jeopardy. Teachers face the challenge of determining when to conduct learning assessments within the unit so they can assess comprehension without making students feel like they are being tested. Since the days of the week and the number of days that children attend JKG vary by family, educators must be mindful to conduct assessments when the material has been covered toward the end of the unit and enough of the students are present. Rachel Dobbs Schwartz recognized that the system for informal evaluation is not perfect, and their team is in the process of determining the best methods for assessing learning outcomes without compromising their commitment to joyful Jewish

⁵⁵ Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe, *Understanding by Design* (Pearson Education, Incorporated, 2006). 153.

learning. It is an ongoing process aiming to ensure that JKG meets its mission to “educate and inspire children—in a way that feels like summer camp—engendering positive Jewish learning, identity, and friendships.”⁵⁶

At the Jewish Enrichment Center (JEC), the educational goal is not for children to acquire a body of content knowledge but to mature as compassionate, caring individuals with a strong sense of self and relationship with Judaism. Therefore, students are not formally assessed for learning; rather, Rabbi Rebecca Milder shares that “the process is the product” at the JEC. Throughout the 8-10 week curriculum units, children participate in text study and what the JEC calls “process *yetzirah* (creation).” Children raise questions from their learning of the text, and educators help to design long-term projects that will allow their students to grapple with the questions and gain new insights through collaboration. The projects invite students to “design their own interpretation of the text through [the] extended creative project, developed through play, an immense range of artistic and expressive media, and conversation with peers,”⁵⁷ all of which “supports each child in reaching their own insight [about] themselves or Judaism, the world, God, or relationships.”⁵⁸ Student projects serve as vehicles for learning and they are displayed and shared with the greater JEC community through “Family Exploration and Celebration” gatherings. These assemblies at the end of units invite families to celebrate the work of the students and the learning that has occurred.

⁵⁶ “JKG Organizational Values,” Jewish Kids Groups, <https://www.jewishkidsgroups.com/mission-vision-values>.

⁵⁷ Jewish Enrichment Center. “How We Do It,” March 28, 2019. Accessed March 3, 2023. <https://jewishenrichment.org/about/how-we-do-it/>.

⁵⁸ Rabbi Rebecca Milder, interview by author, October 19, 2022.

MEASURING IMPACT

“It’s not a lasting experience; it’s an imprint of a lifetime.”

- Orna Eldor Gerling, MoEd

The five after-school educational leaders interviewed seek to deliver quality Jewish enrichment and education to their participants while building community and nurturing positive associations with Jewish life and learning. Since the programs have only been in existence for a maximum of 13 years, the long-term impact and lasting impressions of the programs on learning retention and identity formation are not yet known. However, many of the leaders interviewed conduct regular evaluations both internally and externally to gain feedback and insight into the current success of the programs in meeting their goals. The programs typically measure their impact through formal surveys and informal conversations with parents to understand how children and families are responding to their experiences after school.

Though The Covenant Foundation conducts confidential formal evaluations of the program as its grantees, MoEd sends annual surveys to families to understand what attracts them to MoEd and keeps them enrolled. The survey also assesses how well the program strengthens students’ Hebrew proficiency and Jewish knowledge while providing children with positive Jewish and social experiences through high-quality after-school care. While the data is not publicly available, Orna shared that for many of these families, the choice to enroll their children in MoEd stems from their desire for the children to speak Hebrew, establish a connection to Israel, and be “actively Jewish,”⁵⁹ meaning that they regularly

⁵⁹ Orna Eldor Gerling, interview by author, December 6, 2022.

engage with the Jewish community and form strong Jewish identities. When asked why families might invest their time and money in sending their children to MoEd compared to other supplemental schools that meet once or twice a week, Orna noted that the type of community that MoEd builds can only be fostered through the aftercare model because of the amount of time that students spend with their peers. Students have the opportunity to play during unstructured time both at the beginning and the end of their day at MoEd and during learning activities. There have even been times when children who began at MoEd one or two days a week asked their parents to go every day of the week because of their high level of enjoyment and time with their friends.

Jewish Kids Groups similarly self-evaluates annually and has participated in external evaluation through the Jewish Federation of Greater Atlanta, the Emergence Collective, and Tobin Belzer. As an organization that prides itself on adapting quickly to the changing needs of students and families and innovating as a scaling program, JKG values feedback and regularly asks, “Are we accommodating of our kids? Are we able to meet them where they are? And are we responding and accommodating to what we need to to make people happy?”⁶⁰ The 2022 Federation survey feedback was overwhelmingly positive, and families have shared stories about the impact of JKG on their children as well. In one case, a family with means enrolled because they had a need for after-school childcare and lived near a JKG location. The father of the family had been born Jewish, but the family was not necessarily raising their children Jewish, so sending their young child to JKG would be one of the family’s first engagements with Jewish education. Through JKG involvement, Judaism

⁶⁰ Rachel Dobbs Schwartz, interview by author, October 6, 2022.

became an integral part of the child and family's life, even for older siblings who did not attend JKG. When an older sister of the child went on to college and became involved in Hillel, she stopped wearing a cross and ultimately had a Bat Mitzvah ceremony in her early 20s. The JKG experience was formative and transformational for members of this family, even though only the youngest child enrolled in the program, and it demonstrates the great impact of the program on its participants and their loved ones.

While the topic of formal surveys and evaluations did not arise in the interviews with the educational leaders of Edah, Makom, or the Jewish Enrichment Center, Yafit Shriki Magidish shared some indicators of success at Edah from parent feedback and enrollment. Though she reports that she does not hear a great deal of feedback from families (indicating that perhaps no news is good news), the staff at Edah mostly hears that the children are happy and love the program. Yafit attributes that success to the investment that educators make in students, acknowledging that they “know the first thing that allows us to learn is feeling safe and seen and connected, and if that’s not happening, [no] learning will happen.”⁶¹ Fostering feelings of safety, inclusion, and connection at Edah contributes to student happiness, and in turn, continued participation in Edah. Many families have multiple children enrolled in Edah, and most typically return year after year and participate throughout their time in elementary school. Both the verbal feedback that the staff of Edah receives and the retention of students and families indicate the success in reaching their goal of fostering a sense of care and community at Edah.

⁶¹ Yafit Shriki Megidish, interviewed by author, October 6, 2022.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

The educational leaders of the five after-school programs I interviewed are making a profound impact on the field of Jewish education. Though their approaches vary, they are preparing their students for participation in Jewish life and learning, building niche Jewish communities, and serving a plurality of families. They invest in knowing and developing both their teachers and their students to ensure that students receive a quality Jewish education; recognizing that it is necessary to first create a culture of care to empower and engender deep, meaningful learning. The program directors and their teachers employ educational pedagogy that elevates student choices and voices in learning and prepares students with both skills and knowledge for future engagement in the Jewish community. The programs are directly addressing the needs of 21st-century Jews articulated by educational visionary Jonathan Woocher: “they seek a Judaism they consider meaningful, one that is reinforced by high-quality interpersonal experiences and opportunities for developing self-efficacy.”⁶² Building Jewish identity and competency through intentional communities where members are meaningfully connected meets the needs of today’s Jewish families, and because of this, these programs are highly successful.

The after-school programs are also shifting the paradigm for Jewish education by virtue of their timing and logistics. They produce an alternative model to religious schools that operate on the weekend by creating an additional opportunity for Jewish education that is available to families in their locations. By addressing the need that working families

⁶² Diane Tickton Schuster, *Portraits of Jewish Learning: Viewing Contemporary Jewish Education Close-In* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2019). xx.

have for after-school childcare and their desire for Jewish educational opportunities different from those at synagogues, the programs create an entry point for families that is beneficial in a multitude of ways. As Beverly Socher-Lerner described, many parents with young children have negative associations with their own supplementary Jewish educational experiences. Therefore, some of the programs are enabling them to re-engage with Jewish communities and offer their children experiences that affirm the possibilities for positive Jewish experiences. For those who have been alienated from the Jewish community or who might otherwise be disinterested in enrolling their children in Jewish educational programs, the after-school model provides a unique entry point to Jewish life and learning.

As a parent, a rabbi, and an educator, I am highly inspired by the work of the after-school programs and the leaders that I interviewed. I would be thrilled to send my child to or recommend any one of the after-school programs. I appreciate the depth of learning that occurs at the Jewish Enrichment Center and Makom Community, the breadth of learning at Edah and Jewish Kids Groups, and the emphasis on Jewish identity formation through Hebrew immersion and Israel connection at MoEd. The goals and approach at MoEd align most closely with a specific need that I see in Jewish education for more significant Israel education and a connection to Jewish peoplehood through the acquisition of the Hebrew language, though I realize that this may not resonate as much with more other segments of the Jewish community. Despite my connection to the philosophy at MoEd, in an ideal world, I would love for children to gain all of the knowledge and skills that the programs instill in their students. However, my research furthered the hypothesis that it is improbable that educators can provide a comprehensive Jewish education in just a few

hours a week. After conducting the interviews and learning from them as I drew inferences and conclusions, I do not believe that any type of educational school can give students a comprehensive Jewish education of both breadth and depth. Time is a limitation no matter how much of it an educator has; the Jewish tradition is so expansive that Jews can devote their entire lives to learning and never finish. My research affirmed, however, that the after-school programs indeed reach greater depth and breadth than they would be able to with less time.

As I strived to learn more about how the after-school models utilize more time with students, I learned much more about their systems and outcomes than I had initially anticipated. For most, their pedagogy takes precedence over the content they teach, and the desire to equip children with basic Jewish fluency is not the primary goal of most of the educational leaders with whom I spoke. The five educational leaders care most deeply about creating communities of students and helping them to acquire a baseline of Jewish knowledge and skills that will serve as the foundation of their Jewish identities. They are achieving all of the aims of Jewish education that I sought to explore, including establishing a positive association with Jewish education to encourage lifelong learning and engagement with Judaism, encouraging children and families to bond and engage in a social network, inspiring a love for Judaism along with Jewish places and spaces, promoting feelings of inclusion and belonging to the Jewish community, instilling sacred Jewish values, and exposing students to the fundamentals of Jewish life (holidays, texts, language, history, and culture).

Though I believe that the programs are successfully meeting their goals, and their leaders report high levels of satisfaction amongst their constituents, further research would need to be conducted to better understand the experience of students and families. The stories that the educators shared were helpful anecdotes, but conversations with families would be useful to better understand the following:

- Why do families initially choose the programs? Is it for enrichment and education or after-school childcare? What compels them to re-enroll their children in the programs?
- How do children feel about their experiences in the programs? What are the components that excite and challenge them most?
- How do students articulate their connection to Judaism and the Jewish community as a result of their involvement in the after-school programs?

In addition to conducting interviews with current program participants, I would be interested in speaking with individuals who were students at the programs 5-10 years ago to investigate how their attitudes toward Judaism and their involvement in the Jewish community have developed, changed, or remained the same since they participated in the programs.

While there is currently no public longitudinal data on the outcome of participation in the five after-school programs, it is evident to me that they are profoundly and positively impacting the lives of Jewish children and families in their locations across the United States. The programs are making significant impressions on hundreds of families who might otherwise not be engaged in the Jewish community or Jewish education, and I believe that

their impact will last far beyond the time that children spend participating in them. I hope that more educational after-school programs will launch in other places throughout the country as alternative and complementary to the existing options for supplementary Jewish education. The after-school programs give me hope for the future of American Jewry as they create opportunities for more children and families to receive a Jewish education and participate in Jewish communities.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Avineri, Netta, Sarah Bunin Benor, and Nicki Greninger. "Let's Stop Calling It 'Hebrew School': Rationales, Goals, and Practices of Hebrew Education in Part-Time Jewish Schools." *CASJE*. CASJE, July 27, 2020. Accessed February 26, 2023.
https://www.casje.org/sites/default/files/docs/hebrew_education_report_july2020.pdf.
- Central Bureau of Statistics. "Population, By Religion," September 15, 2022. Accessed February 24, 2023.
https://www.cbs.gov.il/he/publications/doclib/2022/2.shnatonpopulation/st02_02.pdf.
- Chazan, Barry. *A Philosophy of Israel Education: A Relational Approach*. 1st ed. 2016. Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.
- Fisher, Laurie. "'So Exciting, so Rich and Right': A Constructivist Grounded Theory of the Jewish Afterschool Program." PhD dissertation, Gratz College, 2020.
- Foundation for Jewish Camp. "Making Mensches: A Periodic Table." Accessed February 21, 2023. <https://jewishcamp.org/making-mensches/>.
- Jewish Enrichment Center. "Educational Approach," March 28, 2019. Accessed February 3, 2023. <https://jewishenrichment.org/about/educationalapproach/>.
- Jewish Enrichment Center. "How We Do It," March 28, 2019. Accessed March 3, 2023. <https://jewishenrichment.org/about/how-we-do-it/>.

Jewish Kids Groups. "JKG Organizational Values,"

<https://www.jewishkidsgroups.com/mission-vision-values>.

Makom Community. "Makom Making: Jewish Education Professional Development," January

4, 2023. <https://makomcommunity.org/makom-making/>.

MoEd. "Curriculum — MoEd." Accessed March 6, 2023.

<https://moedcommunity.org/curriculum>.

MoEd. "Israeli Culture." Accessed February 27, 2023.

<https://www.moedcommunity.org/#israeli-culture>.

Novak Winer, Rabbi Laura. "New Partners in Jewish Education: Independent Afterschool

Jewish Education Programs and Their Relationships With Congregational

Supplementary Schools." *Journal of Jewish Education* 83, no. 3 (July 3, 2017):

173–95. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15244113.2017.1344822>.

Schuster, Diane Tickton. *Portraits of Jewish Learning: Viewing Contemporary Jewish*

Education Close-In. Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2019.

Studio 70. "About Edah," February 24, 2022. <https://studio-70.org/edah/about/>.

Wiggins, Grant, and Jay McTighe. *Understanding by Design*. Pearson Education,

Incorporated, 2006.