



## Blog Post: Building a Field

By Jon Levisohn

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The Mandel Foundation, in partnership with Brandeis, established the Mandel Center in 2002 as an expression of the Foundation's commitment to the importance of research in Jewish education. Research is not valuable for its own sake. Rather, research helps to build a knowledge base for teaching and learning in diverse Jewish educational settings. Rarely does research tell us "what works." Rarely does research tell us, definitively, where to invest and where not to invest. But good research – disciplined inquiry based on systematic analysis of evidence and rigorous construction of arguments – helps us to understand practice better, provides us with powerful ideas to guide practice, and generates images and language and tools that can strengthen the work of practitioners.

How do we build the field of research in Jewish education? For the Mandel Center, one strategy is to make post-doctoral fellowships available for the most promising young researchers in the field. The calculation is straightforward. Presently, virtually all of those who choose to do doctoral work in (or related to) Jewish education work on their doctorates, develop an area of expertise, perhaps write an article to share some of what they've learned through their research, and then return to Jewish educational settings where they do meaningful work and make significant contributions as educators and institutional leaders.

This pattern is familiar from the field of general education, where most doctorates are earned by practitioners – principals and other educational leaders – who do not intend to pursue further systematic inquiry of educational phenomena or settings after they complete their dissertations. Within the field of Jewish education, too, the academic work that doctoral students pursue can contribute to the quality, clarity and depth of their educational practice.

But this pattern also reflects the relative paucity of further research opportunities. In other words, without compelling alternatives, some of those who have devoted several years to training as researchers, and in whose research training the community has invested, and who would want to continue their career trajectories in research, are unable to do so. Just when they are poised to make meaningful contributions to the knowledge base in Jewish education, they find themselves faced with few opportunities to do so. As a result, the field suffers.

To build the field of research in Jewish education, we need a healthier and more robust ecosystem, with opportunities for advanced work that are more numerous, more collaborative, and more diverse.

The Mandel Center at Brandeis cannot create this on its own but—when we can mobilize the resources—we can help by leveraging the investment in research training that some of our most talented and thoughtful individuals have already received. We believe that, for the right people, the Mandel Center's post-doctoral fellowships are an opportunity to further develop research skills, to collaborate on shared projects, and to advance their careers. We

focus on studies of teaching and learning, so the right person must do so as well. We value internal collaboration, so the right person will have to want to be part of a team. But it is part of the mission of the Mandel Center to build capacity in the field, and to that end, we ask our post-docs to spend approximately half of their time working on Center projects and the other half of their time advancing their own intellectual agendas.

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To date, the Mandel Center has been able to mobilize the funding to support five post-doctoral fellows. These include:

- Eran Tamir, now leading two research projects at the Mandel Center;
- Susan Kardos, presently at the AVI CHAI Foundation;
- Inbar Galili-Schachter, presently at the Kerem Institute for Teacher Training;
- Renee Rubin Ross, presently at the Jim Joseph Foundation; and
- Tsafirir Goldberg, presently at the Department of Learning Instruction and Teacher Education, Haifa University.

Each of these individuals received excellent research training before they got to Brandeis, and each brought a wealth of wisdom and experience. And each, now, is engaged in work that draws on and contributes to the research ecosystem. We like to think that their time with us at Brandeis had something to do with the excellent work that they are doing now.

Learn more about post-doctoral fellowships at the Mandel Center [here](#).

See our current posting for a post-doctoral fellowship to begin in September 2013 [here](#).

*Republished from the CASJE blog.*

Pictured: Post-doc Tsafirir Goldberg

