This report was made possible by the North American Alliance for Jewish Youth in partnership with the Jewish Agency for Israel, the North American Coalition for Israel Engagement and UJA Federation of New York. It is a publication of the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies, Brandeis University.

Additional copies may be obtained by contacting:
North American Alliance for Jewish Youth
6 East 39th Street, 10th Floor
New York, NY 10016
Tel: 212-792-6212
info@naajewishyouth.org
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

One of the major concerns of the Jewish educational community over the past few years has been the connection of American Jews with Israel. Political and cultural factors have contributed to the weakening of ties. These factors include the perceived dangers of participating in Israel experiences during the intifada; the controversy over ‘who is a Jew?’ the growing subjectivity of American Judaism; and the growing awareness that much of earlier Jewish education about Israel relied on myth (Rosenthal, 2001). The North American Alliance for Jewish Youth (NAA) and the North American Coalition for Israel Education (NACIE) recognize that for those ties to flourish, American Jews need a greater knowledge and understanding of Israel (Boyd and Moskovitz-Kalman, 2004). To that end, NAA and NACIE have reviewed the state of American Jewish education about Israel, particularly in the area of informal Jewish education: Jewish summer camps and youth movements. Their goal is to help the educators in these environments become better prepared to build connections for their campers and youth group members with Israel.

In order to identify the needs for professional development specifically in regard to Israel, the NAA engaged the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies (CMJS) to interview directors of national Jewish youth organizations and experts in the field of informal Jewish education. This report presents the results of those interviews. Participants discussed training and development efforts already underway and additional needs for skills and knowledge to teach about Israel. Directors of NAA affiliates agree on the centrality of Israel in the missions and values of their organizations. Beyond that, Zionist camps and youth groups differ from denominational camps and youth groups, and camps differ from youth groups even within the same organizations. Nonetheless, the interviews point to the kind of professional development needed in the field and how it should be delivered.

- The target audiences for training are direct contact counselors and youth educators, but their needs and the structure of their work will necessitate separate and distinct programs for each.
- An Israel experience is an essential component of any professional development effort for both groups of professionals. Outside of the Orthodox and specifically Zionist organizations, there are many counselors and youth group leaders who have not had significant Israel experiences.
- An Israel experience is not enough on its own. Time in Israel needs to involve a serious learning component, pre-trip preparation, and post-trip follow-up efforts.
- Professional development for groups of people who may not define their jobs as professional and whose employers think of them as transitory has its own set of

---

1 In this report, counselors refers to summer camp counselors, and youth educators are those who work with youth year-round in informal education either as youth group advisors or local youth directors.
challenges. Strategies will be necessary to develop buy-in especially among the congregational leadership that employ youth educators.

- Educators planning the learning component of Israel training require background and understanding of informal education. Youth educators and camp counselors need their teachers to model the kind of work informal educators are responsible for in the field. Programs based on a formal educational model are less likely to succeed.

- An Israel experience is not enough on its own. Personal interaction that builds relationships between Israelis and North Americans over time is an essential element in developing attachment to Israel for youth workers as well as for the young people with whom they work.
BACKGROUND

This section talks about the creation of NACIE and its partnership with the NAA. It emphasizes the importance of informal education as a vehicle for bringing awareness, appreciation, and connection to Israel into the lives of North American Jewish teens.

Educating American Jewish children about Israel is becoming an increasingly difficult task. American Jews’ connections to Israel are weakening; security issues have reduced the number of youth taking part in an Israel experience; and political issues have distanced American Jews from Israel. As well, there is evidence that Israel education, itself, is lacking (Gerber & Mazor, 2003). NACIE, a partnership of the Jewish Agency for Israel (JAFI) and the UJA-Federation of New York, was formed in 2003 to develop a new strategy for teaching about Israel and creating engagement. One of the areas it targeted for change is informal Jewish education in camps and youth groups.

Informal Jewish education, more than the formal classes our youth attend, may be the place to develop an interest in Israel. “Jewish education lends itself particularly well to the experiential approach because so many of the concepts that we wish to teach … are rooted in actual experiences. Israel in Jewish life is not an abstract concept but a real place that can be visited, touched, walked, smelled. Jewish education is extremely well suited to giving experience primacy. And informal Jewish education is the branch of Jewish education which highlights that primacy” (Chazan, 2003, unpaginated). But unfortunately, the front line of informal Jewish educators—camp counselors and youth advisors and educators—are often young people with very little experience or education in the field. They come to their positions because they had some of their best teenage experiences in Jewish camps or youth groups and they want to continue to have and share those experiences (Sales and Saxe, 2004). They are enthusiastic about their work and their Judaism, but they are not necessarily educated about Judaics, informal educational techniques, or Israel.

NACIE built a partnership with the NAA to develop professional training for informal Jewish educators that would enable them to wrestle with the issues of teaching about Israel and to develop the skills and abilities to be able to convey a greater understanding of Israel. The NACIE-NAA partnership asked CMJS to explore the current status of professional development initiatives and future needs centered on Israel. Several vexing complications arise in discussing such initiatives:

- Who should be the targeted audience: direct contact people, their supervisors, or a new class of ‘teacher educators’?
- Should camp and youth group personnel be included in the same programs? And if so, how can this be accomplished?
- What should be the content of such programs? How should the areas of need be prioritized? How important is it for youth educators to have Israel experiences of their own before they can be effective transmitters of engagement with Israel?
Method

In order to address some of these questions, CMJS interviewed 21 national directors of NAA affiliates and various experts in the field of informal Jewish education. Initially, the NAA Executive Director and the NACIE Project Director compiled a list of informants. These included the national directors of both the camping organizations and the youth groups of USY (Ramah), NFTY, Habonim Dror, Hashomer Hatzair, Young Judaea Camps. Interviews were also conducted with leaders of BBYO and the JCCA Center for Jewish Education as well as with other selected leaders in the field of Jewish camping and informal education. Three interviews were conducted with local coordinators of youth educator programs.²

Interviewees were asked about current professional development within their organizations for counselors and youth educators and were asked to describe what they believed to be best practices in the field. They were asked about their perceptions of the gaps in knowledge and skills among informal educators both in general and specifically in regard to Israel, and they were asked to dream aloud about how those gaps could be filled.

This report is organized in three sections: (1) the current state of the field, which outlines the place of Israel in North American youth groups and camps and the knowledge and experience of Israel that youth educators and camp counselors bring to their work; (2) current professional development offerings; and (3) the needs for further professional development specifically around Israel. This third section addresses issues of content, buy-in for professional development programs, and the need for personal contact between North American youth professionals and Israelis. Finally, the conclusions section summarizes the challenges ahead.

² For a complete list of informants, see Appendix A.
CURRENT STATE OF THE FIELD

In this section, the discussion focuses on the centrality of Israel in the missions of NAA affiliate organizations. It describes current information about direct contact people both in youth groups and summer camps and their connections to Israel. It also presents ways in which Israel is integrated into informal education and the role of shlichim, particularly in building relationships among Israelis and North American youth.

Its website gives an unequivocal picture of Young Judaea’s stance in regard to Israel. “Young Judaea uses Israel as the prism through which its members see the world. While Jewish education and Jewish identity are essential to the functioning of the movement, it is Zionist identity which has been treated as a priority in terms of education and social action.” Its director says, “Israel is central to everything we do ... Everything we do in YJ leads up to the pinnacle experience – the Year Course in Israel.” YJ is a birthright israel (bri) organizer and provider. A number of years ago, YJ leaders were approached to do land arrangements for Hillel but “none of the bri participants were YJ kids because YJ kids have all gone before.” YJ kids are involved in camps and/or youth programs from 6-8 years of age. Their YJ education is all about Israel. Hebrew language is very prominent and they have more shlichim on a per capita basis than any other camp. YJ “knows how to do Israel.”

Young Judaea is a powerful force for engaging North American youth with Israel, but it is not the only organization to promote learning, appreciation and love for Israel among Jewish teens, nor is it the only one with great success in getting its members to visit. Other Zionist movements—Habonim Dror and Hashomer Hatzair—have also had impressive results and NCSY has contributed to bringing non-Orthodox young people as well as its Orthodox members to Israel. Reform and Conservative camps and youth groups also consider Israel central to their mission though they have other priorities for teaching and learning. Many factors distinguish camps from youth groups, one denominational movement from another, and the denominational movements from the Zionist movements. Nonetheless, the underlying fact is that they all are united around Israel and their desire to provide Jewish youth with meaningful learning experiences in and about Israel.

Ramah is very strongly Zionist, but not everyone understands that. Sometimes the message gets muted or lost. At a workshop, someone tries to organize separate groups for denominational camps and Zionist camps. The Ramah representative doesn’t know where he belongs. He says it makes him laugh because “We’re Zionist, but we’re also halakhically based. People fail to understand that we’re a Zionist camp as well.”
In 1998, Friedman and Zisenwine wrote that the marketing of Jewish summer camps centers on “fun and identity development.” Israel, Zionism, and religious growth are not usually mentioned in camp promotions, or when they are, they are “soft sold” (Friedman and Zisenwine, 1998). Today, however, a glance at the websites of NAA affiliates indicates a clear and unmistakable emphasis on Israel. Israel is mentioned on the home page of all ten camping and youth organizations that were part of this study, and promotions for Israel experiences are no more than one click away. The tone is clear. From NFTY’s “Imagine the Most Incredible Summer of Your Life” to BBYO’s presentation of Israel news on its main page, all convey that Israel is very much a part of their missions.

Still, the degree of centrality differs. For YJ it is the essence of the organization’s existence. For Ramah and the URJ summer camps, it is part of a larger agenda of instilling Jewish ideas and Jewish values. For NFTY and USY, as youth movements, creating safe time and space for Jewish youth to socialize with each other is paramount, but NFTY includes Medinat Israel among its values and commitments, and each USY region has a Vice-President for Israel Affairs. For NCSY, Israel is only one, albeit very important, aspect of bringing young people into Jewish life and identity.

Organizations differ not only in the place of Israel within their missions, they differ in regard to their success in hiring informal educators who are knowledgeable and experienced about Israel. The survey of camp staff conducted by Sales and Saxe found that 72% had traveled or studied on an organized Israel program. These numbers include camp rabbis, formal educators, activity specialists and senior staff as well as bunk counselors (Sales and Saxe, 2004, p.105). Among bunk counselors, 66% had been on an organized Israel program.3

In Hashomer Hatzair camps, the counselors “know Israel and have visited many times.” Its director claims that 95% of its counselors have been on Yedid (the 10th grade summer trip). The counselors speak Hebrew. Many are Israelis, and “those that are not feel that they are.” But Hashomer Hatzair attracts a very small number of North American Jewish teens. USY has the numbers but has more difficulty engaging direct contact people who can provide teens with a solid connection to Israel. NFTY advisors are young, many of them poorly paid and untrained for their jobs which they view as a way to spend a year or two between college and graduate school. “The reality of their lives is that they are just trying to get through the administration of the events and making sure the events take place.” When confronted by students who ask “why Israel?” many USY and NFTY youth educators do not have the ability to answer.

Counselors and youth educators differ from each other in important ways, even within the same movement. YJ, for example, is both a youth movement and a group of summer camps. The youth group leaders are volunteers, some from Hadassah. They have an affinity for youth and Israel, but they do not necessarily have the experience of living or studying in Israel that would help them maintain the level of Israel education that takes place in the summer camps. In YJ camps, Israel education is usually led by the shlichim

3 We do not have similar numbers for youth educators.
who bring current events about Israel, Israeli music and dancing, and various cultural activities into the programs. YJ teens go to Israel and they know Israel. Many attend Year Course. They come back as counselors ready to convey a “serious sense of personal engagement with Israel.”

In contrast, youth educators in the JCC’s may be stronger in their knowledge and experience of Israel than are the counselors who work in the JCC summer camps. The JCC Association offers an extensive development opportunity to youth educators employed by their member Centers. Although the JCC Association recently published an Israel Task Force Report in which it calls for greater engagement with Israel and Israel education on all levels, the individual JCCA camps may not be as deeply involved with Israel as the leadership suggests (Israel and the JCC: Partners In Jewish Discovery, 2004).

The extent and the ways in which Israel is integrated into camp life varies. In a census of camps and their Jewish programming and activities, the differences in regard to Israel is noticeable. Sales and Saxe (2004) noted the percentages of camps that incorporated Israel or Zionist symbols and activities:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Camp Type</th>
<th>Israel Flag/Hatikvah</th>
<th>Hebrew names for places and activities</th>
<th>Israel trip for older campers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jewish federation/JCC</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zionist</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denominational</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Sales and Saxe, 2004, p.40)

Another way in which youth groups and camps differ is in the presence and use of shlichim. Some camps have many, others have few. Youth groups may have regionally based shlichim, but only in some regions.

In some camps the shlichim are well integrated. There, “through personal contact with Israelis, campers can come to know Israel as a place where real people live and can share in their challenges and experiences.” Other camps, however, give shlichim centralized responsibility for Israel programming. As a result, the presence of shlichim can actually disempower the North American counselors who are not necessarily consulted about such programming and, if consulted, may feel they don’t know enough (Friedman and Zisenwine, 1998).

The national directors of NAA camp affiliates, in contrast to Friedman and Zisenwine, described “enormous contact” between shlichim and North American counselors working together. One informant did suggest that downtime (as opposed to programming time)
was different and that Israeli counselors may isolate themselves socially. “If [the Israelis] form a bond during [their] training, and have traveled together, they tend to hang out together.” JAFI in its preparation of shlichim and camp directors in their placement and programming are trying to diminish the degree to which shlichim are isolated. Some camp directors try to pair up Israelis and North American counselors. They try various informal activities such as mifgashim around topics of interest to both. The shlichim program has been upgraded—something referred to by one informant as “an absolute success.”

All the camp and youth movement Israel trips were affected by ha’matzav. Youth travel to Israel as reported by NACIE was down 92% from 2000 levels. Although tourism and teen travel are beginning to pick up again, young people who would have gone in 2001-2003 are now 19-21, in their college years, and prime candidates for counselor and youth educator positions. On college and university campuses, these potential informal educators are hearing extremely negative views about Israel and questioning whatever ties they have. The next sections look at the ways organizations are currently trying to address that situation and what can be done to further training about Israel in the future.
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT—CURRENT OFFERINGS

Camp counselors and youth educators are discussed separately in this section because of the differences in the nature of their jobs. The two fields differ both in terms of the preparation and on-going professional development that their direct contact people receive.

Camp Counselors

URJ runs Camp Kutz in New York’s Orange County. The camp provides leadership training for NFTY members. Its mission is to provide them with “serious Jewish learning” through teaching, mentorship, and peer leadership. The counselors, called Resident Advisors (RA’s) to fit in with the university model of the place, are college students. Faculty are brought in to teach specific subjects, but the education is kept informal, relaxed, without homework. The RA’s get their professional development in an orientation week before camp starts and in twice-a-week staff education sessions during camp. “They need adolescent development, experience working in teams, first aid, and skills for dealing with conflict.” This is the cohort that missed going on the Israel trip in 2000. They are signing up for bni now, but they don’t know a lot about Israel. Israel professional development for Camp Kutz is “more about creating a yearning for Israel and modeling that yearning for their campers. It’s not teaching about Israel.”

Camps and youth groups, according to interviewees, hire their front-line staff largely on the basis of character, leadership, and prior experience as campers or youth group members. For the denominational camps and youth groups, commitment to Jewish education is important as well. For the Zionist camps and movements, of course, attachment to Israel is critical, but character, leadership and enthusiasm for the organization usually trump Judaic content or knowledge of Israel in almost every organization. “The primary role of a counselor is in loco parentis.” They have to be “incredible and responsible human beings or they shouldn’t be watching children,” one interviewee said. Given these hiring criteria, the low pay, and difficulty attracting job applicants, many counselors and youth educators have little background in their work. Professional development, therefore, is an essential part of the work of both individual camps and their national organizations.

Every camp has an orientation week and the general sense among national directors is that camps do their best job with their first year counselors. Some have CIT programs that progress from taking classes, to working with younger campers in specific activities, to living in bunks as junior counselors. There is a great deal of variation and change over time as directors attempt to improve existing programs and initiate new ones. Mador, for example, a nine-week program at Camp Ramah of California in which senior campers work with the youngest campers but also receive instruction in a variety of fields such as
“education, rabbinics, psychology and child development,” is currently being revised. The Foundation for Jewish Camping (FJC) is exploring these counselor training programs and seeding new efforts. It recognizes the development of counselors as a “really key piece of the camping movement.”

During counselor orientation week, young people learn to view themselves as counselors. A critical aspect for all camps is to help staff distinguish between the roles of friend and counselor and to understand that their most important responsibility is to “be there for the kids.” There are many topics camps have to include during orientation week because they are legally required or because they are essential to camp operation. Protocols for dealing with negative, self-destructive behaviors as well as homesickness, discipline and administrative procedures have to be covered. New counselors need to learn some programming skills. There is very little time left over for Jewish learning and even less for learning about Israel (Sales and Saxe, 2004). The expectation is that those counselors who have been part of the organization as campers and have been on Israel experiences will transmit their enthusiasm to their campers.

Camps and their national organizations also try to maintain contact with counselors and provide them with development opportunities at conferences during the school year. Camp Ramah runs the Weinstein Institute specifically for second and third year counselors (college freshmen, sophomores, and juniors). Over the last two years it has been timed and placed to lead up to the NAA conference. The 2004 Institute focused in part on the Zionist mission of Ramah. The 2005 Institute was held in Israel. It attracted 43 counselors and focused on three areas:

- Staff training (with a focus on leadership, discipline, group dynamics, counseling skills, Hebrew language, and program development);
- Long term programs in Israel (with an emphasis on encouraging counselors to consider such programs for themselves);
- Experiencing Israel (geared to training staff how to translate the experience for their campers).

All aspects of professional development for counselors are on the FJC agenda. Currently, FJC is using a Covenant Grant to help counselors build the self-confidence they need to work with children on Jewish values and life. Another program, *Jewish Teachable Moments*, helps counselors identify and maximize those times during the day open to conveying Jewish values. Because orientation week is already full, this program experiments with an interactive distance learning model. FJC also offers the Cornerstone Fellowship providing an incentive package and an advanced professional development seminar for more Jewishly knowledgeable and committed third-year counselors. Specifically in regard to Israel, FJC is working with NAA to construct the *Israel I Know* program in some of the NACIE communities. All participants will have had some Israel experience and will be involved in the program on college campuses—again, during the school year, not during the summer. Through building literacy and “enabling them to feel confident that they have something to say,” the program hopes to empower counselors “to translate their emotional experience into content.”
In seeing professional development for camp counselors as an off-season activity, these programs represent an important development. At the same time, the national directors interviewed for this report remain committed to an informal educational approach. It is the “informal moments” rather than the formal programs that they think will have the most impact on their staff. As one told us: “to throw more programs [at them] is not the best bang for the buck.”

Youth Educators

The Director of the Board of Jewish Education lays out the dilemma confronting professional development for youth workers. Speaking generally about youth educators, directors and advisors, he says, “There is a revolving door of field workers – for a dozen legitimate reasons.” His community has created a network of informal Jewish educators to meet once a month for two hours. They spend half the time on administration and program collaboration and the other half on professional development. The network is, to some extent, a model, but they know they have a long way to go to professionalize the field. Salaries are low and the status of youth educators in their institutions is low.

Professional development for youth group educators and advisors differs from that for counselors. There is no equivalent of the week-long orientation session. Pre-job training requirements largely consist of experience as a youth group participant and willingness to accept very little pay for a great deal of work. Unlike counselors, youth group workers are in most cases hired by a third party whose mission, particularly in regard to Israel, may differ from that of the national or regional organization. Congregations would like to see their teenagers show up in their buildings and continue or develop new friendships with other Jewish teenagers. That is the primary task of the youth educator: to get the teens in the door and talking to each other. Israel, according to the people interviewed, is not high on their agendas. Youth educators also work in more isolated settings away from peers in their field. Some may be volunteers. Even youth group professionals hired by national organizations may have very little training or experience. BBYO direct contact youth leaders are mainly volunteers: parents, alumni, recent graduates or part-time college students. “Ninety-nine percent have no formal educational training or knowledge of what they’re trying to do.” In some regions, they have training but not the “tachlis.” Among the few professionals (125 nationwide), many are part-time and only 1-2 years out of college. A few, however, have majored in Jewish studies and have been active in Hillel. Some have even received training as fellows of the Steinhardt Jewish Campus Service Corps and have served in the role of Hillel JCSC.

Like counselors, many youth educators view their work as stop-gap between undergraduate and graduate school. Lately with the development of the Institute for Informal Jewish Education (IJE) at Brandeis University and local youth educator initiatives, some have begun to rethink these positions and call for professionalization of

4 This refers to youth workers for NFTY and USY.
the field. “I absolutely think informal education needs to be professionalized. We are part of a legitimate field with a wisdom, a literature….I don’t think that the problem is that professionals don’t know enough, but there is little means by which we communicate with each other using professional language.”

At least 35 North American communities have some kind of network for youth educators. These, such as the one referred to above, offer opportunities to collaborate, meet with peers, and share issues and programming ideas. Sometimes they offer serious professional development. Some are open to any level of youth educator, advisors as well as directors, part-time and full-time. Some in communities with regional camps may include camp directors and their senior staff. Others are more specific and do not support part-time youth workers. A professional development fellowship program for educators of Jewish teens in San Francisco, Ti-ke-a, over an 18-month period offers four 3-day retreats plus a 2-week Israel trip. Its goals are “to increase the quality of Jewish teen programs by: recognizing, supporting and providing leadership opportunities for teen educators; supporting innovative program development; and working with Jewish agencies to better support teen education.” In Boston, 16 youth educators meet monthly to share ideas, collaborate on programs and learn more about areas important to their work. This year they have explored:

- College working: with parents and teens on choices
- Teen dating and abuse issues
- Engaging teens
- Social justice and service
- Organizational management
- Teen social life
- Supervision
- Negotiating for a better compensation package

Last year they had a session discussing Israel. This year they did not. Unfortunately, there is little demand among the network participants for programs on Israel. This may be because they feel they already have the knowledge, or because other issues are more pressing, or because promoting Israel is not part of the mission for youth as conceived by the youth committees that employ them. As the network’s coordinator said, “The field itself is not crying out for extensive professional development on Israel.”

Also in the realm of more formal education for informal Jewish educators are the programs run by the JCCA. The Association offers scholarships to young people interested in entering the field. These may be used to study for an MSW, an MA in Jewish education or Jewish communal service, or even for a marketing MBA. There is a “full and articulated mentoring program” for employees of the JCCs, and the JCCA runs

---

5 An inventory of such networks and programs would help reduce the risk of duplicating efforts in program design and development.
6 This may be different in San Francisco where the youth educator professional development program fellowship program (Ti-ke-a) has included an Israel experience, and the Educational Leadership Institute (ELI) for both formal and informal educators has focused on Israel.
four-day professional conferences during the course of the year. The Mandel Center for Jewish Education, “a free standing organization,” helps the JCCA “infuse informal education with Jewish education.”

The JCCA runs a program called Teen Professional Fellows. They just started their 4th cohort of this two-year program with fifteen fellows. Youth workers from JCCs all over the country apply for this selective program. Five times a year the fellows come together for four days. At the JCCA biennial, alumni return and Rabbi Alvin Mars is brought in to work with them. Participants also attend the JCCA professional conference held during the off year when the biennial does not meet. Over the course of the program, the fellows receive Jewish education as well as training in professional skills. The program is designed to be “a personal Jewish journey so they can feel comfortable thinking of themselves as Jewish educators.” One of the five seminars is a two-week trip to Israel. Many of the fellows have never been to Israel. The goals of the Israel component of the program are 1) to get them to Israel, 2) to strengthen their own identification as Jews 3) to make Israel part of their own Jewish journeys, and 4) to enable them to “sell” a trip to Israel to the teens they work with.

The IJE and JESNA are laying the groundwork for developing a “boilerplate curriculum” for youth educators that each community can adapt for its own use. This project is still in the development phase, but they anticipate a component on Israel. This and similar programs are designed to help “professionalize” the field. Youth workers, national leaders said, need to be able to feel part of the professional teams of their communities. They need to feel part of a field of professionals in a respected career, and they need compensation that reflects that respect. Unfortunately, the problem is cyclical. Youth workers are young, inexperienced and untrained, therefore they do not receive the compensation or respect they need to make them want to stay in the field. Because of their status, they usually have very little if any professional development time or money in their budgets. The lack of opportunity for professional development means that their status will not improve, and they will move on to other careers. A new crop of young, untrained youth workers will enter the field and the cycle will begin all over again.

Some organizations, particularly the Zionist youth groups, insist on keeping professional development for informal educators informal. Hashomer Hatzair leaders describe its training as “experiential, informal learning … mentoring and role modeling.” Leadership development is part of both youth group and summer camp activities from the earliest years. The movement does not distinguish between this leadership development and training. They are the same thing. It is in the fabric of the organization’s culture: “Mostly [our youth members] learn by example – doing for each other – they run practice activities for the youngest kids… We are informal to the core!”

To summarize, there are many attempts to develop informal Jewish educators, but we suspect that the best and most innovative reach only a small number in the field. And for
most informal educators, Israel is a small part of their training.\(^7\) A central agency director said, “Israel is a overlay of an age-old problem: teachers in formal education have the content but they can’t deliver it; youth workers have the delivery, but not the content. How do we bridge that gap?” But according to most of the NAA affiliates’ national directors we spoke to, few youth workers have the delivery skills. Even if they have the experience of having been in Israel, having lived there or studied there, it does not mean they have the skills as informal educators to become effective Jewish educators about Israel.

\(^7\) A subject for further research would be to survey youth educators as Sales and Saxe surveyed counselors to try to ascertain professional development they have been part of, Israel experience they have had, what they know about Israel, and what, if any, role Israel plays in their jobs.
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT – CURRENT NEEDS

This section describes the current needs for professional development for informal educators both as perceived by national directors of youth groups and summer camps and by experts in the field. It discusses the need to provide Israel experiences as well as a format for serious learning. It also highlights the importance of creating commitment to Israel education among informal educators as well as the institutions that employ them. Finally, it stresses the necessity of maintaining and continuing to foster personal contact between Israelis and North American youth.

Barry Chazan notes that “informal Jewish education …calls for extremely serious educators and training.” And those educators need:

- Judaic knowledge;
- a Jewish lifestyle;
- a knack for group dynamics;
- the ability to be inter-active and to listen;
- the ability to engage others;
- the ability to impart ideas and values twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week (Chazan, 2003).

Joseph Reimer points out that youth workers need opportunities “to reflect on their work, identify problems and issues to work on, and learn new skills and perspective.” They need to be part of a group of peers who together can “raise the standards of practice in their field.” They need serious adult Jewish education coupled with “opportunities to explore what Judaism can mean for themselves and their youth.” Finally, they need both “professional and personal guidance” (Reimer, 2001).

In the ideal world, every counselor and every youth worker would have the opportunity to acquire the knowledge and abilities described by Chazan in the kind of setting described by Reimer and offered by the IJE. But in the real world, program designers have to prioritize the needs of informal Jewish educators. In the area of professional development around Israel, do youth workers and counselors need 1) their own Israel experiences, 2) formal learning about the culture, history and life of Israel, or 3) empowerment to create their own programs and informal “teachable moments” with which to convey engagement with Israel to their campers and youth group members? Which of these needs is most critical? Can programs be designed that meet all three needs at once? And where does Israel fit in terms of other professional development needs?

The Audience

Interviewees talked about their vision for youth educators and the kind of professional development they would like to see implemented by the NAA for Israel. All of them
assumed that the development needs for their front line people were greatest and most critical to address. Only once, when prompted by a specific reference to the format of training programs, did someone suggest that the professional development might be for teacher educators at the regional or more senior levels who could then use their learning to help the counselors or youth advisors and educators. The national directors regard their national and regional staff members as knowledgeable about and deeply committed to Israel. For them, the target for any new programming to enrich their organizations in regard to Israel is the direct contact people.

A second question concerns whether or not camp and youth group personnel can be trained together. Reimer writes that “a program for professional development should be for a defined groups of youth workers … A group that is highly heterogeneous is likely to find it harder to develop common understandings and work on common issues.” Each group has its own sets of issues and each needs to develop its own professional networks (Reimer, 2001). Particularly for youth educators, networking is imperative in order to avoid the trap of isolation in their own institutions. Professional development efforts should be job-specific but not limited by geographic region according to local youth educator network leaders. Partly they suggest this because of the difficulty of attracting a critical mass from their own regions. But a further consideration is providing the cross-fertilization of ideas and the discussion of mutual interests and issues that can come from including participants from a wider geographical area.

Content

A director of a national youth movement addresses the dilemma of where to start by acknowledging that everything isn’t great. “We have a lot of people out there who haven’t the foggiest idea what they’re doing, but they were in youth group themselves and loved it and want to give back. No one does it for the money.” He understands that most youth workers are in the field for the right reasons but do not have the right tools and that there is no organized training program for people who enter this field. Conveying a sense of Israel or a connection to Israelis is a serious challenge. That connection is an abstract concept even with the best of programming “unless you know something about Israel and you can’t know that without direct exposure.” Youth workers can’t teach about Israel unless they have a passion for Israel, he says, “but it’s awfully difficult to develop that passion if you haven’t had the contact.”

Broadly speaking, the people interviewed fell into two categories. Those in the first group assigned priority to learning the skills of informal education either as a foundation for any other professional development or in order to be able to help staff who have been to Israel translate their experiences into something meaningful for their campers or youth group members. The second group feels that getting informal educators to Israel is the absolute prerequisite for any discussion about professional development about Israel. These two views cut across type of organization (youth group versus camping or both) and stance (denominational versus Zionist).
Directors of the Zionist camps and movements are fairly comfortable that they have the right way to convey enthusiasm for Israel and to get their campers or youth group members to travel to Israel. They believe their youth workers have been imbued with the critical reasoning skills to come to solid positions on Israel in an organic way. And they maintain that these staff members are now comfortable conveying those same skills to their campers or youth group members. Most YJ, Habonim Dror, and Hashomer Hatzair youth leaders and counselors have been to Israel. The latter two organizations, recognizing that the majority of Jewish teens are in movements that are less successful in building Israel connections, feel the community’s first priority should be getting youth leaders to Israel in some kind of study experience. Counselors and youth educators need to have intimate knowledge of the country and society and personal experiences they can relate to current events. Without these, they will not be able to sustain their own connection to Israel or provide that connection for the youth they work with. “The paradox is that the Zionist youth movements don’t need [professional development about Israel] because they know how to do it, but the Reform and Conservative movements have the kids and don’t know how to do it,” one leader said. YJ is not concerned about getting its people to Israel— they already go. In the words of a YJ leader, “Israel education, for us, is not particularly worrisome. Teaming the field as a whole—that’s what’s important.” They can get their people to Israel, the challenge is getting people who are good informal educators.

NCSY leaders also feel their people know how to do Israel education and they have the numbers to prove it. But they feel the key is getting people to Israel. All of their youth workers have been to Israel. The Orthodox community has made it affordable and attached a high priority to making it normative for young adults to spend the gap year between high school and college in Israel. For them the question is not how to educate more youth workers about Israel, it’s about bringing more teens into Judaism by showing them “you care about them.” Once they have been brought into Judaism in this way, they will go to Israel. Their people know where they stand concerning Israel. The professional development needs they share with other NAA affiliates are in the areas of management, administration, fund-raising and programming.

In contrast, NFTY has many youth workers who have not been to Israel. It may not be realistic to try to bring all of them to Israel, but their national director considers time spent in Israel with a serious learning program to be “the single most effective way to develop youth workers who can teach about Israel.” He suggests selecting a certain number of youth workers from national, regional and local venues and providing them training—in Israel—with very senior educators to help them discover new and exciting ways to teach about Israel.

The JCCA in a recent Task Force Report, called for JCC camps to send counselors to Israel in late spring as part of educational training seminars, and to include in such seminars an opportunity to meet with shlichim assigned to their camps for the summer (JCCA ITFR, 2004). Pluralism is an essential element for the JCC world and its camps and “that pluralism is undergirded with a commitment to Israel.”
There is so much need in the area of professional development for youth educators and counselors, it is difficult to say where to begin. One expert in the field said in regard to Israel, “Some expertise is only experiential; some have never been. The latter case is scarier. How can you educate about Israel if you’ve never been there?” But balancing the need to visit Israel against the needs for professionalizing the field in general is a challenge. The same person had a long list of areas in which she felt informal educators are usually lacking: leadership development, pedagogy, grant writing skills, access to community leaders, trading programs and ideas, “professional skills pieces—marketing, financial management, strategic planning,” basic skills—how to network, find a mentor, “do our jobs right now better.” And only when prompted did she mention Jewish content. “Everyone probably needs to work on that—but that is what they do work on, where the offerings are right now. Whether they are great or the best that they can be…is another matter.”

Of course “just because you’ve been to Israel doesn’t mean you can teach about it,” one interviewee said, and spending time in Israel, as another said, has to be more than “partying, smoking pot, and hanging out on the beach.” The experience has to involve a serious learning component, as well. Interviewees were unanimous that more was needed. The consultant to Boston’s Yesod program indicated that an Israel experience would have to entail preparation and follow-up seminars. Informal educators, according to the national mazkir of Hashomer Hatzair, have to have an understanding of the nuances of Israel and a readiness and ability to think critically about it. The content piece has to address the complicated questions, many of which were raised in The Philosopher’s Retreat. The willingness and ability to think critically and understand many sides of an issue is important to any discussion or learning about Israel. Translating emotional experience into content is challenging for the most senior educators. Interviewees said that an effective Israel experience has to involve that translation. “It’s not just exciting people, but challenging them about Israel and their professional lives when they are at home.”

But it is not even enough for youth workers to bring home knowledge and ideas and programs. Informal educators also need the Israel experience to focus on the informal side of Israel education. The goal, according to Rabbi Alvin Mars, is to enable youth workers to make their work “Israelcentric” so that it informs all aspects of camp and youth group life. Some camps already claim to be doing that, but much more needs to be done. “If all you do in camp is an Israel day every year, it’s not enough. You need to have counselors who can develop an informal experience for campers, for example, going to haYam in the evening as a meditation for going to sleep.” The debate may continue about whether informal education is just good education, or whether good education requires both formal and informal elements. Clearly there are characteristics of youth work in both camps and youth groups that set it apart from classroom teaching. The results of experiential learning have the capacity to be much greater and longer lasting than classroom instruction. But the work is not easy because it is informal (Chazan, 2003; Reimer, 2003). Precisely because it is informal, it may be more difficult. In respect
to conveying a sense of engagement with Israel, study trips for informal educators may have to be thought through very differently from the Israel seminars for teachers.

**Buy-In**

Professional development around Israel for informal educators will also have to address buy-in—both from the youth workers themselves and from the organizations that hire them. The promotional challenge is particularly great for denominational youth groups in which the youth educator is hired by a synagogue youth committee. Hiring committees and supervisors expect that youth advisors will be with them for only a short time and will not be professional. Their job, conceived as building a community of teens who will return to the congregation in order to be with other Jewish teens, does not require a professional development budget line or release time for an Israel seminar.

Some of our informants also admitted that, until now, youth educators and their institutions have not put Israel on the front-burner of their work or their own personal development. In Washington D.C. when Jewish Experiences for Teens (JET) offered youth workers an opportunity to develop relationships and exchanges with their counterparts in their Israeli sister city, Beit Shemesh, the youth educators preferred having an exchange with youth directors from other cities in the U.S. They felt they did not have enough in common with their Israeli counterparts. In Boston, Israel is a subject of the Yesod network’s professional development program no more than once every other year because the demand is not there. As in other organizations we talked to, tools of the trade, administration, communications and career development are paramount concerns. “People, particularly at the line level,” a YJ leader told us, “have needs for more about communication and time management and being well organized.” A local network organizer said, “Israel is one of the priorities but not the top priority…Our youth educators are interested in a larger scope of things.”

National organizations that intend to make professional development about Israel happen will have to find ways to market it to the employers and supervisors of youth workers as well as to youth workers themselves. And they will have to include in their curriculum the organizational political skills to help youth educators advocate for themselves—to gain both the financial resources and the release time for this kind of study.

**Personal Contact**

Fortunately, there is also “low hanging fruit”—professional development that requires less effort. As we saw at the NAA for counselors and camp directors, the personal approach is already built into informal education about Israel through the shlichim program. “The person to person relationship” makes a great difference.” For example, USY on Wheels has had shlichim on their staff for the last three summers. They are a tremendous asset in and of themselves, and they form relationships with their North American peers.
The ultimate goal is to create a relationship with Israel for North American Jewish youth through professional development of their counselors and youth group leaders. It is hoped that the staff’s enthusiasm for Israel, their learning, and the professionalization of their practice will contribute to getting more Jewish young people to Israel for longer periods of time and for more intensive learning and living experiences. “Everyone should go to Israel,” said an informant. “If we do a good job, everyone will.”
This report demonstrates the need for professional development to help informal Jewish educators become more knowledgeable about and more connected to Israel. It raises questions and calls on the community to create new models. The following are proposed next steps for bringing those models to fruition.

### Information

Two areas of further data collection are recommended.

- **Survey of direct contact people.** Although camp counselors have been surveyed (Sales and Saxe, 2004), there is no similar information about youth educators, except perhaps at a regional level. The directors of national organizations and regional youth educator consultants lack a systematic basis for assessing the state of knowledge and experience in the field. Needed is a survey based on a well-developed sample that represents the various organizations and positions in the field.

- **Inventory of existing professional development programs.** No inventory of professional development activities for informal Jewish educators currently exists. A full list of programs offered by camps, the FJC, national and regional organizations, and local federations and central agencies could help inform the design and content of future efforts, particularly those involving Israel.

### Models

No two informants saw the needs for Israel education for counselors and youth educators in exactly the same way, and no one model will meet the needs of all organizations or cohorts. The interviews suggest the need for multiple models, all guided by the following principals.

- **Content-rich learning experiences in Israel including preparation and follow-up.** Informal Jewish educators need to have intensive learning experiences in Israel. None of the interviewees thought learning about Israel through U.S.-based teaching was a top priority, although all recognized that sending youth workers to Israel, while necessary, is not necessarily sufficient to produce a youth leader capable of conveying engagement with Israel. The trip has to incorporate exposure to study, values, and understanding. It requires preliminary groundwork and post-trip follow-up.

- **Customization.** Not only do the camps and youth movements differ in their needs, but the needs of the Zionist camps and youth movements differ from those of the denominational camps and movements. Models need to be customized for camp counselors and youth educators.

- **Personal contact between Israelis and North Americans.** Opportunities should be included for North American informal Jewish educators to build relationships with Israelis.

- **An informal education paradigm.** Counselors and youth educators need to have the “tools of their trade.” These are young people. Few have the background in planning,
community building and adolescent development that are essential for their work. Although Israel is a central part of the mission of all the organizations this study covered, for most it is part of a broader mission—none of which can be accomplished without creating safe, comfortable environments for youth. The skills for creating such environments are the top priority in training Jewish informal educators. Without those skills, no content piece—Jewish values or Israel—can be successfully conveyed. Creating programs that provide exposure to Israel and knowledge about Israel while at the same time embedding both within a framework of quality informal educational practice represents a significant challenge.

“It’s not about formal education. That’s not where people get their values and identity. Values and identity you get through informal education.”

Advocacy

• **Communicating the importance of the work.** Individual camp directors and synagogue lay and professional leaders do not necessarily appreciate the need to professionalize the field or to integrate Israel in the training of their direct contact personnel. Some of that is tied to the “revolving door” aspect of these positions. Information could be obtained from a survey of youth educators to determine whether high quality professional development could be enough to get people to stay on the job, even just one or two years longer—enough to have a real impact on the teens they work with.

  “There has to be the buy-in [among the lay leaders of the synagogues that hire and underpay our youth workers]. Otherwise, we could find ourselves with the money and no takers.”

• **Reframe the work.** Professional development is not the only goal of the work. The community must realize that every time it helps bring someone to a love and knowledge of Israel—whether through school, camping, youth group, summer program or professional development—it has done a good thing, even if that person does not choose a career in Jewish informal education.

  “There is no silver bullet for any of this. What we come up with will have to be tailored and nuanced, created hand and hand with the camp directors and national, regional, and local youth group leadership who are using it. One size won’t fit all.”
## APPENDIX A: Informants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Organization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sidney Abrams</td>
<td>Director of Human Resources</td>
<td>BBYO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Goldstein</td>
<td>Yesod Coordinator</td>
<td>Bureau of Jewish Education of Greater Boston</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nechama Tamler</td>
<td>Director Teen Programs</td>
<td>Bureau of Jewish Education of San Francisco</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avi West</td>
<td>Education Office</td>
<td>Board of Jewish Education of Greater Washington</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naomi Less</td>
<td>Senior Program Officer</td>
<td>Foundation for Jewish Camping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alex Sharon</td>
<td>Mazkir T’nua</td>
<td>Habonim Dror</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guy Ben Dror</td>
<td>Executive Director</td>
<td>Hashomer Hatzair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aaron Wolfe</td>
<td>General Secretary</td>
<td>Hashomer Hatzair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph Reimer</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>IJE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rabbi Alvin Mars</td>
<td>Director of the Center for Jewish Education</td>
<td>JCCA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlene Wendell</td>
<td>Consultant on Camping and Youth Services</td>
<td>JCCA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devorah Silverman</td>
<td>Director of Youth Initiatives</td>
<td>JESNA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fara Gold</td>
<td>Youth Advisor Training</td>
<td>JET</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steve Burg</td>
<td>National Director</td>
<td>NCSY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul Reichenbach</td>
<td>Co-Director of the URJ Youth Division and NAA Chairman</td>
<td>NFTY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rabbi Eve Rudin</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>NFTY Kutz Camp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rabbi Mitch Cohen</td>
<td>National Director</td>
<td>Ramah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andre Fram Plotkin</td>
<td>Jewish Renaissance &amp; Renewal Alliance</td>
<td>United Jewish Communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jules Gutin</td>
<td>International Director</td>
<td>USY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ramie Arian</td>
<td>Executive Director</td>
<td>Young Judaea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neil Weidberg</td>
<td>Director of Israel Programs</td>
<td>Young Judaea</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
REFERENCES


