

Deep Change in Congregational Education

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CONTEXT OF THE INQUIRY

Congregational education has for decades labored under the traditional religious school model. Based on Sunday and/or afterschool classroom teaching, the model has increasingly come to be seen as problematic and in need of fundamental revision (Wertheimer, 2007). There may be debate over causes and solutions, but what's clear is that most supplementary schools fail to captivate the affection of parents or the imagination of their children. Ten years ago the Task Force on Congregational and Communal Jewish Education concluded that innovative initiatives were needed to revitalize and enhance the quality of Jewish education and they recommended a set of activities to foster new models and structures in program design and content (Flexner, 2000). Almost a decade later, a study of effective supplementary schools arrived at essentially the same conclusion (Wertheimer, 2009). The repeated call is for *innovation*.

The Re-Imagine Project of the Experiment in Congregational Education (ECE) is one of several current efforts to engender educational innovation. As its name suggests, it intends to produce original thinking about supplementary school education and to create a new mindset about Jewish learning. Its goals, among others, are to explore and experiment with alternative models for religious school education and to build the capacity for organization change. Its design is a two-phase process: a year and a half of visioning, planning, and pilot testing followed by the implementation of a full-scale educational initiative. Our research focuses on the implementation phase and is concerned with the extent to which deep change is evidenced in the congregational schools as a result of this effort.

The Change Initiative

With funding from UJA-Federation of New York, The Re-Imagine Project has involved 32 congregations in Greater New York since 2003. The work has been carried out in three cohorts. The first launched in 2003 (5 synagogues), the second in 2004 (14 synagogues), and the third in 2006 (13 synagogues).

Planning Phase

Each cohort began with an 18-month planning phase. Within each synagogue, this phase was driven by a taskforce selected to represent different constituencies (lay leaders, parents of school children, educator, rabbi, and others). The taskforce used a step-by-step guidebook that took them through a deliberate process based on Jewish text, planning models, and organizational commonsense. The intended outcomes of the planning phase were an articulated vision for Jewish education for the children of the congregation, pilot tests of potential innovations, and clear direction for the implementation of a full-scale educational initiative.

Previous research gathered baseline data on the religious schools in the second and third cohorts and assessed the success of the planning phase in the second cohort only (Sales & Koren, 2007a, 2007b). This latter study measured how much congregations accomplished in the year and a half of planning and how positively they evaluated the product of their efforts. It also examined the factors that contributed to or detracted from a satisfying process and outcomes. The study was based on a pre- and post-project survey of taskforce members and a post-project survey of members of the school committee and the congregation's board of trustees. The research found that in the year and a half of planning, most of the congregations did not re-imagine their religious schools. Overall, only four of the 14 congregations reported that they "very much" re-imagined the school and only two said that their work set religious school education in a new direction. Part of the explanation lay in the relatively low ratings given to taskforce creativity and willingness to think big and take risks. Part lay in the enormity of the task and the necessity in a number of the sites to focus their efforts, to start small, to see this work as first steps on a longer process of change. And part of the problem, we suspected, was the intractability of religious school structures.

Nonetheless, results showed that taskforce members learned a great deal about their religious school, models of education, and the relevance of Jewish text. On a personal level, they learned about others in the congregation and about themselves and their own leadership capabilities. For many, the project helped develop skills in meeting management, community building, planning, and the like. Most importantly perhaps, survey respondents exhibited substantial acquired wisdom about the change process. It is this learning that we hypothesized would have the greatest impact on the congregations in the future.

Implementation Phase

The planning phase was followed by an implementation phase in which the synagogues were to put into place a full-scale educational initiative. The current research, conducted in 2009, focused on the implementation phase. Depending on their cohort, synagogues had had between one and four years to develop their initiatives by the time of data gathering.

Research Focus

The research on implementation is framed by ECE's goal for the congregations not merely to develop new programs in their religious schools but to create new models of education. The core question concerned the extent to which congregations achieved the deeper level of change entailed in a new model of education.

Theory of Change

Religious schools, like any organization have deep and surface structures. Surface structures are the concrete elements readily seen in an organization. A *program* is a surface structure. It is defined by target audience, content, learning activities, and the practical matters of time and place. In contrast, deep structures are intangible. They are the "heart and soul" of the organization and touch on its culture, values, and beliefs. A *model* is deep structure. It entails a

set of deep-seated assumptions about education and beliefs about student learning and the role of teachers and parents in the educational enterprise.

Surface and deep level change have variously been referred to in the literature as incremental and deep change, first- and second-order change, or structural and fundamental change. Such designations acknowledge that different types of change have different degrees of magnitude, with deeper levels of change having greater implications for faculty, students, parents, and other stakeholders (Beckard & Pritchard, 1992; Fullan, 1993; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2004, 2005). Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2004), for example, explain first-order changes as those built on past or existing models. These relatively superficial changes “are consistent with stakeholders’ prevailing values and norms and can be implemented largely with existing knowledge and skills and with help from outside experts. In short, they merely tinker at the edges and don’t seek to change the core values, beliefs, or structures of the school” (pp.50-51). In contrast, second-order changes “dramatically break with the past and challenge existing models, norms, and values.” These relatively deeper changes cannot be implemented by outside experts. Rather, “stakeholders must find their way through the changes together, acquiring along the way new sets of knowledge, skills, ways of thinking, and often, values” (p. 51). It is commonly recognized in education circles that many problems cannot be solved “once and for all” by superficial, incremental change but rather require deeper, more radical shifts in thinking and behavior (Fritz, 1984; Fullan, 2001; Heifetz, 1994). ECE’s purpose is to bring a similar understanding to the problems of Jewish supplementary education.

The two levels of change can also be understood through the theory of single- and double-loop learning (Argyris & Schon, 1978). In single-loop learning, the organization attempts to solve a problem by using tried-and-true strategies. In double-loop learning, the organization re-conceptualizes the problem, shifts its view of the world, and adopts a fundamentally new strategy. In terms of ECE’s Re-Imagine Project, changing a program by adding new elements or adjusting the schedule is single-loop learning; re-imagining congregational learning, conceptualizing a new model of education, is double-loop learning. Importantly, organizations that master double-loop learning will be more successful in the long run as they not only solve today’s problem but also learn how to solve problems. In terms of Jewish education, congregations that engage in double-loop learning not only develop new programs but they learn how to become educational innovators. We can expect that over the long haul, these synagogues will be more adaptive and creative places than those that merely learn how to implement a particular new program.

Process of Change

ECE’s theory of change intends to produce deep level change in the culture of the congregation, its educational model, and its capacity to be an innovating organization. The change process is based on the premise that the recipients of change must be actively involved in the process and should “experience a taste of the final product.” It also recognizes that change takes a long time and requires patience (Aron, 2000).

ECE’s Re-Imagine change process is driven by a taskforce selected to represent the different constituencies within the congregation and follows a multiple-stage design. It begins with the

formation of the taskforce and related structures (e.g., leadership team, connections to the religious school committee) and the establishment of the taskforce's working style (e.g., facilitated meetings, time for reflection, text study). The taskforce then researches the history of the religious school and its current status; considers the characteristics of meaningful Jewish learning; and challenges current assumptions about Jewish education for children in the congregation. In the third step, the taskforce becomes acquainted with several alternative models for Jewish education and begins to consider its own religious school program in light of these models. It also considers four issues: the integration of Jewish learning and living, the role of community and of parental involvement in children's Jewish education, and the creation of Jewish memories. Note that these issues define the *educational philosophy* underlying the project.

In the next step, the taskforce members examine their congregation's challenges and opportunities; they take a comprehensive look at their school; and they consider future possibilities through the lens of the four issues referenced above. The last step in planning engages the taskforce in writing a vision statement, developing and assessing proposals for educational initiatives, designing a pilot program and developing a plan for its implementation. After running the pilot, the congregation moves to the implementation of a full initiative. The assumption is that this extended process of exploration, reflection, visioning, and testing changes not only the educational delivery system but also the values and philosophy that underlie Jewish education for children and parents in the congregation.

METHOD

The implementation study is based on 24 of the original 32 synagogues that participated in The Re-Imagine Project. Synagogues that failed to complete the planning phase or were on hiatus from the project were not included in the study. Findings therefore represent the experience of the most stable and/or resilient synagogues and, in some regards, present the most optimistic picture of the kind of change that is possible. Beyond that, the synagogues in the study are diverse in terms of the key variables of location, denomination, size, and culture.

The participating congregations are located throughout the New York metropolitan area: five are in Manhattan, three in Queens, one in Brooklyn, seven in Westchester, and eight on Long Island. Importantly, some of them are in intensely Jewish areas which means that there is not only a large Jewish population but also high levels of competition from other synagogues and groups. Others are in areas remote from centers of Jewish life, often facing the challenges of a declining Jewish population base.

These congregations cover much of the denominational spectrum (Table 1). Orthodox congregations are not included in the project as they tend not to have supplementary school programs given their membership's high rate of day school participation.

Table 1: Congregational Affiliation

	Number of Congregations
Conservative	11
Reconstructionist	3

Reform	8
Unaffiliated	2

The smallest congregation has 38 member households, while the largest claims more than 1,800 households (Table 2). There is commensurately a large range in the size of the religious schools. At one end of the spectrum is a large congregation with 600 students and 55 faculty members in its religious school. At the other end are two congregations with religious school enrollments of 25 students and a faculty comprised of only three or four teachers. At issue is not just size but also growth trajectory. One, for example, has been undergoing rapid growth in membership in recent years. The intimacy which was a key quality to its founding generation is now of concern as they plan for the future. Another has seen almost a 20% decline in membership and a 32% decline in its school enrollments. It is equally concerned with numbers but the impact on its planning is obviously very different.

Table 2: Congregation Size

Total Households	Number of Congregations
Fewer than 300 households	5
300-499 households	8
500-999 households	8
1,000 or more households	3

Finally, the congregations have distinctive cultures. One is described as traditionalist; another as participatory and innovation-oriented. Some are decentralized; others are run in hierarchical top-down fashion by a strong professional team. These cultures are implicated in the effort to change the school. For example, one of the congregations describes itself as a “sensitive, mindful community.” When it began the project, it already possessed a vision and the ability to think about Jewish practice creatively and with sophistication. In contrast, another is described as averse to change, an attitude prevalent on the board and among the broader membership. The former congregation, as described below, achieved deep structure change within the timeframe of this study. The latter did not.

Data gathering entailed hour-long telephone interviews with key informants involved with each of the congregations. At least three people were interviewed at each site. These included the ECE consultants, rabbis, educators, other professionals, and lay leaders (including members of the original taskforce). All total, 101 individuals were interviewed (69 in one-on-one interviews; the others in group interviews). Interviews were either recorded and transcribed in full or captured in detailed notes. The interview protocol covered the model of education; progress with implementation; learning from implementation; related initiatives, grants, or programs in the synagogue; and future plans.

A case story was developed for each congregation drawing not only on interview data but also on results from our studies of the planning phase. The analysis herein follows from these stories and seeks to draw out general lessons from the particulars.

KEY FINDINGS

The research found four patterns of change: deep change, replacement of old forms with new ones, creation of alternatives, and addition of programs. The distribution across these patterns is flat with five or six congregations manifesting each type. In addition three congregations evidence no change to date.

1. Deep Change

Five of the congregations give evidence of change that is reaching their deep structure. These are congregations that are not merely developing new programs but also new models of education. One exemplar is a Conservative congregation that over the past three years reported “very high” levels of innovation. At the programmatic level, the taskforce implemented a pilot consisting of three programs--on Shabbat morning, on Friday night, and for Havdallah—each with family learning, a ritual component, and a meal. Sunday programs were changed from classroom teaching to informal Jewish education and family learning experiences. The school introduced more experiential learning during the week, as well. For example, instead of having students sit at their desks and study prayers from the siddur, the school developed choices that allow students to learn prayer musically with instruments or to explore the meaning of prayer through art projects. In terms of structure, the school moved from three days a week (six hours total) to two days a week (five hours total) plus semimonthly mandatory Shabbat programs and a social action project. As well, the synagogue integrated all aspects of congregational learning under the auspices of a Director of Lifelong Learning. At the symbolic level, this restructuring signaled a paradigm shift from a top-down approach to one responsive to the needs of all members. Moreover, the extra hour of teacher time produced by the schedule change was set aside for weekly professional development. Sum total, these changes yielded significant family involvement in Jewish education, opportunities for experiential learning, and a strong emphasis on professional development. Importantly, after the pilot year, the new program became the only option for religious school education. The change was not just for those who opted in but for everyone, thus increasing the likelihood that it would seep into the DNA of the congregation.

2. Replacements

Seven of the congregations replaced existing schedules and/or curricula with new forms but have not yet achieved the depth of change noted above. Replacement means that the old form no longer exists and that families and children have no choice but to participate in the new program. Two of these congregations reduced the school’s schedule from three to two days a week. One was able to make the change for the entire school and, indeed, it became a starting point for curricular changes as well (e.g., introduction of more experiential learning, more choice). The other found the reduction of days to be a contentious, divisive issue amongst parents and to date has been able to implement it in only one grade.

One congregation left its schedule intact but replaced its old curriculum with a new one. The new program covers eight Sundays a year in which parents and children attend separate classes and then engage in a joint activity. The focus of the program is on the Jewish holidays and the goal is to increase parents’ awareness of the rituals associated with various holidays so that they can

include them in their home practice. Another congregation integrated its youth group with the religious school. Once a month, “youth group day” replaces a regular weekday class. This day is marked by informal educational activities (e.g., a scavenger hunt, quiz show, or mitzvah project) followed by dinner.

Other congregations replaced both their schedule and their curriculum. Here is one example: During the winter months, a small Reform congregation replaced five consecutive weeks of its regular Sunday morning program with a Shabbat morning program that includes parallel learning for children and parents, 4th through 7th grades, and then participation in Shabbat morning services. The first year the topic of the program was aging. While the children learned with their regular teachers and classmates, the parents learned with the rabbi and a group of adult congregants who come on Shabbat morning for Torah study. In the final week, students and parents met at a local assisted living facility where they engaged in an hour of study, a Shabbat morning service, and lunch with the residents.

3. Alternatives

Five congregations implemented either schedule and/or curricular changes that were *optional*, most often trading off mid-week classes for Saturday or Sunday programming. One congregation, for example, offered a Sunday morning option instead of a weekday class. Although a minor change, leaders believe it could eventually make way for more significant change as Sunday morning sessions open the possibility for parent-child learning.

4. Additions

Four of the congregations added programs. One congregation, for example, added a Saturday morning program which includes interactive family prayer, learning, and socializing. The program was an optional addition to the regular religious school program. (N.B. The program was eventually made mandatory, but the requirement did not increase enrollment and the program effectively continues as an option.) The congregation also developed a four-times-a-year Sunday program, open to the entire congregation, which incorporates learning about the holidays and social action. Other congregations experimented with events, junior congregation lunch and learn, parent-child learning sessions, special Shabbat programs, *havurot* for school parents organized by grade. All of these take place episodically and generally target specific grades. By adding experiential learning, parent participation, and original content, they intend to enrich the religious school program.

5. No Change

Three of the 24 congregations in the study evidence no change in their Jewish education. The outcome from one is a social action committee which serves no direct educational function. The outcome from a second is a lifelong learning committee and a new educational professional who has been able to generate more programming (e.g., a synagogue-wide Hanukkah celebration). The programs are normative for a congregation and although they may represent more activity, they do not rise to the level of innovation. A third wants to reverse the negative views of the

Hebrew school and create a “fun and innovative” place for children, but has not as yet taken any action on its vision.

Attendant Change

Importantly, what is salient for synagogue leadership is most commonly not the new educational model or programs but rather the changes that occurred in the attempt to create these. Across the board, leaders spoke of the friendships and sense of community that developed among participants on the taskforce and in the pilot programs. This sense of community has noticeable ripple effects: new leadership; increased connection to the synagogue and the religious school; higher attendance at youth group programs, family programs, and worship services; greater cohesion in the classroom. One synagogue noted that one of the tables at a recent fundraising event was filled by families from the Re-Imagine pilot program. Another noted that the higher levels of parental involvement meant that the professionals could now have conversations with parents about engaging students in learning, creating compelling community, and raising the level of content. This is different, one informant said, than talking about how to supervise the parking lot during dismissal. Although direction of causality cannot be empirically established (i.e., whether the program attracted the more participatory or whether it made them that way), from the congregations’ point of view, these changes are a valued result of the initiative.

IMPLICATIONS

How do we understand these vastly different results among the 24 congregations? All of them were given the same opportunity when they joined The Re-Imagine Project. They received the same materials and were instructed and consulted in the same process of planning and implementing change. The initiative made no judgments but set the same expectations for all of them. It appears that a confluence of factors in certain sites led not just to more programming but to a new model of education. We consider here three types of factors: those related to starting points, the dynamics of change, and resources. In order to understand the impact of these factors, we looked at the role they played in the highest and lowest performing sites. Highest performing sites include those that arrived at deep level change. Lowest performing sites are those that show little or no change to date.

Starting Points

Cohort

Our first assumption was the synagogues in the earlier cohorts would have greater outcomes because they had had more time in which to effect change in their religious school. The correlation between cohort and outcomes, however is imperfect: Deep change is found in at least one congregation in each of the three cohorts; and no change is seen in at least two congregations in Cohorts 2 and 3. Rather, what correlates with implementation outcomes is preparedness and the pace at which the taskforce proceeded through the planning phase. All three congregations from Cohort 2 that achieved deep change had successfully “re-imagined” their religious school by the end of the planning phase (as per taskforce survey responses at the time). None of the others in that cohort had. In fact, one of the lowest-achieving congregations in this cohort is only

now finding what might be the right educational model for them. They were slow to gain momentum in their planning, learn from their pilot program, understand their failures, and to figure out what they were looking for in congregational education. The starting date of the project seems less relevant than the capacity of the organization to arrive at a vision and to generate creative ideas for fulfilling it.

By the third cohort, the project had been strengthened and improved but it was reaching congregations at lower levels of preparedness. As per survey results, Cohort 3 taskforce members were significantly *more* likely than their counterparts in the previous cohort to understand the process and intended outcomes of the project and to have clear ideas about quality Jewish education. At the same time, they were significantly *less* likely to believe that their congregation was truly ready for the project or that the project was a very good match for the congregation. Although they equally judged their taskforce to have the right mix of people and the leadership it needed, they less often said that the group was willing to think big and take risks. As well, compared with the previous cohort, fewer of the Cohort 3 taskforces believed that the project had the active support of the synagogue board and the school committee. Years later, only one of twelve congregations in Cohort 3 had made deep change versus three of the nine congregations in Cohort 2. It seems, therefore, that preparedness at the outset has an influence on implementation outcomes.

Goals

Many congregations came into The Re-Imagine Project seeking deep change in the religious school, others were looking for more superficial change in the school, and some joined the project hoping for congregation-wide change. Our second assumption was that a congregation's outcomes would align with its beliefs about what the project could/should help it accomplish.

About one-third of the congregations in the study evidenced a grasp of what it means to have a model of Jewish education and a desire to change the current model. Their leaders had an articulated view of what was going on with education in the congregation, a philosophy of education, or an understanding of pedagogy. They joined The Re-Imagine Project to make a change in this deep structure. Most of the congregations that produced deep change are in this category. For example, at a Reform congregational school that was on the move with a number of initiatives, leaders spoke clearly about the "traditional" model of Jewish education in which a certain number of instructional hours or classroom days are assumed; parents are rarely present in the school; and when parents are there, it is to watch their children perform rather than to participate actively in their education. The leaders in this congregation understood that they needed to "push" on this model in order to, in their words, modernize it, upgrade it, and raise its quality. The goal was a new model that would emphasize informal education, parental engagement, and lifelong learning. The philosophy of Jewish education, or the big idea that underlay their work, was that parents and children learn side-by-side in the synagogue, the learning is brought into the home, and it is then translated into action in daily life. Note that this conversation does not specify a particular program but rather opens the gates to an endless possibility of structures, programs, experiences, events, and various experiments in education.

Based on programmatic designs offered by The Re-Imagine Project, a number of the congregations created a Shabbat program in lieu of weekday classes. In some places this was a surface level change, a manipulation of the schedule to entice more families into the synagogue. But more often, it was an effort at deep level change, an attempt to create a Shabbat morning culture in the congregation, to build a community in which religious school families were fully integrated into the life of the congregation, and to provide opportunities to live and learn in “real Jewish time.” These efforts invariably affected not only the religious school—which was the starting point for innovation—but the larger congregation. They also produced what Loren Mead (1995) refers to as “maturational growth”—increased sense of community and greater capacity for worship, the essential obligations of the religious institution.

A few of the congregations were seeking surface-level change. One congregation, for example, believed its traditional religious school model was successful and wanted to preserve and enhance it without fundamentally changing it. Another school was also well satisfied with its existing model and wanted the project to support it by bringing families together for study and prayer and by creating Jewish memories. A third school was already working on increasing parental involvement and saw the work of the initiative as continuous with efforts to date.

Several of the congregations wanted to focus on the congregation writ large and not specifically on the religious school. At one, the religious school was viewed as an “add on” rather than an integral part of the congregation. The taskforce thus believed that their Re-Imagine innovation should not take place solely within the school, but should reach across generations to the entire congregation. Another congregation reached the same conclusion but for somewhat different reasons. This congregation had a shrinking religious school in deficit. The congregation, too, was declining in numbers and only a small percentage of households had children in the school. Concerned that the small school was consuming too many of the synagogue’s resources, the congregation used the initiative to reach the congregation more broadly and to design intergenerational programming. The goal of a third congregation was to move beyond its Classical Reform roots in order to make Reform Judaism fresh, alive, and meaningful for congregants. It used the initiative to craft a broad new vision and a set of pilot projects that encompassed not only the religious school but also adult education, worship, and social action programming.

By and large, implementation outcomes are in line with these initial orientations toward the project. Those that have achieved little or nothing came into the project seeking superficial change or change so broad that the process was unable to support it. For example, one synagogue wanted to use Re-Imagine to build a sense of community across the different groups in the congregation. Given that the Re-Imagine materials did not lend themselves well to this goal, the taskforce was unable to push change with its vision statement or its pilots. It did manage to establish a lay committee for its religious school and to generate more interest in social action, but it did not try and therefore did not succeed in developing new educational models.

Those that have achieved the greatest change most often came into the program with an intent to create deep structure change. But there are instructive exceptions. One congregation joined The Re-Imagine Project seeking help with reducing the religious school from three to two days a week. Although originally focused on schedule, their efforts ended up changing the school and

affecting the culture of the congregation. (The process by which this happened is described below.) Another began the project wanting to innovate within the congregation at large. In other sites such a goal was problematic, but here educational leaders linked the effort to make Shabbat celebrations the cornerstone of the congregational community with curricular innovations in the school. The changes were mutually enhancing, bringing greater energy to both the school and Shabbat morning practice.

Dynamics of Change

Implementation outcomes are also influenced by the dynamics of change in two ways: change begets change, and process begets change.

Change Begets Change

Greater outcomes result in congregations that initiate more than one innovation. Change is particularly wide and deep when each innovation spurs others, leading to a chain reaction of change. One of the large Conservative synagogues is an object lesson. The congregation began its re-imagining process with the school but ended up with change at the congregational level and the beginnings of a shift in culture. Here is the story in brief:

This is a traditional congregation which holds Shabbat observance at the core of its identity and practice. Many families send their children to day school and the rabbi emphasizes the importance of a day school education. At the start of The Re-Imagine Project, the religious school families felt on the periphery of congregational life, seeing the synagogue as a “closed society” for knowledgeable and observant members.

The first innovation was a well-studied change in the religious school schedule: It reduced the number of days from three to two but maintained the number of contact hours and the school’s high standards. The change meant that students were in school for longer periods of time each day, so the teachers needed to adjust their lesson plans. They looked to informal learning models and expanded the curriculum to include electives and more hands-on learning including music, art, drama, and cooking. The congregation took part in ECE’s professional development program, which in turn made professional learning an ongoing part of the school. As part of his involvement in the taskforce, the rabbi started office hours for the religious school parents and expanded his teaching in the school. Other efforts to engage religious school families led to an Israel trip for them, along with the rabbi and educator and their families. The trip did much to change both parents’ and students’ relationship with the rabbi as well as their involvement in the synagogue. It also strengthened the bond among the families who continue to socialize and participate in congregational life together. All of these efforts integrated the families into the mainstream of the synagogue and brought them into leadership positions beyond the religious school. At the same time, the congregation created a family learners’ minyan as a Shabbat morning entry point for the religious school families. And then, building on the success of the learners’ minyan, they created a Shabbat morning program for 2nd and 3rd grade families. An at-home component to the Shabbat program soon followed.

The result of the multiple efforts and the chain reaction among them profoundly changed the congregation. The congregation learned to listen to and understand its congregants beyond the committed core. The rabbi became active in the religious school community and, in turn, religious school families became more involved in congregational life and leadership. Today, more religious school families attend Shabbat services than previously, a sign that families are now more comfortable in the core of synagogue life. All of these are signs of a change in the deep structure of the congregational community.

The synagogue above and several others that saw success with the initiative coupled their change efforts with professional development. Professional development is particularly important in settings in which new curricula are being implemented (Sales, Samuel & Koren, 2007). Teachers need to learn the new material and its methods, but they also need to learn the new ways of thinking about teaching and learning that underlie the new curriculum. For example, one of the highest outcome congregations introduced experiential education into its curriculum. In doing so, it provided professional development to religious school teachers unaccustomed to this mode of teaching and brought them to a summer camp to observe best practices. Another of the top performing sites introduced family education. It held in-service training for teachers not only to introduce the new model of parent-child learning but to empower teachers to become partners in developing the program. Unless teachers have bought into the new program and are comfortable with their new roles, any change in structure or curriculum remains superficial.

Process Begets Change

Evidence abounds that the Re-Imagine process itself creates change beyond the particular innovation. Informants variously reported that the project readied the synagogue for innovation and infused the congregation (beyond the religious school) with a sense of change. It introduced the concepts of long-term strategy and vision—both of which were readily applied outside of the religious school. Moreover, the Re-Imagine Project engaged the taskforces in the study of Jewish text, a practice that carried over to the meetings of other groups within the synagogues. In one Reform congregation, text study, once seen as foreign and Orthodox, became more accepted as a result. The rabbi now often talks about the weekly Torah portion and does a text study instead of a sermon on Friday night. The project taught them the value of getting broad congregational input before implementing change, and the importance of engaging lay volunteers rather than relying solely on professional staff in important endeavors. Not all of the taskforces enjoyed the Re-Imagine planning stage, but even those critical of the process credit it with important learning.

It is also clear from the data that change initiatives, regardless of their focus, prepare the synagogue for more such work. One congregation that was previously in Synagogue 2000, describes that process as the “spark” that convinced them that they could look at their congregation with fresh eyes. It also prepared the member who would head the Re-Imagine taskforce for her leadership role. Even congregations that had learned a negative lesson from Synagogue 2000 (a great deal of effort for little measurable output) used that learning to good effect when it came to Re-Imagine, the next change initiative.

Importantly, the changes emerging from the process itself cut across all cohorts and all levels of outcomes—from those that created radical change in the congregation to those we would judge as having produced no change in their educational model.

Politics and Change

We had expected that congregational politics would emerge as a key variable distinguishing the highest from the lowest achieving sites. We found, however, only a few instances in which political struggles affected the capacity of the organization to innovate. In one synagogue, the top leadership morphed the Re-Imagine taskforce into an education board to replace the traditional religious school committee. When the new education board began to implement change, it met the resistance of some who accused it of wielding too much power. Another congregation set up parallel governance structures—the traditional religious school committee to set policy for the traditional school model and the Re-Imagine taskforce to create new policies and programs for the optional innovation model. Lay leaders on the former committee felt “bypassed” by the new structure and the taskforce had to proceed gingerly to avoid challenging the authority of the existing committees. In yet another synagogue, taskforce members were, by design, not the “usual players” in the synagogue. Some of the old guard leadership resented this fact, seeing the taskforce as exclusive and intrusive, and sensing that they were being left behind.

All three congregations confronting power issues managed to produce notable but superficial change in their religious schools. It appears that organizational politics can slow down or limit change but it does not stop it.

Resources

Change depended on having the human resources to start the change process and the financial resources to maintain its momentum.

Human Resources

During the time of the project, there was substantial turnover among synagogue professionals (rabbis, education directors, principals) and a number of new hires. New hires not only replaced staff who had left but also brought family educators, program coordinators, or curriculum developers into some sites. The change in personnel sometimes obstructed progress with innovation. In other instances, it is credited with making greater change possible.

On the negative side, transition is disruptive. During the planning phase of the project, one of the slowest sites faced turnover among clergy and educational staff. Not only were the lay leaders loath to take action before the new senior rabbi arrived, but energy that could have gone into innovation was going into professional staff search and transition. It also stymied the lay leaders who needed professional guidance. With one or more staff positions unfilled, the remaining professionals had increased workloads that made it impossible for them to attend to long-term planning and change. Two other congregations that hired new educational staff made changes that they attribute to their new leadership and not to the initiative. Indeed, in one case, the new

education director took them in a direction that obviated their need to continue along the Re-Imagine path.

On the positive side are several congregations in which newly hired education directors and/or rabbis were able to push innovation forward and make a difference in their Re-Imagine accomplishments. In four instances, the new director was chosen for his/her past experience with school change efforts. In one case, for example, the new leader is credited with bringing new enthusiasm for the pilot Shabbat program and for integrating it into the religious school curriculum by requiring teachers to develop relevant materials and activities for their classrooms, something the previous director would not do and the lay leaders could not do. In other successful instances, new professionals were hired to coordinate the new programs and thus provided the leadership and human resources for their growth and development.

The involvement of the lay leaders was inconsistent over time and across sites. Most commonly after the planning phase, lay leadership lost momentum, dwindled, or morphed into new governance entities with new membership. The research found no consistent pattern between the role of lay leadership in implementation and the depth of change. What seems critical is lay leadership's *support* for the change work and not necessarily their active involvement in it.

In any event, innovation cannot proceed without sufficient human resources to drive it. One of the sites that produced no change is a small congregation in which many members of the taskforce also held other roles in the congregation. When there was turnover in the educational and rabbinic leadership, lay leaders on the taskforce took over the work, a move that contributed to a high burnout rate. Several taskforce members joined the search committee for the new rabbi and the taskforce folded before a pilot was conceived. At the very least we can conclude that a minimum foundation of human resources is needed in order to succeed with a change initiative.

Finally, lay leadership may be implicated in the ripple effects of change, the conduit by which change (or the appreciation for change) moves from the religious school into the congregation more broadly. It was not uncommon for leadership to be developed on the Re-Imagine taskforce and then appointed to other positions in the synagogue. In one congregation, over one-third of the current board, including three officers, are former Re-Imagine taskforce members. These volunteers bring their Re-Imagine perspective into synagogue planning. That perspective includes the notion that vision is essential and that change is possible.

Financial Resources

Change requires financial resources and the difference is apparent between the congregations that managed to bring in outside resources and those that did not. Not surprisingly, all of the most successful congregations received Legacy Heritage grants and only one of the least successful congregations did. (In this latter case, the grant came too early in the pilot phase. The congregation was burdened by the requirements of the grant; the pilot failed; and no further funding was forthcoming.) It is likely that success is both the cause and the outcome of outside funding. Success seems to beget success: The congregations most capable of change are the ones most likely to be funded for innovation. It is also the case that the funding, in turn, contributed to their success.

Of the 24 congregations, nine received innovation grants from Legacy Heritage and four others secured funds from other sources (Jewish federation, private donors, congregational funds). These monies were variously used to create curricula and materials, support and expand programming, and to hire staff that could work in the new mode. It is this latter purpose which, as described above, may have had the greatest impact on the growth of the initiative. One of the most successful congregations received a grant in multiple years. It thus had the funds to hire educators and implement programs beyond the limitations of the congregation's budget. The synagogue expanded programs every year to meet the updated requirements of the grants. It is clear here that the resources provided by outside funding accelerated the pace of change and the creation of new programming. Another synagogue has a special congregational fund for innovation. Both of their pilots, which were optional additions to the traditional model, received significant support from this fund. Without the support it would have been difficult for the synagogue to assume the additional costs associated with running an alternative option alongside the traditional religious school, particularly in the current economic climate.

Where funding was not received or not continued in succeeding years, progress was stymied or stopped. One of the congregations had an idea for radical restructuring of the entire congregation but needed fulltime staff to take it to implementation. They applied for but did not receive grants for this purpose and the plan is now on hold. Another received a grant for the first year of their pilot but not for the second year. Not only was the congregation disappointed, but progress was slowed markedly. Still another received initial support from a donor that enabled them to add electives to their religious school program. The past year was financially difficult for the congregation and it appears that electives, the cost of which they do not want to pass on to the parents, will have to be offered every other year unless they can find a donor to underwrite them. Leadership here truly believes that the major impediment to fulfilling the overall vision of the initiative was financial. The taskforce was asked to think big, not to be concerned with budget, to start to dream and believe. That is precisely what they did but, in reality, they did not have the financial or personnel resources to make it happen.

CONCLUSION

The research confirms that a thoughtful and concerted effort can effect change in congregational education (Weinberg & Aron, 2002). Two out of three congregations that began the Re-Imagine project achieved noticeable change in their program's structure, content, and/or approach. Rarer, however, is the capacity of the synagogues to arrive at new models of education—to introduce new modes of thinking about education, to change the culture of the school, and to create not just a new program but an innovating congregation in which education will continue to grow and evolve in exciting ways.

This more radical type of change appears to be linked to the capacity of the taskforce to move apace through the planning phase, creating a vision and generating creative options for innovation. The group's initial ability to think big and take risks continues to have an impact on the congregation's innovation during the implementation phase. Radical change is also helped by an understanding of the difference between a new program and a new model, a difference that some congregations appeared not to grasp. Synagogues that were interested in changing the deep

structure of the school were more likely to achieve such change than those that were focused on surface level changes.

The impact that participation on the taskforce or in Re-Imagine pilot programs had on individuals helped to generate further change and to increase the likelihood that change would get to the deep level. One common impact was an increased sense of community, which in turn raised levels of participation and started, in some instances, a virtuous spiral of positive change in the school and in the wider congregation. Another was the cultivation of new leadership which in turn brought new ways of thinking to the synagogue board and other committees.

The most energy and dynamism was seen in congregations that tried a variety of innovations. It is unlikely that any one change can be deep or broad enough to affect the whole educational system. As Wertheimer (2009) notes, schools are complex institutions and require a series of interventions to turn them around. The value of multiple interventions is that each successful innovation spawned others (e.g., a change in the schedule provoked a change in the curriculum; a change in family education led to a change in Shabbat morning services). As change bred more change, the momentum of innovation quickened. If and where this process is sustained, it is likely to lead to the kind of deep change that the field is seeking.

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