

# Strengths and Limitations in Present Attempts at Preparing Workers for Jewish Communal Service\*

GRAENUM BERGER

*Former Director, William E. Wiener Educational Center, Federation of Jewish Philanthropies, New York*

**W**HAT? Another paper on professional training?

An examination of the literature of Jewish communal service would indicate the pre-occupation with this topic.<sup>1</sup>

As far back as 1890, stipends were provided to college graduates, who wished to educate themselves more adequately for work in Jewish institutions. In 1902, the National Conference of Jewish Charities provided such scholarships, but a very limited number accepted this opportunity and the funds were subsequently withdrawn.

Prior to 1913, efforts were made to encourage workers on the job to improve their knowledge and skill through in-service training.

During this period, the Jewish Chautauqua Society (1893), initiated courses in New York, Baltimore and Chicago for employed Jewish communal workers, but this effort was short-lived. Perhaps this was so, because of the questionable state of the profession at that time.

In 1917, Boris Bogen<sup>2</sup> could write that "in the selection of a superintendent ... in some instances, the office is bestowed as a pension upon a person whose services could not be employed otherwise, in others it is purely a matter of connection,

something similar to political pull. Lately, the requirements have become more positive. The appearance, the general bearing, the moral tone and disposition, eloquence and refinement are taken into consideration. It is only in exceptional cases that professional efficiency is sought. How many communities care whether their superintendent possesses knowledge of sociology, political economy, psychology, and so on; how many of the Jewish communities dealing with immigrants, their past, their peculiarities, their tendencies, their merits or their shortcomings. ... The qualifications of a settlement worker are measured by the degree he or she is pleasing to the volunteers. Here the charming personality, the smooth talker and an effective smile, a jollier and a favorite of some selected circles, what is called a good soul, has better chances than the efficient communal worker, a man or woman of ideas, sincere and well meaning, but not possessing external pleasantries."

In 1913, the Jewish Settlement, an agency supported by the Federation of Jewish Charities in Cincinnati, established what might be termed the first School of Jewish Social Service, but when it failed to enroll students it was terminated within 18 months.

In New York, the struggling and imaginatively directed Kehillah, established a school for Jewish Communal Work in 1915, but World War I soon brought this to an end.<sup>3</sup>

Due to the indefatigable labors of one man, Dr. Maurice J. Karpf, the National Conference of Jewish Charities es-

\* Presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Conference of Jewish Communal Service, Philadelphia, May 28, 1973.

<sup>1</sup> The Author presented one entitled "Professional Training for Jewish Communal Service" at the National Conference of Jewish Communal Service in Pittsburgh on June 1, 1959. It was not received with enthusiasm.

<sup>2</sup> *Jewish Philanthropy*, McMillan, New York, 1917, pp. 305-6.

tablished the Graduate School of Jewish Social Work in 1925, which unhappily for Jewish communal service in America, terminated in 1940, when the Jewish communities could not be persuaded to provide the essential funds. The school offered a Master's degree. The program provided some basic courses at the then New York School of Social Work (now Columbia), but Jewish students were exposed to the seminal minds of Dr. Salo Baron and Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan, whose historical, sociological and theological conceptions have been without peer in the past 40 years. Here these distinguished teachers tested their original ideas on a group of students, many of whom achieved key leadership positions in subsequent years.

Despite the rapid professionalization of the field of social work since the 1930's and the burgeoning of new non-sectarian schools of social work in the 1940's, a lacuna in preparation for Jewish communal service necessitated the establishment of the Training Bureau for Jewish Communal Service in 1947 to meet the prodigious Jewish communal requirements of the post World War II period. It was the creation of five national organizations — the American Association of Jewish Education, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds, the National Community Relations Advisory Council and the National Jewish Welfare Board. Organized largely for selected workers already practising in the field,

<sup>3</sup> Arthur A. Goren, *New York Jews and the Quest for Community*. Columbia University Press, New York, 1970, pp. 60, 62-63, 75-76.

Read Alfred J. Kutzik's chapter on "Class and Ethnic Factors" in Florence W. Kaslow, and Associates, Ed., *Issues in Human Services*, Jossey-Bass, New York, 1972, pp. 85-114, for a historical and critical evaluation from the volunteers to professionalization of the field which includes references to Jewish institutions.

drawing upon a full and part-time faculty, some of whom had been educated in the predecessor Graduate School of Jewish Social Work, developing a mass of specialized material pertinent for those engaged in Jewish communal service, it too experienced trouble in finding students and failed to sustain the initial outburst of financial support, so that it folded in 1951. The Training Bureau offered a certificate but no degree.

The next venture was undertaken by Yeshiva University. From some initial courses offered on an undergraduate level in 1944, it made a giant leap forward by founding the Wurzweiler School of Social Work in 1957, the first such "Jewish" school in a total university setting and a Jewish university at that. While it initially prepared professionals for casework and group work, in 1972 it introduced a department in Jewish community organization as a result of a grant from the Federation of Jewish Philanthropies of New York. The School offers both a Master's and Doctoral program. It is the only graduate school which provides all its students with four basic Jewish courses, thus giving it both the milieu and the academic character of a Jewish institution.

Mindful of the need for more professional as well as Jewish underpinning for future as well as for existing staff, local Jewish agencies, Federations and many of the national Jewish organizations have sponsored short term institutes for their specialized requirements over the years. These institutes operate in town, at summer camps, in resort hotels. In New York, the Jewish Orientation Training Seminars (JOTS), now completing its 20th year, has exposed over 1,000 Jewish communal workers and some Board volunteers through more sustained seminars (four to ten sessions), frequently employing some of the outstanding Jewish thinkers in the Jewish community. These include rabbis,

Jewish scholars, psychiatrists and social workers. It is funded by the Federation, directed by the Board of Jewish Education, co-sponsored by the National Jewish Welfare Board and the New York Metropolitan Association of Jewish Center Workers, and in the last two years has had a close working relationship with the Wurzweiler School.

About six years ago, perhaps inspired in part by the near tragic Israeli-Arab War, which turned the world Jewish community around and inward to face and judge itself, both spontaneously and contagiously there arose new stirrings that revealed that we not only had serious shortages in professional personnel in our then still expanding Jewish communal agencies and particularly those involved with larger Jewish communal problems, but that the products of existing educational programs were inadequately prepared both Jewishly and administratively. Under the latter rubric were included fund-raising, social planning and community organization.

Organizational life had reached a higher level of sophistication. We were now operating in the age of the computer as well as in advanced communication media. It was now necessary to organize entire Jewish sub-communities, particularly in New York, as well as just provide high level concrete services to individuals, families and groups. The Jewish future could not be assured just by competent technicians,<sup>4</sup> but that institutions required committed professional Jews, or to use Jacob Neusner's phrase — a new breed of Jewish "holymen" (and I equally assume "holy women").<sup>5</sup>

Although it was not yet articulated by

more than a few people, there was a growing disillusionment with the preparation afforded by schools of social work — at that point in shifting time hell-bent on a program designed to work with and prepare as quickly as possible minority group professionals for the liquidation of their own and America's gigantic social problems. It began to dawn on Jewish lay and professional leadership that our world-wide financial rescue, settlement and funding programs, our middle- and upper-class communal constituency and our serious Jewish educational deficiencies could not be corrected by Jews overwhelmingly exposed to a graduate school system pushing mainly for advocacy and the alleviation of basic inequities in our entire policy.<sup>6</sup>

While from time to time studies of individual programs, agencies and communities raised questions about the effectiveness of social work methodologies, it was not until recent years that this questioning became so widespread.<sup>7</sup>

This self-flagellation was evident when Richard Lodge, Executive Director of the Council on Social Work Education, in low key, raised the issue at the 1972 Alumni Conference of the Columbia University School of Social Work.

"It is apparent that social work and social welfare are under extreme question in many segments of our society today. Voluntary and government funds for the education of social workers are diminishing rapidly. Our competence in the delivery, management and planning of social services is being called into

---

<sup>6</sup> Charles Miller and Charles Zibbell, "Memorandum on Jewish Communal Service and Social Work Education: A Problem and Program for Action", a N.C.J.CS document, April 1, 1973.

<sup>7</sup> Daniel P. Moynihan, *Maximum Feasible Misunderstanding*, Free Press, New York, 1969, and Joel Fischer, "Is Case Work Effective - A Review", *Social Work*, Jan. 1973.

---

<sup>4</sup> Theodore R. Isenstadt, "Towards Enriching the Quality of Jewish Life - the Role of the Jewish Family and Children's Agency" this *Journal*, Vol. XLX, No. 1 (1973) pp. 31-9.

<sup>5</sup> Jacob Neusner, *American Judaism - Adventure in Modernity*, Prentice-Hall, New York, 1972.

sharp question. Divisiveness and a degree of demoralization within the profession itself are evident."

The euphoria which marked over a decade of excessive expansion of social work training on a graduate and undergraduate level was now apparently at an end; the field was on the defensive.

But six years ago, steps were coincidentally taken to remedy the problem confronting Jewish communal welfare.

Perhaps the first was initiated by the Federation of Jewish Philanthropies of New York, which saw little prospect of obtaining properly prepared Jewish middle-management personnel from the schools of social work and thereby established the William E. Wiener Educational Center. Seeking post-master students and/or workers from any professional discipline (rabbinics, law, business as well as social work) with some life and work experience, it planned to augment their backgrounds Jewishly and administratively by using supplementary academic settings, but basically relying on intensive field work in Jewish agencies to fill the gaps. Despite the offer of extraordinary stipends, it found it difficult to enroll more than four students a year, although the program was designed for eight. Recruitment remained the major problem confronting these programs even when adequate funding was available. More mature people were reluctant to undergo another two years of training without an accompanying higher degree, even if it would lead to a better paying and higher status position.

After the first year, the program had to seek some second-year students among local schools of social work, and the pick proved no richer in these orchards. Schools claimed that they had few Jewish students to meet our unusual qualifications. Only with difficulty could four students be obtained, and even

they, while well above the average, seldom met the optimum standards set for this program.

Yet despite the difficulties of recruitment, those who completed the one-year program (only one remained for two years) were able to obtain higher level positions at substantially more rewarding salaries than they had previously earned. Three became assistant directors of Federation, four became assistant directors or directors of large departments in Jewish agencies, where a portion of their work load was community organization. One went into public welfare, one into social research and one left the field. On its face, it does not appear to be a bad record, albeit a most costly one in time and money.

Since the recruitment problem was so acute, and the feeling remained that a center which did not offer a degree would be unattractive in this age of academic association, the program was finally modified with Federation setting up a chair in Jewish community organization at the Wurzweiler School of Social Work. In the past year Federation accepted six first-year students for field work. While all but one are young and lack experience, they have the requisite Jewish background, have an eagerness to learn, and hopefully, with intensive supervisory attention, will achieve the desired professional result. But I would be less than frank, if I did not indicate that the decisive factor in their development — and this was true of other students from other schools as well — is their field work exposure. Here is where one discovers the gaps in their knowledge; here is where they really acquire skills; here is where one overcomes their built-in resistance to fund-raising, administration and working in the voluntary and Jewish sectarian domain, often having to counteract what the schools were teaching or what the faculty were

privately advocating; here is where one tests their commitment to future Jewish practise.

While the Wiener program was being developed, on the West Coast the School of Jewish Communal Service of the Hebrew Union College, Jewish Institute of Religion was being born simultaneously, matriculating its first class in the Summer of 1969. This program is indirectly related to the institutions associated with the Jewish Federation of Los Angeles. It is essentially a national rather than a local enterprise.

This is not the first effort at associating social work education with Rabbinic seminaries. When the Graduate School of Jewish Social Work was in difficulty, I remember joining the late Moses Beckelman and Dr. Abraham Duker in a visit to Dr. Louis Finkelstein at the Jewish Theological Seminary to explore the possibility of the School's affiliation. A few decades later an effort was made to establish a new school of social work in that institution. There have been other reach-out programs to Jewish Rabbinical bodies with the development of pastoral psychiatry and the cooperative programs developed in New York, through the Commission on Synagogue Relations of the New York Federation with its companion social welfare and medical institutions. The need for greater union is self-evident, particularly today when our youth and families are seeking the mystery of the Jewish experience more than its formal rationalism.

The Los Angeles School of Jewish Communal Service is headed towards stability and, hopefully, permanence. Twenty-eight students were enrolled in the summer of 1972. While drawing initially and mainly upon workers already in the field of Jewish communal service, its avowed aim is either to awaken the student's Jewish interests and consciousness, or, where it already exists, to extend and deepen it through seminars,

exposure to thoughtful and influential secular and rabbinic teachers, and through some direct field work contact with social work practise. From afar, and from interviews with a half dozen of its participants over several years, I am persuaded that it is achieving its objectives. Since it is now also offering double masters degrees in both social work and Jewish communal studies, it has a wider appeal to students, who might otherwise have been reluctant to spend either the time or money for a mere certificate. I suspect that its major problem in the years ahead will be sufficient money to assure its continuity. If I may also comment from a distance, I think it will also suffer if it does not develop a more singular Jewish ideology. While students articulate that they prefer to choose amongst the conflicting positions that pre-occupy Jewish life, my own feeling from having supervised students intensively in recent years — although my own supervisory experiences initially go back to 1933 — is that they *need* a monolithic discipline to relate organically the historical Jewish experience with the current Jewish scene. I'm not worried about their making their own ultimate decisions. I am concerned that in the welter of selecting from among inconsistent and antagonistic Jewish ideological expositions, that they will settle for the most minimal identification with Jewish life, since *no more* is required of them to remain a Jew and even obtain a good position in the Jewish professional world.

Meanwhile Baltimore is following suit with a program that closely relates the local Federation to the Baltimore Hebrew College and the University of Maryland School of Social Work in an effort to harmonize Jewish background with social work skills. The program is limited as yet to only a few students. The overall supervision is intensive. It includes a summer in Israel to broaden the

students' international Jewish perspective. It is the kind of model that could be replicated in other communities, where both Jewish collegiate facilities and a social work school are in close proximity. Its weakness is its very modest dimension, which unless intimately connected with similar efforts elsewhere, will give the students either a sense of isolation or a feeling of apprenticeship rather than furnish them with an all-encompassing academic atmosphere. It requires a delicate balancing of three institutional structures, which while operating in a congenial cooperative relationship, at best find it impossible to achieve an integrity and singular ideological position. The fortuitous presence of a Jewish dean in a school of social work with a strong Jewish background and an affirmative Jewish identity is a great asset, but this is an accident of person, of time and of place, not a typical condition in the field.

Cleveland also has a similar modest program, but much less complex in that the relationship is only between the Federation and the Case-Western Reserve School of Social Work with no tri-partite Hebrew College. Furthermore, the program includes non-Jewish voluntary agencies, which apparently have the same need to obtain sympathetic students who are not hostile to voluntary social work and who might be more adequately prepared to deal with the sophisticated problems of fund-raising and administration — along with social planning and community organization — which the Jewish Community Federation of Cleveland and kindred non-Jewish organizations require.

At Brandeis University, there is located an on-campus Hornstein - Lown Center which combines all the Jewish, general and field work disciplines, except that its avowed objective is to develop Jewish professionals for the varying functions of Jewish communal service including Jewish education, rather

than merely social work. The resources of the entire university are available to supplement any imaginative bent that the student may develop. It is located near the Florence Heller Graduate School of Social Work, which seems to be moving further and further from the Jewish scene, if one is to judge by where its graduates ultimately end up in practice, and the doctoral dissertations, which with very few exceptions, have rarely employed Jewish themes.

In support of all the above programs and others (e.g. Philadelphia) that may still emerge, the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds has undertaken to bring together periodically those associated with these programs for an exchange of experience and to encourage large scale recruitment for these projects. In combination they will probably not enroll more than 75 students in the academic year 1973-74.

The Council has also established a scholarship fund supported by the Federations, which provide generous stipends in the first year and enable the students in the second year to borrow funds at low interest rates repayable over a decade after graduation. The students are interviewed by a combination of volunteer and professional leaders, using criteria that is most exacting. The watchword is "excellence". I supervise such scholarship students.

One can see from the above that a dire problem must have existed in the national Jewish institutional community with respect to current and future Jewish professional personnel to evoke such a response — in fact, varied and imaginative responses. Not only are there now a number of programs for which there appear to be a sufficient number of recruits, but the Jewish communities have found the resources to maintain these different establishments, which are not exactly operating on shoe-string budgets.

What it does reveal is that the Jewish communities no longer found the schools of social work as they were previously operating satisfactory instruments for developing future Jewish professionals. Not that Jewish students were not flocking to these schools, for they were; nor that some graduates did not make it in the Jewish field, for they did; but we did recognize that in the main the schools were not concerned with preparing workers for either voluntary social work and more particularly for service in the Jewish community.<sup>8</sup> They did nothing to enhance the Jewish backgrounds of their students. Their preoccupation with advocacy and public policy often ran counter to Jewish interests. They often diverted Jews from seeking their professional fulfillment in the Jewish field. In recent years, the affirmative action policies for both admission and scholarships reduced opportunities for Jewish students to enroll and prepare for general as well as Jewish practise.

Jewish problems around the disintegration of the Jewish family (pre-marital sex, extra-marital swinging, divorce, desertion, homosexuality, intermarriage, drugs, etc.); Jewish problems around community affairs (school demoralization, housing deterioration, crime, poverty); Jewish education with emphasis on day schools, summer camps,

college youth; Jewish interests in Soviet Russia, the Middle East, Israel; Jewish funding for all these endeavors received little or no attention in the curriculums, the extra course content, and in the field work assignments of schools of social work.

In fact if you had a field work student, you had to spend a great part of the year counteracting the negative influences, searching for experiences that would provide antidotes, supplementing class bibliographies with Jewish materials, and in fact attempting to raise both the intellectual and productive demands on a student, so that if he ended up by chance in a Jewish position, he would be much better equipped for the job than if left to the normal practices of the school.

It will be contended that the schools, or at least some of the schools, are changing; that a few of them have already exhibited an interest through the above referred to programs; and that at best our numbers are not so great, but that we can find a sufficient number of schools to cooperate with us, so that all we have to do is be alert and furnish supplementary experiences. While this may be true, the business of the schools of social work is to concern itself with 98 percent of the U.S. population, which is non-Jewish, rather than our miniscule and shrinking Jewish census. Dependent as they have been and will be increasingly on government funding and the pressures coming from other minority and liberal fronts, they will have to bow to inevitability.

Assuming even that there is the best will in the world on the part of the schools, the curriculum must remain predominantly generic, not necessarily sympathetic to our interests. Faculty changes in the future are not likely to reflect any greater interest in Jewish affairs and in fact are quite likely to image the reverse. Student selection, even when they are of Jewish origin, may be prejudicial, for schools are looking for

---

<sup>8</sup> That this extends even beyond the Jewish field is reflected in the "Position Statement of Family Service Agencies Regarding Graduate Schools of Social Work", 1972: "In the opinion of the Family Service Association of America and directors of its member agencies, the trends of curriculum development in schools of social work in recent years and the climate of opinion with which schools surround their students have weakened the preparation of their graduates as practitioners with individuals and small groups. ... The trends in the majority of graduate schools have been to emphasize community planning and social policy and to deemphasize social casework, as if these were competitive rather than complementary processes."

the individual, who prefers to function in the general rather than the sectarian field. Even in the choice of field placements, or the approval of a field work supervisor, there seems to be a greater propensity for selecting agencies which provide a student with a general rather than an intensive Jewish experience. Faculty, curriculum, field placement, influence in job selection are all intimately related, and in fact should be, if a school is to have an impact on the student's professional development.

Except for a few locations like Wurzweiler, Hebrew Union College and Brandeis, if they intensify the course which they have elected to pursue, I can see little reward from alliances with other schools of social work as a source for future Jewish personnel prepared for the kind of Jewish practise and leadership roles which they must ultimately assume.

What is good in contemporary economics, psychology, sociology and education that squares with Jewish in-

terests should be incorporated in our own specially designed Jewish communal schools, and two or at most three models should be sufficient for our future requirements. We do not have to fear professional isolation, because the media, literature and innumerable personal contacts will not permit us to become recluses, even if that kind of separation was desirable.

What we must prevent, if it is educationally possible, is the confusion of mind and uncertainty of direction that the variegated, non-Jewish approaches have imposed on several generations of Jewish social workers. Unfortunately the latter's continuing vocational presence and lag in our field will act as a sufficient brake to any hasty change that many of us have impatiently tried to accelerate.

But the instability of the Jewish position in the United States and the world demands a newly committed Jewish communal professional, and no other can be trusted to insure our destiny.