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A New IDEA: An Exploration of Special Education in Jewish Day Schools

by

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ABSTRACT

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) has prompted a movement in public schools toward including students of all ability levels in the classroom. Private institutions are not bound by these federal regulations, presenting an opportunity to investigate how inclusive programs are generated outside of the legislation. This study seeks to explore how one such institution, the Solomon Schechter Day School Association, addresses special education and specifically considers whether Jewish precepts influenced these practices. The findings reveal that students with mild disabilities benefit from the flexibility, attentiveness, and immediacy of care provided by Solomon Schechter schools. Explicit Jewish influences were not detected; however, it is possible that the observed practices and policies were implicitly framed by principles of Judaism.

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INTRODUCTION

During the 2006-2007 school year, approximately 6.7 million United States (U.S.) public school students qualified for support services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This number represents 13.5% of public school students aged three through 21, and 8.6% of all American youth aged three through 21 (www.nces.ed.gov, 2008). These figures indicate a sharp increase from the 3.7 million students who received services when Congress first passed this Act in 1975. Since the passing of this legislation, both the number of services offered to students and the number of students qualifying to receive such services have grown dramatically. With these numbers still on the rise, special education has become increasingly discussed in popular discourse.

Special education has further entered the popular domain as more schools embrace *inclusion*. As will be discussed further, *inclusion* refers to educating students with disabilities in the same classroom as their typically developing peers. Given this legislation, schools are implementing models of including more students with disabilities in their classrooms, bringing an increasing number of students and parents face to face with individuals with special needs.

Integrating individuals with disabilities into public education sectors marks a significant departure from older practices that separated students with disabilities into self-contained classrooms, if educating them at all. This study seeks to explore how individuals with special needs are treated when educated in private schools. Because IDEA does not apply to private schools, students whose parents have chosen to send them to such schools do not have the same access to special education services as

students educated in the public system. One goal of this study is to further an understanding of how private schools design and develop their special education programs where IDEA regulations do not apply.

This study specifically investigates private religious schools as religion plays an integral part in the lives of many Americans. Before the federalization of services for individuals with disabilities, many religious organizations acted as the sole providers of social services for this population; however, these programs often existed as self-contained services and did not aim to integrate these individuals into their religious communities (Selway & Ashman, 1998). Given that religious institutions have an ethical commitment to serving their congregants, I anticipated that they would be particularly sensitive to the needs of community members with disabilities and their families. A further understanding of the interactions among faith, religious practices, and disability will not only inform leaders of religious communities about their congregants with disabilities, but will also assist professionals who work with these individuals to better understand the roles faith and religion play in their lives.

For the purposes of this study, the issue of religious private education will be examined through a Jewish lens. Jews in America constitute a minority group that shares the collective memory of discrimination and exclusion in this nation, as well as many others. This position of Jews in America may predispose them to being more tolerant of other minority groups. Similarly, Judaism prides itself on being a tolerant religion, as a main principle in Judaism is *tikkun olam*, understood as working to make the world a better place. In justifying the inclusion of all students with

disabilities in public schools, Sapon-Shevin (2007) uses a version of a typical Jewish story that illuminates why inclusion of everyone is necessary:

> In the beginning, before there were any beginnings or endings, there was no place that was not already God, and we call this unimaginable openness *ain-soph*. Being without end, world without end, *ain-soph*.
>
> Then came the urge to give life to our world and to us. But there was no place that was not already God. So *ain-soph* breathed in, to make room, like a father steps back so his child will walk to him. And we call this withdrawing *tsim-sum*. Into the emptiness, God set vessels, and began to fill then with divine light, like mother places bowls into which to pour her delicious soup. And we call these bowls, *ke-leem*. As the light poured forth, a perfect world was being created. Think of it! A world without greed, and cruelty, and violence.
>
> But then something happened. The *ke-leem* shattered! No one knows why. Perhaps the bowls were too frail, perhaps the light too intense. Perhaps God was learning. After all, no one makes perfect the first time. And with the shattering of the bowls, the divine sparks flew everywhere: some rushing back to *ain-soph*; some falling, falling, trapped broken shards, to become our world and us. Though this is hard to believe, the perfect world is all around us, but broken into jagged pieces. It's like a puzzle thrown to the floor, the picture lost, each piece without meaning until someone puts them back together again.
>
> We are that someone. There is no one else. We are the ones that can find some of the broken pieces, remember how they fit together, and rejoin them. And we call this repair of the world, *tikkun olam*. In every moment, in every act we have the possibility of healing our world and us. We are each holy sparks, but dulled by separation. And when we meet and talk and eat and make love; when we work and play and disagree—with holiness in our eyes, seeing *ain-soph* everywhere—then, a little at a time and over a long time, our brokenness will end. And our bowls will be strong enough to hold the light, and our light will be gentle enough to fill the bowls. As we repair the world together, we learn again and again that there is no place that is not God (56-57).

This philosophy of working together to repair the world positions Judaism as a community-based religion, intent on improving the world for everyone. The concept

"there is no place that is not God" suggests that Judaism should embrace all peoples as a form of revering God.

Solomon Schechter schools were selected as the target schools for this study because they were the first Jewish schools in the U.S. to educate students for an entire day created outside of Orthodox Judaism. The Solomon Schechter Day School Association oversees over 60 schools in approximately 20 states across the country (www.ssdsa.org, 2009). They provide a unique opportunity to examine how independently governed, geographically diverse schools housed within the same organization vary in their inclusion policies and practices. Interviews with various faculty members at Solomon Schechter day schools were conducted in order to assess special education in these schools.

While my initial sense that Jewish principles would influence special education policies at these schools was not fully supported, the study yielded important findings. Mainly, that Solomon Schechter schools approach special education in a flexible and attentive way that benefits their students. Most of the Solomon Schechter schools have developed special education programs with the ability to change depending on the needs of enrolled students with mild disabilities. These schools additionally employ a variety of special education practices, some of which mirror those of public schools complying with IDEA. For their target population, these special education policies and practices provide what appears to be a successful alternative to the current model employed by public schools in the United States.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A Brief History of Special Education in the United States

Prior to 1975, no federal legislation existed insuring the rights of all children to a public education. Historically, children with special needs[1] often were deemed uneducable and were excluded from public school or sent to residential institutions. Many students with disabilities consequently had little contact with their typically developing peers. The exclusion of these students is illustrated in a 1919 case that was argued in front of the Supreme Court of Wisconsin with regards to the right of a child with cerebral palsy to be included in a public school: the student had the academic and physical capabilities to attend school, yet the court denied him access to an education because he "produce[d] a depressing and nauseating effect upon the teachers and school children," (Beattie v. Board of Education, City of Antigo, cited in Sapon-Shevin, 2007). Given this negative legal precedent, U.S. public schools in 1970 only educated one in five students with disabilities and many states had laws excluding students who were deaf, blind, or had emotional disturbances or intellectual disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, 2000).

The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 marked the first attempt of the U.S. government to remedy the neglectful treatment of children with disabilities in the public education system (U.S. Congress, 2004). Designed to support states in meeting the needs of and improving the lives of children and youth with disabilities, this act guaranteed all children the right to a "free, appropriate public education" in all fifty states. In accordance with the legislation, states were

[1] To be defined in greater detail in the following section

required to provide an education for children with disabilities and to regularly assess the effectiveness of the services they offer to such students (U.S. Department of Education, 2000). In 1986 the Education for the Handicapped Act[2] was amended to include provisions for children with disabilities beginning at birth. States then began to identify children with special needs and provide them with early intervention programs. These programs were required to create Individualized Family Service Plans (IFSPs) designed to best identify the needs of each child (from birth to five years) and his or her family (U.S. Department of Education, 2000). These IFSPs detail the child's strengths and weakness, list the services to which the child is entitled, and help families ensure their child's readiness for school. In 1990, the Act was again amended and the name changed to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The changes in 1990, and subsequently in 1997, primarily addressed the need for transition services for students with disabilities. Public schools became required to create a plan for students' living and employment opportunities post-high school. Typically such plans involve beginning to prepare the student for living arrangements whether at home, in an assisted living facility, or in an independent living situation. The student may prepare for employment by learning more job specific skills or may receive college counseling. Currently these plans must begin at age 14 (U.S. Department of Education, 2000). All these amendments to the original law, including the 2004 Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA), work toward guaranteeing the right of every child to a free and appropriate public education. Children with special needs, have the right to

[2] The name of the Act was additionally changed with the 1986 alterations.

receive "services" deemed "appropriate" at no cost to their families (U.S. Congress, 2004). *Services* refer to any number of aids that children with disabilities might require in order to succeed in the classroom, including speech therapy[3], occupational therapy[4], and physical therapy[5]. Additionally, IDEIA changed the way learning disabilities are diagnosed. Instead of responding to a demonstration of a significant discrepancy between a student's measured Intelligence Quotient (IQ) and classroom achievement, schools now identify students based on their responses to remediation programs that occur first on the universal, classroom-level and then target individuals who continue to struggle (U.S. Congress, 2004). Set out in Response to Intervention (RTI), students can receive help in the general education classroom without experiencing the embarrassing failure of demonstrating an IQ/achievement discrepancy.

Key Definitions

Under the 2004 IDEIA, *disability* is defined as cognitive impairments, hearing impairments, visual impairments, orthopedic impairments, speech or language impairments, serious emotional disturbance, autism, traumatic brain injury, specific learning disabilities, or other health impairments, which cause the child to need special education and related services (U.S. Congress, 2004). *Special education* is defined as instruction specifically designed to meet the needs of a child with disabilities at no cost to the parents. Such instruction can be delivered in the

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[3] Speech-language therapy refers to therapy targeted at improving the production of and processing of language in students.
[4] Occupational therapy focuses on improving fine motor skills in individuals.
[5] Physical therapy aides individuals in the execution of gross motor skills.

classroom, in the home, in the hospital, or in other similar institutions. The *related services* a child can receive refer to services that supplement a child's special education and allow the student to better benefit from the instruction. These services can include transportation, speech-language and audiology therapies, interpreting aid, psychological services, physical and occupational therapy, counseling support, social work services, school nurse aid, medical care, and other services. Early identification and assessment services for children with disabilities are also included under this label. A *specific learning disability* refers to a disorder in one or more of the psychological processes involved in understanding or using language, either written or spoken, which may manifest itself in an impaired ability to think, listen, speak, read, write, spell, or perform mathematical calculations. Impairments in learning that result from intellectual disabilities; hearing, visual, or motor impairments; emotional disturbances; or environmental, economic, or cultural disadvantages are not categorized as learning disabilities.

Children identified as being in need of special education or related services have an *Individualized Education Program* (IEP), which is a written statement including the child's strengths and weaknesses; the concerns of the parents in regards to their child's education; results of the child's most recent evaluation; and the academic, social, and functional needs of the child. The child's educators work to meet the goals laid out in the IEP throughout the school year; the IEP is updated once goals have been achieved and new ones are set. Children with special needs are required to be taught in the *least restrictive environment*, meaning that to the "maximum extent possible," students with disabilities must be educated alongside

their typically developing peers. Special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children from the general education classroom must only occur in situations where the child cannot satisfactorily be educated or receive the necessary supplementary services.

An Introduction to Inclusion

The legal definition of least restrictive environment includes the vague phrase "maximum extent possible" which education experts have interpreted differently. Some call for all children with special needs to be educated in the general education classroom, regardless of the severity of the their disabilities or the resources available. Others advocate a continuum of placement options, conceding that not every child has the potential to successfully learn in a general classroom with typical peers (Winzer, 2000). This debate is complex and warrants further discussion. In general discourse, the terms *inclusion* and *mainstreaming* are often used interchangeably to refer to the process by which students with disabilities are educated in the same classroom as students without disabilities. In the specialized discourse of the educational field, these terms carry distinct implications for how special education is viewed. The term *mainstreaming* reinforces the stigmatization of individuals with disabilities by expressly labeling them as non-normative, or non-"mainstream." Additionally, mainstreaming most often refers to students who are currently placed in a self-contained special education setting, but will be joining a general education classroom. These students must prove their worthiness and ability to learn in a general education environment. Winzer (2000) succinctly describes the difference

between inclusion and mainstreaming by stating that in mainstreaming, "children have to prove their readiness for an integrated setting, [whereas in inclusion] the setting [has] to prove its readiness to accept a child," (6).

The notion of full *inclusion* relies on the assumption that students of all abilities can learn together in the same classroom and that teachers can adapt their curriculum to meet all the needs of their students. This approach does not imply that children be thrown together in a classroom without the proper support from various therapists and paraprofessionals; however, general education teachers often feel ill-equipped to handle this challenge (Winzer, 2000).

Outside Legislative Domain

Although not included in the special education legislation, understanding the support systems in place for families of individuals with special needs is relevant to experts in this field. The need for better support of families of individuals with disabilities has emerged over the last several years, spawning major policy initiatives regarding developmental disabilities (Singer & Powers, 1993). These policies acknowledge that families often provide the primary source of support for individuals with special needs, especially once they age out of schools systems. Rather than requiring families to fit into already established programs, or only serving them in dire circumstances, the family support movement has progressed more toward providing wrap-around services for the individual and the family. Waiting to receive assistance until situations reach crisis mode is deleterious to the family, the individual with disabilities, and society at large.

In contrast with this old system, called *residualism*, the new view of family support strives to provide services that meet the needs of families. It aims to preserve family integrity and address issues before they reach crisis levels; emphasis is placed on the families' perceptions of their own needs, rather than imposing existing, rigid programs onto these families (Singer & Powers, 1993). These systems aim to bolster a supportive community around the family and to increase collaboration between the family and professionals.

Support services are especially important for families because while the vast majority of families successfully adapt to life with a family member with disabilities, many experience additional stressors in their day-to-day lives (Singer et al., 1993). Families with a child with special needs experience greater levels of depression, demoralization, financial troubles, marital strain, and divorce than families with typically developing children. Professionals have begun to introduce programs to better suit the needs of these families. For example, the Support and Education for Families (SAEF) project in Oregon provides families with programs including case management, respite care, parent-to parent support groups, psychoeducational instruction, and behavioral training for parents. Programs like this address the needs of parents traditionally neglected by professionals unfamiliar with the 24-hour needs of the child with disabilities.

Special Education

Full inclusion of all children with disabilities is not a universally held ideal by educators of children with special needs. In an overview of major arguments for and

against inclusion, Winzer (2000) explains how some professionals advocate for maintaining a continuum of placements (from self-contained placements all the way to full inclusion), whereas others argue against any separate special education. Having grown out of the civil rights movement of the 1960's, inclusive schooling aims to target inequity in education for all groups of students, not solely those with disabilities. In fact, many advocates cite the 1954 landmark case of Brown vs. The Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas as support for inclusion, as the case determined that distinct schools for different children were "separate but not equal," (Stainback, 2000). Proponents of inclusion believe in fully embracing the diversity of all students and finding ways to capitalize on their different strengths.

While compelling, these morally based arguments do not answer the myriad practical questions that educators and experts ask about the efficacy of inclusive schooling. Many general educators support the theory of inclusion but do not believe in their own abilities to effectively teach in inclusive settings (Winzer, 2000). Opponents of inclusion fear that students will be placed in classrooms where teachers are not properly prepared to teach them. In addition to concerns about teacher preparation, questions also abound regarding which setting is truly the most beneficial for students. The social and academic implications of inclusive classrooms are still being explored and experts wonder whether students with more severe disabilities might learn better in self-contained environments with smaller teacher to student ratios; where students can receive more individualized, direct instruction (Sapon-Shevin, 2007). A common response to this concern is to ask, what do self-contained environments prepare the students for? That is, the longer that students stay in self-

contained placements, the less likely they are to ever join their typical peers; therefore, segregated placements may not have real-world validity if the long-term goal is to enable students to become independent, contributing members of their communities. Furthermore, some experts argue that classrooms should reflect the general population of the local area because interacting with peers in school is one aspect of education that prepares students for life in the world outside of school (Winzer, 2000).

Modes of Inclusion

Teacher collaboration is often thought of as a powerful tool in better equipping a general education classroom to handle the challenges of including students with disabilities (Brownell, Adams, Sindelar, Waldron, & Vanhover, 2006). This model involves a general education teacher working together with a special education teacher to create the environment most conducive to the education of students with special needs and their typically developing peers. Since teacher collaboration is so important to the success of inclusion, it is necessary to understand situations when collaboration will and will not be beneficial to the teachers. With such knowledge, administrators can learn how to better facilitate the process of inclusion at their schools. Brownell, Adams, Sindelar, Waldron, & Vanhover investigated how teachers who readily benefit from collaboration with other teachers differ from those who do not benefit, finding that the latter have difficulty making changes in their teaching styles. Using a Teacher Learning Cohorts (TLC) approach, discussion group leaders provided concrete examples of innovations that were

tailored to the needs of teachers, led discussions on implementation, provided multiple opportunities for discussing new strategies, and supplied feedback on the active executions. The study revealed three types of teachers: high adapters, moderate adapters, and low adapters. Teachers who more readily carried out the strategies discussed in the TLC and with minimal support were classified as high adapters. In comparison to the low adapters, these teachers were more knowledgeable about the curriculum, pedagogy, and how to manage student behaviors. High adapters also were more likely to structure instruction in a student-focused, rather than a teacher-focused manner. These findings suggest that inclusion is most effective for students when general education and special education teachers maximize their abilities to collaborate with one another.

In situations where a general education teacher is not teaching in tandem with a special education teacher, frequently one or more paraprofessionals will be present in the classroom, supporting the students with disabilities. These aides are able to work closely with students to reinforce the concepts taught in class, and also to help manage students' behaviors (Broer, Doyle, & Giangreco, 2005). As the practice of inclusion has expanded, encompassing more children with a wide range of severity of disabilities, the use of paraprofessionals in the classroom has also increased, and therefore, their roles need assessment. Broer, Doyle, & Giangreco investigated the ways in which students with intellectual disabilities viewed their paraprofessionals. They found that some students with disabilities saw their paraprofessionals as their primary teacher, and consequently felt not worthy or important enough to warrant the general educator's individual attention. Many participants echoed the views of one

individual who reported, "They're always telling me, 'We got too many kids in the classroom; we can't deal with you'" (423). This is not the outcome intended by inclusion policies. Rather, the paraprofessional should support the student with disabilities and reinforce concepts learned from the general education teacher. Furthermore, paraprofessionals are not certified teachers and, therefore, should not be the primary person responsible for a student's education.

Social Implications of Inclusion

Advocates of inclusion believe that educating students with disabilities in general education settings fosters more positive attitudes toward individuals with special needs among typically developing children (Siperstein, Parker, Bardon, & Widman, 2007). Here extended contact with students with disabilities is assumed to have a positive impact on typical children's attitudes. Through daily interaction with fellow classmates, disabilities can become more normal and less stigmatized for those without special needs. Yet evidence for this assumption is inconclusive, with some studies revealing positive social benefits of inclusion (Dyches et al., 1996; Kennedy, Shukla, & Fryxell, 1997; Klingner, Vaughn, Schumm, Cohen, & Forgan, 1998), and other studies finding either no social benefits (Siperstein, Parker, Bardon, & Widman, 2007) or negative impacts for students with disabilities (Broer, Doyle, & Giangreco, 2005).

In general, educating students with disabilities in an inclusive setting has been found to increase the amount of contact these individuals have with typical peers. One study compared the social relationships of students with severe disabilities in

self-contained school classrooms with those in general education classrooms (Kennedy, Shukla, & Fryxell, 1997). Researchers found sixteen students taught in general education settings who were labeled as "severely disabled" and matched them by age, gender, communication skills, and social behavior skills, with similarly labeled students who were educated in self-contained placements. These researchers measured the quantity and quality of interactions these students had with other typically developing students, finding that students with severe disabilities who learned in general education settings evidenced significantly higher levels of peer contact: their interactions tended to be with more people, last longer, and occur across more varied activities and settings throughout the day when compared to the students in self-contained placements. The students in inclusive classrooms also were found to have more non-disabled friends than the students in separated classrooms. The study suggests that mere exposure does, in fact, breed more contact, even in the setting of intermediate schools. Furthermore, students with disabilities in general education placements exhibited significantly more social support behaviors, including greeting classmates, showing emotional support for others, and engaging in acts of companionship toward students without disabilities, than did the students with special needs in self-contained placements. The development of appropriate social skills appears to be important for students with disabilities, especially those with severe impairments.

Even students themselves report that general classrooms better promote social development than pull-out settings. Sixteen fourth through sixth graders with learning disabilities (LD) who had spent at least one year in a pull-out resource room

and one year in a general education setting were interviewed in a study by Klinger, Vaughn, Schumm, Cohen, & Forgan (1998). The impressions of students regarding the social benefits of either arrangement were measured by the responses to the question, "which way [pull-out or inclusion] helps kids have more friends?" The majority of students (both with LD and without) believed that an inclusive classroom provided the most opportunities for developing friendships primarily because there were more kids in the general classroom and the two types of students had more opportunities to interact with one another. For instance, one non-LD student spoke to a positive social benefit of collaborative learning, stating, "[students] can become friends when they are helping" (153). This pro-social view of inclusion indicates how inclusion benefits not only students with disabilities, but also typical students.

Additionally, students often report feeling stigmatized and excluded as a result of leaving the general classroom each day to attend classes in a resource room. Perspectives of students with disabilities who were participating in an "inclusion-through-teaming experiment," were measured by another interview-based study (Dyches, Egan, Young, Ingram, Gibb, & Allred, 1996). 110 typical seventh, eighth, and ninth graders participated in this experiment, along with nineteen students with learning disabilities and one student with a behavior disorder. Students involved in this program traveled to all their core academic subjects with the same group of classmates, where in most cases one resource teacher and two resource assistants were present in each core class. Students with disabilities expressed many positive statements about the social benefits of this program. They especially liked being with the same group of people throughout the day because it was easier for them to get to

know one another. In comparison to that previous year, when they were in self-contained resource classrooms the student remarked, "you don't get picked on as much," (19). When the same special education resources are brought to students within a general education setting, students report encountering fewer social problems and feeling better about themselves.

In contrast to these findings, other studies report that attitudes of typical students may not be changing as a result of increased inclusion. Siperstein, Parker, Bardon, & Widman (2007) studied the attitudes of typical young adolescents toward the inclusion of students with intellectual disabilities; 5,837 middle school students from across the nation completed surveys regarding their beliefs about inclusion. Students reported very low amounts of current contact with students with intellectual disabilities. Despite low levels of reported contact, students revealed high levels of exposure to individuals with intellectual disabilities: 90% reported seeing a person with intellectual disabilities in a public place and 81% reported hearing about intellectual disabilities via some form of media. When asked to respond to a list of activities students believed people their own age with intellectual disabilities could or could not do, most students ranked the hypothetical individual with intellectual disabilities as moderately or severely impaired, when a majority of individuals with intellectual disabilities are mildly impaired. The low incidence of positive social beliefs and interactions between typical students and students with intellectual disabilities do not evidence the supposed positive social benefits of inclusion. These low rates might be explained by the fact that students do not always know who has disabilities. In the Klinger, Vaughn, Schumm, Cohen, & Forgan (1998) study,

students who had both a general education and a special education teacher were asked why they had two teachers. Not a single student without disabilities identified the second teacher as a special education teacher.

For students with intellectual disabilities, paraprofessionals play an important role in their experiences in general education settings. Broer, Doyle, & Giangreco (2005) were the first to investigate the issue using people with intellectual disabilities as the sole informants. Their study interviewed sixteen young adults with intellectual disabilities to learn their perspectives about their experiences with paraprofessionals. Content analysis of the interviews revealed four main perceptions of the roles of paraprofessionals: as mother, as friend, as protector from bullying, and as primary teacher. Students had both positive and negative opinions about their paraprofessionals fulfilling these roles, but the very nature of these roles raises problems for the students' social development. Some students felt comforted by having the paraprofessional act as a mother figure, but most students felt hindered. One student expressed his frustration by saying, "I was kind of getting embarrassed because I always had, like a mother right there. People were like looking at me and stuff, and saying, 'Why do you always have this person with you who is twice as old as you?'" (420). Although having a paraprofessional is not the sole cause of any social problems this young man might have had, educators need to ensure that individuals with disabilities not be stifled by their paraprofessionals.

Academic Implications of Inclusion

Advocates of inclusion hold that there are academic as well as social benefits to inclusion; however, some experts worry that general education teachers are not fully equipped to effectively modify their lesson plans to accommodate such a wide range of abilities (Klingner, Vaughn, Schumm, Cohen, & Forgan, 1998). Other researchers worry that the performance of typical students will diminish in inclusive classrooms because the teacher must devote too much time to special needs students. Research on this question has yielded inconsistent findings.

Relying on standardized tests may not be an entirely accurate approach to measuring academic progress for students both with and without disabilities; however, such assessments have a great deal of real-world validity in this era of high-stakes testing. Idol (2006) examined four elementary schools, two middle schools, and two high schools that fell somewhere along the continuum of offering only self-contained classrooms for students with disabilities to fully inclusive classrooms for students. All the schools were moving more toward full inclusion and were measured on a variety of factors relating to their special education services. Four years after the initial evaluation, three out of four of the elementary schools evidenced noticeably higher test scores on a statewide test. The fourth school showed no change, suggesting that while inclusion may not be beneficial to the academic growth of all students, it does not appear to produce deleterious effects on the children without disabilities as some critics of inclusion have feared. Three out of four of the secondary schools similarly experienced improvements in their statewide test scores over the course of four years. That some students with disabilities are exempt from

taking statewide standardized tests complicates the findings to some extent, but the study does indicate that students without disabilities do not suffer academically from the inclusion of students with special needs in their general education classrooms.

Similar accounts of academic achievement of both general education students and students with learning disabilities have been reported following increased levels of inclusion in various schools. Saint Laurent, Dionne, Giasson, Royard, Simard, and Pierard (1998) measured academic progress before and after the implementation of an intervention designed to increase the efficacy of several schools' inclusion programs (Saint-Laurent et al., 1998). The program produced higher writing skills in general education students and did nothing to inhibit these students' reading and math skills. In fact, some evidence suggests that the added reading and math interventions actually benefited general education students most. Students who were at risk for school failure made more academic progress than their counterparts in schools not attempting to improve their inclusive practices. Students with learning disabilities did not score appreciably different between those attending schools utilizing the intervention program and those attending the control schools.

Academic benefits of inclusion are not always best measured through standardized tests. A case study by McDonnell, Mathot-Buckner, Thorson & Fister (2001) measured academic progress by the rates of academic responding and competitive behaviors in the classroom. *Academic responding* refers to behaviors that are academically appropriate in the classroom, such as raising one's hand, asking a question, taking notes. *Competitive behavior* refers to all behavior that distracts focus from the class lesson such as interrupting, talking to other students during class,

looking distractedly around the room (McDonnell, Buckner, Thorson, & Fister, 2001). Three students with moderate to severe disabilities who were educated in general classrooms for at least part of the day were compared to three typical students in the same classes. The program effectively improved the academic responding and limited the competitive behaviors of students with moderate to severe disabilities. The general education comparison students experienced similar changes during the periods of class-wide peer tutoring. These techniques appear to have bolstered the positive academic effects of inclusion for both typical students and students with disabilities. However, the findings have limited interpretation because the participants were not compared to students with similar severities of disabilities in self-contained placements.

Students are not always consistent when reporting their opinions of their experiences with inclusion. In a study by Klinger, Vaughn, Schumm, Cohen, & Forgan (1998), a majority of students with LD reported that they thought that they learn better in a pull-out program; they reasoned that because there are fewer people in the resource rooms they are able to concentrate better. Six students with LD favored the inclusion model because they enjoyed staying with their classmates and not missing events in the general education classroom. They also reported learning more and working harder in the general classroom because the expectations for their performance were higher. Three students without LD suggested that students with LD would learn more in an inclusive setting because, "Their classmates help them and we all learn more," (153). Interestingly, all students (both with LD and without)

endorsed statements revealing that they like teaching other students and like when other students teach them.

In contrast to those students, students participating in a team-teaching pilot inclusion program in the Dyches, Egan, Young, Ingram, Gibb, & Allred (1996) study, reported more positive attitudes about academic achievement in inclusive settings. They reported that even in comparison to pull-out settings, having two teachers made learning easier. They believed they received more attention than before and that the concepts were easier to understand. These students felt comfortable asking questions and reported that teachers were willing to work with them individually in order to reinforce concepts with which they were struggling (Dyches et al., 1996). They also overwhelmingly reported learning more in the new inclusive academic setting. They perceived their skill levels as increasing and enjoyed working at the pace of "the other kids" (18). Both of these studies would have benefited from measuring the students' actual academic performances against their perceptions of their academic accomplishments. Students should gain a sense of self-efficacy in their education, but better understanding whether an inclusive or a self-contained environment is more conducive to academic achievement is necessary as well.

Educating students of all ability levels in the same classroom appears beneficial to the social development of students with special needs and increases the amount of exchanges typical students have with such students. This educational environment prepares students for life in communities where individuals of all ability levels are present and interact with one another. However, research on the academic benefits of inclusion for both types of students seems murky and requires more

investigation. While a conclusion cannot be drawn about how beneficial inclusion is, the reviewed literature serves to create a better understanding of issues that schools face when trying to follow federal legislation and best serve all their students. Ultimately, more research is needed to fully understand the outcome of inclusion for both students with disabilities and their typical peers.

Faith, Religious Practice, and Disability

A success story of religious inclusion is depicted in the 2007 documentary, *Praying with Lior*. The film centers on Lior Liebling, an almost thirteen-year-old boy with Down's syndrome, and follows preparations for his *bar mitzvah*, a Jewish rite of passage that ushers a child into adulthood. Instead of attending a public school or even a special education school, Lior attends an Orthodox day school where he participates in a program allowing him to receive individualized remediation outside of the classroom for a part of the day and to be included in the classroom for the rest of the day. His command of Hebrew and of the prayers he recites would be impressive for anyone, let alone a child with cognitive impairments. After he leads his class in morning prayers, one of his classmates comments, "It's hard to understand [Lior] sometimes, but Hashem (God) understands everyone in their own way," (Trachtman, 2007). Not only does this student accept Lior the way he is, he also recognizes that Lior is an equal member of the Jewish community. At his bar mitzvah, Lior not only dazzles his friends and family with his mastery of the religious service, but he also impresses everyone with the speech he delivers on the importance of community. Lior's story highlights the positive benefits religious communities can

have for individuals with disabilities and their families. This chapter will examine the multiple issues that are at play for children like Lior and their families in relation to faith and religious practices: the relationship of parents to their religious faith, the desire of individuals with special needs to be included in religious communities, the theological responses of religions to disability, and finally an exploration of Jewish doctrines and practices that relate to disability. These topics will illuminate the complex relationships among faith, religious practice, and disability, which will aid in the understanding of the case study of special education practices in Solomon Schechter day schools.

Many individuals perceive religious institutions as welcoming havens for all people of that religion, and many such individuals turn to religion in times of trouble (Rose, 1997). For families of children with disabilities, having a religious community to turn to can be especially important in both adapting to life with a child with disabilities and continuing to live with a family member with special needs (Gaventa & Peters, 2001). In a review of the supports available for families of children with special needs, Fewell (1986) cites a study that measured religiosity of mothers of children with intellectual disabilities, showing that belief in a religion can serve as a buffer for the stresses of raising a child with disabilities. Although not yet practiced on a large scale, many professionals are beginning to understand the need for "spiritual supports" in the lives of individuals with cognitive limitations (Gaventa & Peters, 2001). Oftentimes, families report receiving immediate support from religious communities following the birth of a child with disabilities; however, religious organizations are frequently unequipped or unwilling to provide long-term supports

and accommodations for children and individuals with special needs. Absent or inadequate community outreach likely precludes such people from religious educations, religious services, and community celebrations or activities (Fewell, 1986).

Individuals with impaired cognition who wish to be active members of their religious communities face many challenges. Often the staff members in group homes or institutions do not understand how important religion is for a specific individual and, therefore, helping the individual attend religious services is not a priority. Additionally, the social codes that accompany religious services, such as remaining quiet during a sermon, staying in one's seat, wearing appropriate clothing, might not be clear to the individual with special needs and this may be a barrier for the religious organization's inclusion of the individual. Furthermore, religion and spirituality are often linked with cognitive ability and reason, which might contribute to a religious congregation being unwilling to accommodate those with cognitive impairments in their communities. Without educational supports, adults with cognitive limitations might have difficulties keeping up with the other congregation members (Gaventa & Peters, 2001).

Parental Perspectives

The birth of a child with disabilities usually requires an adaptation of expectations on the part of parents. Few studies have been conducted on personal adaptation resources employed by families of children with disabilities, yet understanding the adaptive mechanisms that parents utilize can improve the services

professionals provide (Bennett, Deluca, & Allen, 1995). Religion can be involved in this adjustment process by allowing parents to give meaning to their child's special needs and also by providing a support system for them (Haworth, Hill, & Glidden, 1996). While more studies are needed in order to better understand the ways families use religion as an adaptive resource, examining interviews with parents is an important start to understanding this topic.

Overall, parents express varied sentiments regarding the role of religion in their lives: many find comfort in their religious involvement, others are disappointed in the lack of support from their religious communities, and some are not at all impacted by religion in their day-to-day lives (Bennett, Deluca, & Allen, 1995; Haworth, Hill, & Glidden, 1996). Many parents who report seeking support in their religion view God as actively involved in their child's disability. Bennett, Deluca, & Allen (1995) asked participants about the role religion plays in their lives while raising children with a wide range of disabilities. Respondents often cited God in their answers: the child was a gift from God; God chose the parent to have a child with special needs because He knew the parent could handle it; God will eventually heal the child; and God has given the parent enough strength to handle life with a child with disabilities. Such beliefs can help alleviate the guilt that some parents feel upon learning their child's diagnosis.

An objective of another study was to examine statements about religion spontaneously made by interviewed mothers of children with special needs (Haworth, Hill, & Glidden, 1996). Mothers most frequently made positive statements about religion that fell into three categories: positive organizational experience (e.g. the

community embracing the birth of a child regardless of ability), support from spiritual beliefs (e.g. believing that God does not give more than a person can handle), and mission statement (e.g. it was in God's plan for the parents to raise a child with disabilities). Their responses were similar to those made by the participants in the Bennett, Deluca &Allen (1995) study; however, in this study mothers additionally stressed the importance of both seeking solace in God and finding a welcoming environment in their religious communities (Haworth, Hill, & Glidden, 1996). Mothers who made negative statements about the role of religion essentially expressed the opposite of the positive statements and their comments fell into two categories: negative spiritual beliefs (e.g. blaming the child's disability on past sins) and organizational negativity (e.g. attending a church where the minister actually discouraged a parent from becoming active in the community). Though more positive statements were made overall, that negative experiences were also shared reveals an inconsistency across religious congregations in dealing with disabilities.

The religious institution itself plays an important role in families' ability to utilize their faith as an adaptive resource: if a religious community does not welcome a child with special needs, it will likely decrease the amount a parent can rely on that community for support. Bennett, Deluca, & Allen (1995) interviewed one mother of a daughter with Down's syndrome who described how her experiences in her church were not at all supportive:

> [The church] almost acted as a detriment. I wasn't able to take her to the church nursery because they didn't know how to handle her. And if I brought her into

> church people would stare and be nasty, because she was making noise and was different…I did not feel like I was getting help from God at this time (308).

This mother felt both let down by her religious community and by God. Treloar (2002) recounts a similar story from her interview-based study: Megan, a mother of a daughter with spina bifida, reported a strong faith in God despite many of her church community members asking her questions such as, "What have you done in your past that would make God give you a child with a disability?" and "Don't you hate God if He would do this to you?" (598). Megan was secure enough in her own beliefs to ignore the questions from fellow congregants, but she viewed the support she received from her religion as much more individual than communal (Treloar, 2002). When parents are able to access their religious faith, they are more likely to feel positive and to possess a sense of empowerment in regards to their children's futures (Bennett, Deluca, & Allen, 1995). The more supportive and inclusive a religious community is able to be, the more parents are able to rely on their community and religious beliefs as adaptive mechanisms in their lives.

The Desire of Individuals with Disabilities to be Included in Religious Communities

Few studies in this field include the voices of individuals with disabilities, yet understanding their perceptions of their religious communities and beliefs is vital in understanding how religion factors into their lives. Swinton (2002) interviewed caregivers and support workers who assist adults with disabilities. They reported that addressing a person's spiritual or religious beliefs and practices had not been a part of the training they received, and unless they themselves were religiously or spiritually

oriented, the caregivers did not value their charges' spirituality or religiosity. In contrast, the majority of the individuals with disabilities who were interviewed expressed a strong sense of spirituality that was often discussed in religious terms. Many reported the importance of God in their daily lives; believing in a higher power allowed them to feel loved, protected, comforted, and a sense of acceptance and hope. This study further found that people with special needs tended to view God as a friend and, therefore, their belief in a divine being became a central part of their social support systems. Their faith also became a way for the respondents to understand the challenges associated with living with a disability.

Further informing the literature on religion and individuals with special needs is an interview study of individuals with intellectual disabilities who associated with a variety of religious backgrounds (Turner, Hatton, Shah, Stansfield & Rahim, 2004). The majority of respondents expressed a strong sense of religious identity, with nineteen out of 29 participants identifying themselves as members of a specific religious group or denomination. The investigators found that even though these individuals wanted to be included in religious communities, their desire was not always met. Some individuals were excluded from participating in religious services due to their language difficulties. Certain religious services are conducted mostly in a foreign language; the researchers posited that if no educational supports exist for children with disabilities in religious communities, as adults these individuals would not be able to access and participate in religious worship. Without outreach from the religious communities or caregivers and modifications to the hymnal or prayer book of a particular faith, people with intellectual disabilities may be unable to follow a

religious service. Although many of the participants in this study reported experiencing less than inclusive religious communities and a general lack of assistance in religious and spiritual matters from the support staff, most reported persisting in their religious expression.

Many of the interviewees also conveyed an understanding of specific religious precepts and beliefs (Turner, Hatton, Shah, Stansfield, & Rahim, 2004). For example, one man explained that Christmas celebrations were in honor of God's birthday and another woman reported that she wears a headscarf because showing her hair is not allowed. Despite their cognitive limitations, these individuals were able to explain beliefs central to the religions to which they belonged, and they articulated the importance of both individual and communal religious practices. While several of the respondents discussed the importance of personal prayer and religious duty, almost all of the interviewees spoke about celebrating religious festivals, a communal activity.

Oftentimes people with developmental disabilities are not integrated in society at large and struggle to develop a sense of belonging. McNair, a disabilities researcher, speaks of evidence that suggests:

> The quality of life of people with developmental disabilities may be related to whether they are identified as members of networks and associations in the community. Individuals who are seen as members gain opportunities to participate in significant social roles and to form personal relationships through ongoing transactions (quoted in Swinton, 2002, 33).

That almost all of the individuals with intellectual disabilities spoke about the importance of religious holidays corroborates McNair's observations and suggests that professionals working with individuals with special needs should consider this desire to be an important member of a community.

The Importance of Religious Responses to Disability

Understanding religions' responses to disability is significant for two reasons; first because many individuals with disabilities and their families participate in religious communities, as well as because prior to federal legislation, many social services for people with special needs were provided largely by religious organizations (Selway & Ashman, 1998). Yet, in many religious texts disabilities are referred to negatively, as impairments that mar a person and preclude him or her from taking part in certain religious rites. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, people with disabilities are almost always mentioned as those in need of healing, not as individuals for the community to embrace. Despite the tendency of religious texts to ignore opportunities for inclusion, many parents of children with disabilities report religious beliefs as an important coping mechanism for them because it helps them ascribe meaning to their child's needs (Glidden, Rogers-Dulan, & Hill, 1999).

Rose (1997), a religious scholar, has identified four distinct ways in which the Judeo-Christian tradition views disability, all of which may serve as barriers to the complete inclusion of individuals with disabilities in religious communities. The first way disability is viewed in religious thought is as a sign of punishment or as an incarnation of evil. Oftentimes in the Bible, sin is referred to as punishable by means

of physical torment that frequently left the sinful person with a physical impairment. The Old Testament labels individuals with leprosy, blindness, and other visible disabilities as ritually impure and they are unable to offer sacrifices at the Temple. In the New Testament, Jesus cures a man with Palsy after declaring that his sins have been forgiven. In slightly more modern times, Martin Luther was known to advocate the murder of babies with visible disabilities because he believed they were the Devil's children. These images convey a powerful message that disabilities happen to either people who have done something to deserve them or to people who embody evil.

Second, disability was believed to be a challenge to God's perfection: even animals with a physical imperfection were not eligible for use in ritual sacrifice. The Old Testament additionally requires that candidates for the position of high priest be physically and mentally unimpaired (Rose, 1997). These requirements indicate that individuals with some form of disability were considered unworthy of being so close to God and were considered less than individuals who were entirely physically able.

Elsewhere in religious texts, individuals with disabilities are presented as people to pity, a third representation of responses to disability. In the Talmud, a text recording rabbinic discussions of Jewish law, individuals are instructed to recite a special prayer when passing someone with a visual impairment. People with disabilities are often thought of as people in need of charity and therefore inherently lacking in comparison to able-bodied people (Rose, 1997). Finally, in Jewish legal code, individuals with disabilities are placed in the same category as incompetent minors and are not allowed to fulfill many community functions, such as owning

property or acting as witnesses in court. By using such classifications these individuals are relegated to being only partial members of religious communities; they never attain adult status and become full functioning members of the congregation.

Beyond religious beliefs, the actions of a religious organization or community can directly affect families of children and children with special needs. Glidden, Rogers-Dulam, & Hill (1999) noted that when religious communities offer such support, they do so in four ways. They might offer *instrumental support*, such as a congregation coming together to raise money so that a family can purchase a new wheelchair for their child or afford a needed medical procedure. The support could be *emotional or social*, such as a religious community taking part in the triumphs and challenges of raising a child with special needs. A congregation might provide *educational support* by creating modified or adapted religious classes to teach the child with disabilities. Finally, the community might give *structural support* by including the child and her family in the typical religious rites of passage (Glidden, Rogers-Dulan, & Hill, 1999). Unfortunately, many religious communities do not have the knowledge and/or resources necessary to serve their congregation members with disabilities; the lack of accommodations make it difficult for these members to participate in religious services and community activities (Rose, 1997).

Judaism and Disability

In ancient times, Judaism was led by high priests who acted as the spiritual leaders and as conduits between the current world and the world to come. The priests

were responsible for offering sacrifices to God at the Temple, one of the most important acts in Judaism at that time. The Old Testament details the many restrictions God placed on those wishing to make offerings, excluding many with disabilities:

> And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: Speak to Aaron, saying, A man of your lineage, for all their generations, who has a blemish shall not come near to offer the bread of his God. For any man who has a blemish shall not come near: [whether he] is a blind man or a lame man or [has] a flat nose or any extra [limb or growth] or a man who has a broken leg or a broken hand or a crooked back or [is] a dwarf or has obscured sight in [even one] eye or has scurvy or scabs or has crushed testicles…He has a blemish and he may not approach to offer his God's bread…Let him not profane My holy [places]: for I the Lord [myself] sanctify [these places] (Leviticus 21:16-24, as cited in Abrams, 1998).

This list of restrictions includes only physical disabilities and does not mention mental impairments. Furthermore, the prohibited persons' list includes both people with permanent disabilities, such as blindness or dwarfism, and people with temporary physical limitations, such as a broken leg or hand. That both temporary and permanent conditions preclude a priest from making a sacrifice indicates the importance of physical perfection for ritual purity. The people themselves are not condemned, yet their condition or disability renders them ritually impure.

Jewish texts following the Old Testament address individuals with speaking, hearing, and mental disabilities. People with these impairments fell into the same

legal category as minors and were excluded from performing certain community roles. Leaders feared that these people would accidentally allow the Temple to become impure, so they were banned from holding any position where that might be possible (Abrams, 1998). While they were stigmatized, the Old Testament nevertheless advocates for their protection, "You shall not curse the deaf nor put a stumbling block before the blind," (Leviticus 19:14 as cited in Abrams, 1998). It was considered cruel to attack a person in a way in which they could not defend themselves, yet in Jewish writings following the codification of the Old Testament, people with disabilities still are not considered equal to those without special needs. In one instance, a ritual occurs after a husband accuses his wife of being adulterous; however, both the husband and the wife need to possess intact sight, speech, and limbs otherwise they cannot participate in the ritual.

Part of this commitment to physical and mental perfection likely stems from the notion that a disability was punishment for one's prior sins. In the Old Testament, people are punished with a disability fitting to the sin that they committed. Samson sins with his eyes and God blinds him. When Miriam rebels against her brother Moses' authority, God causes her to contract leprosy and she must spend seven days in isolation (Abrams, 1998). These biblical stories powerfully illustrate how people with disabilities are somehow sinful and deserve the punishment they receive for their actions. Rabbinic literature goes further than the Old Testament in detailing how sexual intercourse conducted outside of the proper decorum will result in children with disabilities. These ancient writings describe the desirability of bodily and

mental perfection and sometimes justify the stigmatization and ostracizing of individuals with disabilities.

Despite the high premium Jewish texts appear to place on physical and mental perfection, many of Judaism's matriarchs and patriarchs of Judaism were flawed in some way. Sarah, Rebekah, and Rachel, who go on to become the founding mothers of the Jewish nation, were initially barren (Siegel, 2001). Certainly by the standards of their time infertility would have been considered a disability of sorts. However, the women were not punished for their misfortune, nor were they told their infertility resulted from their past sins. Instead, they are adored by their husbands and eventually blessed with children. Furthermore, one of the patriarchs, Jacob, was said to have a physical disability in that he limped. He is venerated as one of the founders of the Jewish people and is not held in any less esteem because of his physical imperfection. Moses, the man who led the Jews out of slavery in Egypt and took them to the Promised Land, was said to have a speech disability: he could not express himself without stuttering. Though perfection is required of the high priests, Moses spoke directly with God when he encounters the burning bush even with his speech difficulty.

In addition to examining disability as portrayed in Jewish texts, understanding the current status of disability in religious practices is also important, especially since ancient texts are frequently revisited and sometimes reinterpreted. Edward M. Friedman (2006) examines the practice of religious conversion in this context. He also relates his experience with a woman with tetraplegia, an inability to move any of her limbs or her head due to a progressive neuromuscular disorder, who wished to

convert to Judaism. Instead of embracing this woman who wished to join the religion, the Orthodox community she sought to join made participating in the community and in services difficult for her. She had to write a paper to the rabbis explaining why she should be able to use her motorized wheelchair on Shabbat, the day of rest when individuals are not allowed to use anything mechanical. In Orthodox Judaism, men and women sit in separate sections during services, this woman found many that were not wheelchair accessible. Some female congregants refused to assist her in turning the pages in her prayer book. Eventually the woman met Friedman when she joined his Conservative congregation, leading him to take an interest in her struggle to find her place in the Jewish community. Women must undergo a ritual when converting to Judaism; they immerse themselves in a *mikvah*, or ritual pool. For this woman, submerging herself in water, even in her wheelchair, was too dangerous for her health to attempt. Friedman wrote to the Jewish governing body that makes decisions in such matters asking if pouring water over the woman would be a suitable substitution for the mikvah. The group of rabbis voted that it would be acceptable, and though the woman still struggled to feel included in the congregation, she was able to become a Jew and, hence, an active member of her synagogue (Friedman, 2006).

This woman struggled to attain membership in a religious community, as many individuals with disabilities still do. With more awareness and education about disabilities, perhaps religious leaders will lead their congregations to embrace community members with special needs. This inclusion stands to benefit not only the individuals with disabilities, but their families as well, who may rely on their

religious beliefs and communities as an adaptation mechanism. Even though religious texts, specifically Jewish ones, present conflicting attitudes towards disability, Judaism's relative openness to questioning doctrine and flexibility in adapting rituals position Jewish education as uniquely suited for providing an inclusive education for its students.

Jewish Education

A brief history of Jewish education will help to better situate a study of Solomon Schechter day schools. The Solomon Schechter Day School Association is an organization of Conservative day schools, which are discussed in further depth in this chapter. Although all three major branches of Judaism --Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform-- will ultimately be reviewed, special attention is paid to the Conservative movement.

Schools are considered the primary method of transmitting Jewish knowledge in the United States. The first Jewish school was founded in 1731 in New York by members of a synagogue who were committed to educating anyone who wanted to learn. Any children who came from families who could not pay for their educations would be taught for free (Ackerman, 1992). Early American Jews felt a sense of obligation to fellow members of their communities; they performed communal duties such as redeeming captives held by pirates, constructing shared ovens so that every household could bake the traditional Passover matzot, and maintaining group homes for orphans and transients (Engelman, 1969). As Jewish communities in the United States grew, particularly around urban centers, Jewish education likewise developed.

As a result of the maltreatment of Jews in Eastern European countries toward the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries, a massive influx of Eastern European Jews entered the United States during this time period, increasing the Jewish population from 300,000 in 1880 to 3,500,000 in 1920 (Adar, 1977). Many of the immigrant Jews attempted to rapidly acculturate to the United States; they rejected the "shtetl" culture they left behind in Eastern Europe and viewed Judaism as their religion, not their nation.

Many Jews believed public education to be the cornerstone of democracy and ardently supported sending their children to school with non-Jewish peers in an effort to be as American as possible (Ackerman, 1992). Isidor Busch, a European immigrant who rose to prominence in his St. Louis community urged parents to avoid the increasing popularity of Jewish day schools asking them, "Should our children be educated as Jews only or even as foreigners in language and spirit or shall they be educated as Americans, as citizens of the same free country, to be with them as a harmonious people?" (24). Rabbi Isaac Lesser from Philadelphia publicly argued against Busch's claim and for the expansion of Jewish day school education, stating, "Mr. Busch underrates the difficulties of evening religious schools. The mode of instructing children in the Hebrew etc. in the extra hours has been tried and has signally failed" (25). This argument illustrates a theme that Jewish education continues to struggle with: how can a deep understanding of Judaism theologically, historically, and culturally, be transmitted to Jewish youth in the context of America?

Evolving Forms of Jewish Education

In 1886, a group of Orthodox Jews who were unhappy with the state of Jewish education in the United States formed the first American Orthodox full-day school: the *yeshiva*. The schools started as a way to teach poor Jewish children Hebrew and the Jewish religion including prayers, the Old Testament, Torah, and rabbinic literature (Ackerman, 1992). Students were educated from 9:00am until 4:00pm and only two of those hours were to be spent learning in English. These first American yeshivas were designed with the yeshivas of the "old country" in mind; instructors were required to uphold the customs of Poland and Russia. Their nostalgia for the rigorous schools of Eastern Europe was met with some hostility from those American Jews who felt that segregated education undermined the Americanization process. Today, Orthodox day schools bear a great deal of similarities to the highly structured, highly demanding yeshivas of the late 1800's.

In the 19th century, most Jewish education occurred in schools connected with synagogues but toward the close of the century, with more Eastern European immigrants populating the Jewish community, new forms of education were developed (Engelman, 1969). In the decades preceding World War I, immigrants began organizing local associations to support Talmud Torahs. These free schools began in Eastern Europe to educate poor children who could not afford expensive private tutors (the preferred method of Jewish learning for those who could afford it). In America the Talmud Torahs lost their low-income stigma as free education was available to everyone regardless of economic status in the form of public, secular education. These schools were distinct from other forms of American Jewish

education in that they were independent of synagogues and focused primarily on promoting Jewish nationalism rather than teaching Jewish theology. Students would attend the school for ten hours a week in the afternoons after the end of the public school day. The curriculum centered on Hebrew language and literature. Sacred works were included in the Hebrew literature department and students also learned about Jewish history, customs, institutions, and holidays (Ackerman, 1992). The modern supplementary school, characteristic of the Conservative movement, traces its roots to the Talmud Torah.

Three main forms of Jewish schools currently dominate in Jewish education: the Sunday school, the afternoon or supplementary school, and the day school. All three major denominations, Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, have all three types of schools, yet each branch of Judaism primarily educates in one of these approaches (Adar, 1977). The Reform movement, the least strict denomination in regards to observing the many commandments and traditions laid out in the Old Testament, has as its primary mode of education the Sunday school, which educates students for two to three hours each Sunday. Although Hebrew may be taught, it is typically not emphasized and students ultimately obtain a general understanding of Jewish principles and traditions. The afternoon school is organized similarly to the Sunday school; it is also typically associated with a synagogue. While having multiple days of lessons a week, the supplementary school, the most frequent type of Conservative Jewish education, still struggles to convey a sophisticated understanding of Jewish issues to its students (Ackerman, 1992).

Although day schools are the primary mode of education in the Orthodox movement, both the Reform and Conservative movements have increased their support of them (Adar, 1977). While the first model of day school, the yeshiva, devoted only two hours a day to general studies, modern Orthodox and Conservative day schools spend between 50 and 60% of the school day on secular studies (Schiff, 1992). With the exception of the ultra-Orthodox day schools, all Jewish day schools teach similar Judaic subjects: Hebrew language and literature, Old testament, Jewish history, customs, ceremonies, prayers, and other rabbinic literature. In recent years, when intermarriage and assimilation have threatened to greatly diminish the Jewish American population, day schools seem to be a promising answer to the question of Jewish continuity. In a follow-up study of graduates of Jewish schools, Hartman (1976) discovered that day school graduates, in comparison to supplementary school graduates, perceive themselves and their parents as more religiously observant, perceive their Jewish education as more effective in enhancing both their own and their parents' religious behavior, and view interdating and intermarriage as more opposing their belief system (cited in Schiff, 1992).

The Solomon Schechter School

The Conservative movement, the most practiced form of American Judaism, was founded in 1913 by Dr. Solomon Schechter in the United States in the wake of massive immigration from Eastern Europe (www.uscj.org, 2008). Developing after the other two branches of Judaism, the Conservative movement purports to modernize Judaism in a historical context, in contrast to the Orthodox movement's emphasis on

unchangeable tradition, and the Reform movement's extreme flexibility in religious practices (Adar, 1977). The governing body of Conservative Judaism, The United Synagogue Commission, has laid out educational goals that encompass transmitting a strong belief in God, spiritual and moral sensitivity, the importance of observing *mitzvot* (commandments), an understanding of Jewish cultural heritage, proficiency in Hebrew, and an overview of Jewish history. These educational goals serve to, at least in theory, guide all forms of Conservative Jewish education, including the day school.

The Solomon Schechter Day School Association was established in 1964, as support for the day school movement in Conservative Judaism slowly started to increase (Werthheimer, 1999). The association serves as a coordinating body for the more than 60 Conservative day schools, spanning from elementary to high schools, that fall under its auspices (www.ssdsa.org, 2009). There are Solomon Schechter schools in 20 states across the country and in two provinces in Canada. All affiliate schools independently form their school policies and mission statements, yet they must adhere to the religious tenets of Conservative Judaism.

In the association's early years, Conservative Jews hesitated in withdrawing their children from public schools, but as criticism of supplementary schools grew, Conservative Jews increasingly attended to the need for day schools. The policies of the Solomon Schechter schools are complex, as they tend to vacillate between the traditional views of the Conservative leadership and the much less rigid views of Judaism held by the parents of their students. This tension is particularly salient as Conservative Judaism traditionally attracts a larger spectrum of beliefs from affiliated members as opposed to Orthodox Judaism, which caters to a narrower population.

The unique relationship between the Solomon Schechter schools and the parents of their students is detailed by Carol Ingall (1993) in a case study of the development of the Solomon Schechter Day School of Benevolent County[6]. The school she followed was founded in 1978 by parents who were unsatisfied with the Orthodox day school in their area. These parents believed in sending their children to Jewish day school for reasons ranging from the religious, to expose their children to Jewish ritual practices, to the secular, to escape the public schools. The dissonance between the more secular and more religious parents exploded at the newly founded school's first school board meeting. The issue that provoked both sides of the spectrum was whether or not to admit non-Jewish students to the school. The more religious Conservative Jews expressed outrage that non-Jewish students might be admitted because they imagined the Solomon Schechter school to be first and foremost a Jewish school and not a private school with a tendency toward Jewish values. On the other side of the debate, the more secular parents were shocked to find that the institution, supposedly committed to social activism, and one that they helped create in an open, undogmatic way, might be willing to exclude a group of people based on their religion. Ultimately, the school board decided to limit the school's population to only Jewish pupils, though the tension between religious and secular viewpoints did not end there.

When polled about the religious message of the Solomon Schechter school in 1992, parents answered in ways revealing the ambiguously defined religious objectives of the school (Ingall, 1993). Some parents viewed the message to be that

[6] Name was changed by Ingall

they and their children should practice more Jewish rituals and observe more precepts espoused by Conservative Judaism. Other parents took a more cultural perspective, thinking the aim of the school to be to instill stronger Jewish identities in their children and provide strong Jewish role models. Another parent enjoyed the fact that to him, the school does not seem "pushy" in its religious message, reporting, "[w]e play by the rules, I don't tell them how to run their house; they don't tell me how to run my house," (58). The inconsistency in message, coupled with the fact that the word "God" appears nowhere in any of the school's literature, tacitly communicates to parents that this Solomon Schechter school promotes a culturally Jewish lifestyle, but not necessarily a religiously Jewish one. Even fifteen years after its founding, the Solomon Schechter school studied struggled to find the balance between private Jewish school and Jewish private school, satisfying some parents, while leaving others wishing for more.

Special Education and the Jewish Day School

Special education presents a complex issue for Jewish day schools. Because such schools are privately funded, they are not mandated to provide the same types of services for their students as would be required of public schools under the Individuals with Disability Education Act (IDEA) (Fishman, 1994). Without the guidelines laid out in IDEA, day schools are free to provide as much or as little support to their students in any way they see fit. Fishman, the director of special education at the Jewish education center in Cleveland, urges parents and Jewish educators alike to be wary of inclusion in Jewish schools. While Fishman agrees that

whenever possible students of varying abilities should be educated together, she worries that Jewish education is simply not the proper arena for this type of learning to occur. Based on the minimal funding received by Jewish day schools and the lack of intensive special education training available to teachers, Fishman warns:

> Given the current state of Jewish education, inclusion may indeed allow Jewish children with special needs to participate side-by-side with their typically developing peers, but it may prevent them from obtaining quality Jewish education and certainly will not provide the peer acceptance that advocates seek (73).

While Fishman discusses only the concept of including children with disabilities in Jewish education, a case study of students with learning disabilities reveals that successful inclusion in Jewish day schools can occur. Four students with varying learning disabilities were interviewed about their attendance at a Conservative Jewish day school (Ross, 2004). These eighth grade students received academic support either inside or outside of the classroom, though none of the students learned entirely in a self-contained class. One student corroborated a belief commonly held by Jewish educators that the dual curricular nature of the school adds stress for those with learning disabilities: "The fact that we had all the regular English subjects then the extra Hebrew to learn…sort of makes it harder, and you have less time in your day to focus on certain things and you can't put as much time on a subject" (55). Despite the challenges of attending such a school, the students reported that having teachers who gave them the extra support they needed to succeed in their classrooms made school an enjoyable experience for them. One student described the

affective and religious benefits of the school saying, "I felt that I belonged here. I'm more familiar with all the Jewish stuff because I went to a Jewish school all my life…and I know a lot about Judaism, so I'm not ignorant about it…so I can know more about myself…I think it's important, because I can make a choice, to be religious, without being ignorant" (56). For this student, the positive experience of belonging coupled with the development of religious identity outweighed the hardships he encountered when dealing with two sets of curricula in his school.

In keeping with some of the Solomon Schechter founding principles, those parents who select a Jewish education for their children have a variety of motivations for doing so. Some want a more rigorous education than they feel their local public school can provide, some want their children to develop a richer understanding of their religion's sacred texts and rituals, and some desire a greater appreciation of their cultural heritage for their children. Regardless of the reasons, parents are sending their children with special needs to Jewish day schools. As Jewish education has a history of assisting disenfranchised groups, perhaps Jewish day schools will provide an exceptional environment in which Jewish children with disabilities can flourish. This study seeks to explore the relationship of Conservative Jewish day schools to special education, a topic not widely studied.

METHODOLOGY

The present study used a semi-structured interview as a framework for developing an understanding of the formation and implementation of special education policies and practices at Solomon Schechter day schools. Prior to contacting individual schools, I spoke with the Associate Director of Education for the Solomon Schechter Day School Association, Dr. Elaine Cohen. She revealed that no special education policies exist that apply to all affiliated Solomon Schechter schools. She noted three schools that she thought were particularly proud of their special education programs. Of those three, two agreed to be interviewed for this study. In order to obtain responses from schools with a wide range of experiences, I contacted Solomon Schechter schools across the country via e-mail. Ultimately, a sample of convenience was used based on six schools that responded to the e-mail and were willing to be interviewed. The six schools are located in six separate states spanning the United States and their sizes vary from 240 students to over 900 students.

Data from five out of the six schools were collected based on phone interviews, and the sixth interview was conducted in person. All the interviews followed the same basic set of questions derived to gain information about the content of and motivation for the special education policies and practices of these schools. After briefly explaining the purpose of the interview, I asked the following questions and several follow-up probes specific to the content of each interview:

1. What can you tell me about special education in your school?
2. Do you have a written special education policy in your school?

a) Can you describe it to me?

b) Can you send it to me?

c) How long has this policy existed?

d) What existed prior to it?

e) What prompted it?

f) Do you have many students that this applies to?

3. Do you think that the principles of Judaism influenced the creation of this policy?

a) Which ones?

b) Can you speak to any specific struggles you encounter as a Jewish school trying to offer special education?

-e.g. Is it particularly difficult to find special education teachers who speak Hebrew? Is it a challenge for students with learning disabilities to prepare for their bar/bat mitzvah?

4. Can you talk a little bit about how these policies are implemented in the classroom?

a) Are the teachers trained in any special way?

b) How are the policies reviewed?

c) Can you give me some practical examples?

Each interview was tape recorded and transcribed after the interview. Once all the interviews were complete, the transcripts were read and coding categories were established based on the principles of grounded theory (Neuman, 2006; Silverman, 2000). The categories further sought to address the relationship of the special

education practices to those laid out in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), as well as the Jewish principles that led to the creation of these practices. Each interview was coded for: positive statements of policy/practice, negative statements of policy/practice, statements of comparison to public education system, statements of involvements with the public education system, statements of structural benefits or limitations, statements of Jewish traditions or influences, and statements of desire. I coded one interview as did my adviser in order to gauge a qualitative reliability assessment of the coding. Since any discrepancies between the two codings were eliminated following discussion, I coded the remainder of the interviews on my own. The results are discussed in the following section.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

After an initial coding of the interviews, each category was expanded in order to obtain a more holistic view of the schools' policies and practices. At the beginning of this project, I anticipated that each school would have different special education policies. If the policies were attainable, then they would be coded along with the interviews. It was discovered that no school has one specific policy; instead, each school deals with special education matters on a case-by-case basis. Only two schools had even brief descriptions of the programs they run, and although these descriptions were coded, they yielded no new information when compared to the interviews conducted with administrators from the same schools. The lack of written policies is not indicative of a lack of practices, but rather characterizes the constantly adapting style that most Solomon Schechter schools examined in this study use to approach the question of special education.

Another outcome of the study concerns how school officials discussed the Jewish influences of their special education practices. The interviews revealed that the practices of the schools were not greatly influenced by principles of Judaism. As seen in the questionnaire format, each participant was explicitly asked if she thought her school's special education practices were influenced by any tenets of Judaism either explicitly or implicitly. Most interviewees had little to say on the matter, typically mentioning cultural rather than religious values when responding to the question. This was an unexpected finding as the schools' mission statements cite Judaism as a guiding force in the running of their schools.[7] For example, one of the

[7] Found on each school's website

schools interviewed lists Jewish values at the root of its purpose, including "*klal yisrael* (the idea that all Jews are responsible for one another) and *tikkun olam* (that it is incumbent upon each of us to help make the world a better place)." Both of these principles could readily be used to justify the need for special education in the school; yet, this school reported that Jewish principles have no impact on its special education practices. The disconnection between the stated mission of each school and its administrative practices will be explored in greater depth in the "Jewish Influences on Special Education Practices" section of this chapter.

Special Education Practices

The bulk of each interview consisted of a description of the school's specific special education practices. All the interviews included mostly positive statements of practice (e.g. "We have a math specialist who provides both enrichment and support as well") but also included various negative statements as well (e.g. "I know we wouldn't take a child with Down's Syndrome or anything like that"). A list of the most pertinent practices was compiled based on the data from all the interviews and the schools were compared across all procedures (see Table 1). Most of the practices were followed by the majority of schools; only a few procedures were employed by half or fewer of the schools. The similarities are notable as all the schools are private schools not bound to a specific method of coping with special education the way public schools are under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Understanding the similarities and differences among the Solomon Schechter schools will further illuminate what arises when a special education program is generated

independent of federal regulations. An illustrative example of what these programs can look like for their students was provided by the head of the program at one of the schools:

> There was a PDD[8] child in a class, he started in kindergarten with his peers, and I would say maybe in third or fourth grade, he would have meltdowns, like real behavior tantrums and he had a TSS[9] in the classroom the whole time and the kids just never thought anything about it. And one time there were guests coming to the classroom and this class had a greeter, so when you walked into this class this child got up and came to the door to greet the guests. At that point I was with these parents and just at that point my [child with PDD] had a meltdown and he's screaming in the corner and the parents are looking and the greeter goes, "Oh, don't worry, that's Ben. That happens often, but we let him get through it and then he gets better."

[8] Pervasive Developmental Disorder
[9] Therapeutic Staff Support (known as a one-on-one aide in some areas)

Table 1: Special Education Practices Demonstrated by Solomon Schechter Schools

Practices	**Ahava School**[10]	**Gesher School**[11]	**Kochav School**	**Osher School**	**Shalom School**	**Tikvah School**	Total # of schools
Using the term "special education"	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	5/6
Dealing with special education on a case by case basis	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	6/6
Serving students without official diagnoses	Yes	N/M[12]	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	5/6
Recommending that students be assessed	Yes	N/M	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	5/6
Providing assessment services	No	N/M	No	No	No	No	0/6
Using pull-outs in small groups or one-on-one	Yes	N/M	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	5/6
Modifying/adapting classroom curriculum	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	6/6
Offering a separate modified Hebrew class	Yes	N/M	Yes	No	No	Yes	3/6
Serving children with severe needs	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	1/6

[10] All names of schools have been changed
[11] The Gesher School uses an independent organization to provide special education services for students with more severe needs. The director of this program was interviewed.
[12] Not mentioned in interview

Serving children with mild or moderate needs	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	5/6
Including children in the classroom for half or more of the day	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	5/6
Having three or more specialists on staff[13]	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	4/6
Writing educational goals	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/M	Yes	No	4/6
Meeting with parents to discuss student	No	Yes	N/M	N/M	Yes	N/M	2/6
Charging extra for special education services	Yes	Yes	No	N/M	Yes	N/M	3/6
Total practices performed:	12	9	11	8	12	8	

[13] Specialists include: directors of support services, literacy coaches, speech language pathologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, social workers, school psychologists, learning specialists, reading specialists, math specialists, school nurses

Adaptability in Special Education Practices

A hallmark of all schools examined was the wide adaptability of their special education practices. Without the guidance and limitations of following IDEA, the schools felt free to adjust their practices to meet the needs of their individual students and they did so. Most interviewees pointed to the ever-changing nature of their practices as the reason they do not have, and do not want, a codified special education policy. As demonstrated in Table 1, each school operates on a case-by-case basis when dealing with special education. As the head of admissions of the Shalom School noted, dealing with special education in this manner allows for greater flexibility in who can be served:

> I think [our practices are] kind of evolving as we're seeing the needs of children evolve. And as I said before, we didn't used to offer OT[14] and speech[15], but now we do because of a demonstrated need. So I think it's constantly evolving. You know recently we've seen an increase in children with sensory integration issues, so our teachers are kind of learning what to do and learning what things work and what is helpful and beneficial for the children.

Most schools studied were unable to offer services such as speech and occupational therapy. The Shalom School demonstrated a keen awareness of what its student body would benefit from and was able to enhance their program in order to provide extra services for their students. The Osher School echoed the Shalom School's sentiment, with the head of school reporting, "We're working as we encounter, but we're sort of

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[14] Occupational therapy
[15] Speech-language therapy

creating as we encounter too." Even if schools were unable to offer a wide selection of services to their students, they took pride in the fact that they were able to offer individualized attention to such a degree that one would not find in most public school settings. The director of support services at the Tikvah School went so far as to say that she believed that if most of the students receiving support at the Tikvah School were to attend the local public school, they would not qualify for any special education services. Likely, this belief explains why the Tikvah School did not use the term "special education" when discussing the support that is offered by the school. While all the schools interviewed were unable to offer the extensive services that public schools are required to provide, all the schools did give support to a portion of their students and they were able to aid most students attending their schools who parents or teachers believed would benefit from additional assistance.

Furthermore, five out of the six schools reported supporting students who did not have official diagnoses of disabilities. As public school systems tend to be overcommitted and underfunded, IDEA requires that students be diagnosed as having some sort of disability before schools can begin to offer the student special education services and receive federal funds for doing so (U.S. Congress, 2004). Without the same types of restrictions, the Solomon Schechter schools are able to offer more support to mildly impacted students than the public schools may be able to provide. The head of admissions at the Shalom School reported, "We support a number of children without any kind of diagnosis. We support people who may be struggling, who might need a little reading support, whatever comes up we certainly support, we don't make them go through a full core [of diagnostic testing]." By not requiring

formal assessment, the Solomon Schechter schools are able to offer services to students more freely than public schools. Some of the schools reported using an informal identification system that allows teachers to discuss with their director of support services any children who may be struggling in their classes, not only those who would clinically be diagnosed as learning disabled. The head of student services at the Kochav School remarked that the teachers are sensitive to the children who need extra support in their classes and the vast majority of the time if parents want their children to be tested, the teachers have already been working with those students. She credited the teachers' perceptiveness in the success of the Kochav School's early identification system reporting:

> We meet, starting in some years in kindergarten, but certainly by first grade, the Hebrew support person, the school counselor and I meet with each grade level of teachers once a month. And we go through the whole roster to find out what's going on with everybody. But, most of the time, it starts already in first grade. And the first grade teacher may not even wait until the meetings, but we start watching already starting in kindergarten. Because the teachers will come to us and say, "They're just not keeping up with the work." So it's kind of like an in-house identification system.

This proactive approach to identifying students in need of support allows students to start receiving assistance before they demonstrate any significant failures and before they fall too far behind their peers. This model exemplifies Kauffman's (2007) argument in favor of the *medical model* over the *legal model* of special education. Kauffman argued that the legal model, the basis of the IDEA regulations, requires

failure and clear indication of a disability disruptive to the daily life of the student; in effect, the legal model relies on innocent until proven guilty and requires a significant demonstration of disability on the part of the student. The medical model of special education more readily assumes disability in students and allows the student to be treated before major complications arise. Solomon Schechter schools that provide assistance to students without official diagnoses follow this paradigm and are able to aid students before they experience serious academic setbacks.

This model, coupled with the seemingly informal approach many of the Solomon Schechter schools take with special education, contrasts the finding that five out of six schools recommend that students in certain situations receive assessment services. Even though they do not use diagnoses as indicative of which course of action to take with a particular student, reading an official diagnosis can be helpful. As the head of the special education program at the Ahava School pointed out, "It's just, we just want more information. And then what we do is basically we base our goals for the new students, who we don't know very well, we're gonna base all our goals from the psychological testing." Using diagnostic assessment to attain a fuller picture of a student's disability allows the Schechter schools to continue providing support to children while waiting for test results. Public schools must delay supplying special education services to a struggling student until first determining that a student needs diagnostic testing. Not until these results come back will the schools develop an IEP[16] detailing the best course of action for the student. Although none of the schools interviewed provide testing services for their students, they are

[16] Individualized Education Program, referenced in the Brief History of Special Education in the United States section of the Literature Review

still able to offer students assistance as soon as they demonstrate a need and the outside assessment serves to create a more detailed guide to help the schools develop more individualized support for their students.

Structure of Special Education Practices

With the exception of the program at the Gesher School, the rest of the schools interviewed organize their special education services similarly. These schools reported serving a population mostly in the mild range of disability. Frequently these students would evidence some sort of learning disability, although a few schools mentioned serving students with mild emotional or behavioral disabilities as well. As the head of school of the Osher School reports:

> And then we have a lot of kids with what you would call learning disabilities, though they aren't really even going that direction to label them anymore, but in the population. And also in the population we have kids with executive functioning disorders, those would be the attention issues that kind of really affect learning.

The Osher School appears open to helping students with learning disabilities and executive functioning disorders to the best of their ability, given their lack of extensive services for children who are more moderately or severely impacted by their disability. Other schools more explicitly stated their ability to only serve students in the mild range of disability. The head of the special education program at the Ahava School reports, "The way this school is set-up, we basically want for our kids, well for lack of a better word, we want kids who are somewhat in the bell curve,

you know we're not really, we don't really offer remediation per se." The head of student services at the Tikvah School went a step further remarking that despite private schools' desires to accommodate all their students, "Jewish day schools, at least on the West Coast, can only handle the mild range. You can have some social issues, you can have some academic issues, but you can't have a lot of either, or it's much harder for you—both the child and the school." These schools typically pointed to the structure of the Jewish day school as impeding their ability to serve a more impacted population. This issue will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

The program housed at the Gesher School follows a completely different model of working with children with special needs. The director of this program remarked, "we don't even want mild to moderate, we want moderate to severe learning disabilities, ADHD, we have Down's Syndrome children, we have serviced brain injured children, we have children on the autism spectrum. . . oh, you know we also have more language based learning disabilities, the more severe end." This program addresses the needs of children currently not served by the Jewish day schools in general and allows many students who would not be able to attend Jewish day school the chance to obtain a quality education in both secular and religious studies. The most heavily impacted students often learn their basic subjects in a self-contained classroom and then join their typical peers for elective subjects, such as art, music, gym, and the like. (Lior, whose experiences are described in the Faith, Religious Practices, and Disability section of the Literature Review, was educated at an Orthodox day school using the same program housed also in the Gesher School.)

Both the program run at the Gesher School and the special education programs located at the other Solomon Schechter schools practice a great deal of *modification* and *accommodation* in the classroom: all six schools reported using these techniques in the general education classroom in order to assist specific students. Most schools reported that keeping the students in the classroom is the ideal scenario for them and only if they have to will they pull students out of the general classroom for one-on-one or small group interventions. The director of student services at the Kochav school states a sentiment echoed by most of the participating schools. She described her program as always starting with the teachers in the general classroom. She gave an example of a kindergarten teacher using reading groups to cluster the children by ability levels. In situations when there are children who simply cannot keep up with the students in the lowest level of readers, she comes in and pulls the children out for one-on-one or small group remediation. In general, the Solomon Schechter schools attempt to keep the students in the classroom with their typical peers. This may be more easily accomplished in the Jewish day school setting because they typically only serve students with mild disabilities; whereas public schools serve students with a wider range of severity of disabilities. Furthermore, private schools are not obligated to provide the same types of evidence-based interventions to their students as public schools are required to do. Having more freedom in the way they aid students with disabilities may increase the likelihood that students are able to be served through methods of accommodation and modification in their general classroom in the Jewish day school setting.

Parent Involvement in Education

Four out of the six schools examined write educational goals for their students either adapting students' pre-existing IEPs or creating their own method of setting goals. In the public school system, writing an IEP for a child necessitates meeting with parents to discuss the goals and exactly what services the school will provide in order to ensure that those goals are met. Perhaps due to the seemingly informal nature of special education at Jewish day schools, only two out of six of the schools reported holding meetings with parents. The head of the special education program at the Ahava School reported that the school has freedom to adapt student learning programs without going through the production of organizing a large scale meeting:

> It's much different from public school, because we change [educational goals] as we see fit. If we feel, oh our student has conquered that, we're not going to have a big meeting, we're just going to say to our parents, your child has conquered blah blah blah, we're going to put in writing goals because that's what they need more of, or whatever.

In this instance, parents are kept apprised of their child's educational progress, but the school does not need to hold a formal meeting to accomplish this. In the public school sphere, IEP meetings are frequently a contentious setting for the school district and the parents. Less is at stake for the Jewish day schools because any services they provide the students are extra and there is little threat of legal recourse on the part of the parents. This likely allows parent-school interactions to be more relaxed and informal in the Jewish day school arena. The head of the program run out of the

Gesher school described the flexibility her school has in creating individualized goals for their students:

> And in Judaic studies we bring the parents' goals into our planning. The parents want the children to have synagogue skills, well, we'll assess and see when that can happen. Many parents want the child to start off in the early years with cultural Judaic curriculum where you know we do the [Torah] portion of the week and holidays and certain mitzvot.

This program is able to integrate parental desires into their curriculum planning, which allows parents to be more involved in their children's education. Such involvement seems more possible in the Jewish day school setting than it would be in the public school setting where there are more parents and students to address, the curriculum is likely standardized across the state, and the specific regulations of IDEA must be followed. Without IDEA, Solomon Schechter schools likely are able to involve parents more fully and more harmoniously in the education of their children with special needs.

Comparisons with the Public Education System:

I predicted that in their interviews, the Jewish day schools would reference the public school system, as special education in public schools is highly regulated and systemized, therefore providing a clear method to either imitate or deviate from. The Solomon Schechter schools indicated both admiration for the public school system in certain respects and their relief that they are not held to the same rigid standards as

the public schools. A list of comparisons to public schools made by the Solomon Schechter schools can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2: Comparisons to public schools mentioned by each school

Comparisons	**Ahava School**	**Gesher School**	**Kochav School**	**Osher School**	**Shalom School**	**Tikvah School**	Total
Serving students who would not qualify in public school	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	Yes	1/6
Writing IEPs or IEP-style educational goals	N/M	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/M	4/6
Holding IEP or IEP-style meetings	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	Yes	N/M	1/6
Not having enough resources for additional aides	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	Yes	N/M	1/6
Not offering as many services as public school	N/M	Yes	Yes	N/M	Yes	N/M	3/6
Using RTI[17]	Yes	N/M	N/M	Yes	N/M	N/M	2/6
Total comparisons made	1	2	2	2	4	1	

Each school typically only made a few comparisons to public schools and each of the comparisons tended to only be endorsed by a few of the schools. The majority of the schools reported using IEPs or educational goals that are written

[17] Response to Intervention, referenced in the A Brief History of Special Education in the United States section of the Literature Review

similarly to IEPs. This seems a feasible step for private schools to take as if a child comes into a school with a pre-existing IEP, the school can continue to use it and adapt it as the school sees fit. Additionally, for students who do not enter the school with an IEP, creating educational goals for a struggling student is a clear and concise way of developing an academic plan specifically targeting the student's areas in need of improvement.

Two of the six schools also reported following RTI, an initiative introduced in the 2004 update of IDEA followed by all public schools. RTI involves a three-tiered intervention plan whereby struggling students are initially targeted within their entire class with a universal intervention. If students demonstrate a need for more assistance, they are then targeted with a tier two intervention, where at-risk students are helped with remediation programs in small groups. Finally, if a student still demonstrates a need for more assistance, an individualized tier three intervention will be administered to the student in hopes of improving the student's academic performance. This method allows for identification of students with learning disabilities in a way that does not force them to demonstrate the IQ/achievement gap that previously was the defining feature of learning disability diagnosis. Two of the schools reported adopting this method in their own schools, which indicates their desire to keep up with the changing federal legislation, clearly demonstrated by the head of the Osher school's comment, "We have been keeping along with the government so then we are just as technically RTI as the schools around us." This finding implies that at least some of the private schools follow the changes in federal

policy quite closely and are willing to adapt their school practices to match the advancements in public special education.

Though the Solomon Schechter schools do not entirely match the changes in local public schools, they demonstrated an attention to these modifications. Half of the schools interviewed mentioned that the local area public schools offered more extensive special education services than their school could offer. The Gesher School reported this to be true while affirming that the Jewish school system still may be more beneficial for some students:

> It's very challenging for us, but if we feel we can meet the needs of the child on some level, and we always say to the parents that we may not be able to meet the needs of the children 100%, and we have some very fine special education schools here…, very fine special ed, but you can't compare them to a special ed program at a Jewish day school if that's what the parents want.

This statement reveals that even if the child could be receiving more intensive academic support at a public school, there are aspects of the child's education that could not be met in that setting. If the parents want a rigorous Jewish education for their child, regardless of his or her ability level, a Jewish day school remains the only place for it to happen. Supplementary schools run by synagogues may not have the resources or knowledge to run programs for students with such intensive needs.

Alternatively, the head of student services at the Kochav School discussed the more extensive programs at the local public schools as a way to explain why greater services and specialists are not needed at her school:

> At one time the town used to give us a psychologist. The town used to give us language[18] through nursing services-- through the health department. But they haven't for a number of years, so…we haven't had a number of people come to ask. So, it hasn't come up particularly. And the town…has a pretty good special education program.

By referencing the quality of the local special education program, the interviewee implied that better services are not needed at the Kochav school, since if students really need more, there are good programs at the local public school. That the participant remarked "we haven't had a number of people come to ask" reveals a conflicting and symbiotic aspect of special education in Jewish day schools. Since most schools develop their special education programs as they encounter students who need support, they will generally offer services due to the demonstrated need of their students. Likely, however, parents will choose not to send their child to a school that does not offer the type of therapies that he or she needs. It seems that only if Jewish day schools are presented with children who need a specific therapy not currently offered will the school's provided services expand.

Involvements with Public Education

A further finding of this study lies in the fact that many of the private schools studied received some amount of funding or services from their local public schools. These involvements with public education are important to note as they may better

[18] Speech-language therapy

illuminate some of the practices of the Solomon Schechter schools. Table 3 details what each school receives from their local public schools.

Table 3: Involvements with public education mentioned by each school

Involvements	**Ahava School**	**Gesher School**	**Kochav School**	**Osher School**	**Shalom School**	**Tikvah School**	Total
School provides assessment services	N/M	N/M	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/M	3/6
One-on-one aides provided by government	N/M	Yes	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	1/6
School provides nurse	N/M	N/M	Yes	N/M	N/M	N/M	1/6
School provides speech services	N/M	N/M	N/M	Yes	N/M	N/M	1/6
School provides some funding for certain students	N/M	N/M	Yes	N/M	N/M	N/M	1/6
Total involvements mentioned	0	1	3	2	1	0	

Two of the schools studied reported that they do not receive any assistance from the public schools. The remaining four schools reported at least one source of help from the public school system. That at least three out of the six schools receive assessment services from their local public schools may help to explain why even though none of them offer their own assessment services, five out of the six schools recommend that students be assessed. The schools who receive services from the

public education system, such as speech-language therapy, a school nurse, or one-on-one aides, are able to offer more support services to their students. Even if the schools receive only a small amount of assistance from the local area schools, it appears to help the Solomon Schechter schools provide services they otherwise would not be able to offer. For example, the Osher School receives a speech-language pathologist from the local school district. Only a few students at the school receive this type of therapy, and it is only offered to them a half an hour a week, but without the assistance of the local district, the Osher School would not have the budget to provide any amount of speech-language therapy to their students at all.

Jewish Influences on Special Education Practices

In investigating the Jewish influences on the special education practices of each school, it was expected that many would report theological principles which guide their programs, especially due to their affiliation with Conservative Judaism. As previously stated, the mission statements of each of the six Solomon Schechter schools contained claims about the importance of imparting Judaism to their students. As reflected in Table 4, many of the interviewees had trouble pointing to Jewish ideals that influenced the creation of their practices.

Table 4: Jewish influences on special education practices reported by each school

Influences:	**Ahava School**	**Gesher School**	**Kochav School**	**Osher School**	**Shalom School**	**Tikvah School**	Total
Any family that wants a Jewish education for their child deserves it	N/M	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	5/6
Everyone is created in God's image	N/M	N/M	N/M	Yes	N/M	N/M	1/6
Teach a child according to his lead	N/M	N/M	N/M	Yes	N/M	N/M	1/6
Teaching children to be mensches[19]	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	Yes	N/M	1/6
Including everyone we can	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	Yes	N/M	1/6
Supporting everyone we can	N/M	N/M	N/M	Yes	N/M	N/M	1/6
Dealing with people with compassion	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	Yes	1/6
Total influences	0	1	1	4	3	2	

Before beginning the interview process, it was expected that many of the schools would point to similar guiding principles when asked about Jewish influences on special education policy. Although I do not have an extensive background in Jewish theology, I anticipated that schools would report ideas such as: *betzelem*

[19] A Yiddish word meaning upstanding or admirable person

elohim (everyone is created in the image of God), *tikkun olam* (the obligation of everyone to work to create a better world), *tzdekah* (Jews are obligated to offer charity and assistance to those who are less fortunate than themselves) and other related ideas, as justifications for the existence of their special education practices. Only one school mentioned any of these concepts, *betzelem elohim*, as a motivating factor behind its special education program. Instead, five out of six of the schools pointed to a cultural justification for their special education practices: any family who wants a Jewish education for their child has a right to it. Of course, the Solomon Schechter schools cannot meet this goal all the time, but they strive to achieve it, which sometimes involves accepting students with special needs. As the head of student services at the Kochav School succinctly remarked, "Well, we kind of feel that everybody's entitled. Anyone who wants a Jewish education, should be, should have access to it. So that kind of foundation kind of drives to whom we deliver education, who we take into the school, all of those pieces." The interviewee from the Gesher school echoed these sentiments saying, "So I think the principle that guides us in all of the Jewish day schools is any family who wants a Jewish education for their child on some level, if they want it so badly, we will try very hard to make it happen." This struggle to provide a Jewish education for every child who desires one frames the tension schools feel when they cannot provide an adequate education for students who struggle in the day school setting. The head of admissions at the Shalom School discussed how parents endorse this principle to a great extent, which can be challenging when students present with difficulties beyond the scope of the school:

> There were concerns of the part of the parents, like how can you not take my child, you call yourselves a religious school, that's not being very charitable, that's not being very mensch-like or whatever. So I think there is pressure, but you have to, you really have to do what's going to be right for the child and for the school. You know, doing what's right for the child is always my utmost concern. I would never, I would never want to have a child here who was having a miserable experience. I would never want to take on more than I thought our school could handle, you know for the teachers and the support.

The interviewee acknowledged the idea of serving anyone who desires a Jewish education as a driving force behind the practices of the Shalom School, but also revealed that there are situations requiring the school to act against this idea. The practical concerns of whether or not the school can meet the needs of a specific student are given more importance than complying with a Jewish ideal. This appears to be another example of Solomon Schechter schools approaching special education in an individualized, case-by-case manner, rather than adhering to overarching policies regardless of whether or not they have their roots in Jewish traditions.

The head of the Osher School also endorsed the belief that the Solomon Schechter schools should try to provide a Jewish education for all those who request one, yet she implied that the school and the parents need to carefully consider what type of Jewish education the student will be able to obtain. Echoing the thoughts of Fishman (1994), who warned that including Jewish children with special needs in day schools may prevent them from obtaining a quality Jewish education, the head of the

Osher school described how sometimes accepting all Jewish children into their school can conflict with the Jewish mission of the school:

> You know, sometimes we come across like, how can we turn away a Jewish child from a Jewish education, so it sometimes comes into play that way. But I don't know if we go back in this area-- it also comes into play if we look at the mission of our school, the Jewish mission of our school. So the mission of our school has a lot to do with creating typical Jewish children and so they can learn, so if they don't have very strong skills in language, can they do that in a modified Hebrew program?

In this case, a clear Jewish principle guides the actions of the school: the Osher School upholds its mission to create typical Jewish children. One might argue that yes, students can learn the important precepts of Judaism in a modified Hebrew program, and the interviewee continued later in her interview to explore that possibility, but more so than the other schools, the Osher School explicitly reported trying to preserve the Jewish goals of its school. Perhaps this overt awareness of the Jewishness of the school explains why this interview yielded four Jewish influences of special education practices, more than any other interview.

One possible reason why more Jewish commitments were not mentioned by the interviewees could be because the Jewish roots of the schools' philosophies are present in more subtle ways and, therefore, are more implicit in the minds of the participants. All the schools demonstrated concern with educating their students in precepts of Judaism and in imparting Jewish values. These values may be so clear and self-evident to the individuals interviewed that they did not consider describing

them even in response to the specific interview questions. Another possible explanation is that the interviewees mentioned broad social values, (compassion, supporting everyone) but that these values have their roots in Jewish principles such as *tzdekah*, and *gemilut hasadim* (performing acts of loving-kindness).

Yet a third explanation is that while Jewish factors are at play in the stated mission of each school, they do not influence each school's practices on a daily basis. As Ingall (1993) discovered in her case study of the Solomon Schechter Day School of Benevolent County, despite the Conservative Jewish roots of the school, any mention of God was notably missing from all of the school's literature. The fundamental Jewish principle of believing in one God was not explicitly stated or referenced in the school's practices, although it would be evident in the school's Judaic studies classes. Solomon Schechter schools may feel most comfortable addressing the specific theology of Judaism solely in the context of their Judaic studies classes where teaching religion is expected of them. In this scenario, not addressing Judaism in the practices and policies of the general studies aspect of Solomon Schechter day schools would be expected.

Structural Limitations of the Jewish Day School Model:

Many of the interviewees pointed to the structure of the Jewish day school (in terms of both curricular and logistical factors that differentiate it from a public school) as the primary agent limiting the school's ability to serve more students with a broader range of disabilities. These limitations are important to understand when examining the issue of who Jewish day schools are able to serve. Since Solomon

Schechter schools are private entities, there are structural factors at play that one would not encounter in the public school system. Table 5 lists the limitations discussed by the Solomon Schechter schools in their interviews.

Table 5: Structural limitations of Jewish day schools mentioned by each school

Limitations:	**Ahava School**	**Gesher School**	**Kochav School**	**Osher School**	**Shalom School**	**Tikvah School**	Total
Time constraints of dual curriculum	Yes	N/M	Yes	Yes	N/M	Yes	4/6
Teaching two languages	N/M	N/M	Yes	N/M	Yes	N/M	2/6
Not enough funding	N/M	Yes	N/M	N/M	N/M	Yes	2/6
Can't offer as many services	N/M	N/M	Yes	N/M	Yes	N/M	2/6
High expectations for students	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	Yes	Yes	2/6
Space limitations	Yes	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	1/6
Total limitations:	2	1	3	1	3	3	

The primary limitation voiced by four out of six of the participants had to do with the dual curricular nature of the Jewish day school programs. All the schools contacted spend a significant portion of the school day teaching Judaic studies in addition to general studies. Since more topics are covered in a given day, students spend less time going over the material and are expected to pick up the content perhaps faster than would be expected of them in a public school. According to the

head of the Osher School, this format presents challenges not only to the students with disabilities at Solomon Schechter schools, but also to the typical students:

> There's also what happens in day schools, and I have a coined term for it, and it's the day school disability. It's the kids who in the public schools or in a private school would do fine, maybe it's too serious there, but they do fine. But when you put them in our schools with the dual curriculum and the less time to review during the school day and all the things that includes, they don't do fine. Se we started having those kids as well, and that was the problem.

The students attending these Jewish day schools are expected to learn many things in one day and it can be hard for all types of students to keep up. Spending less time on general studies potentially creates added difficulties for students with learning disabilities or executive functioning disorders that they may not have encountered in a public school setting. This rigorous learning environment does not preclude students with disabilities from being successful in the Solomon Schechter schools, but it may make parents and school administrators alike more hesitant about sending such students to these schools.

A more specific concern about the Judaic studies component of the curriculum lies in that students are expected to develop a mastery of the Hebrew language. Not only is learning a second language difficult for students with disabilities, but Hebrew is a particularly difficult language, as it relies on a different set of characters than English and is written and read in the opposite direction. The head of admissions of the Shalom School noted the dual language focus of the school to explain why

students with language based learning difficulties may not be suited for her school, "we also, my feeling is, because this is a Jewish day school where the children learn to read and write in both English and Hebrew, so it's a left to right and right to left, I think that for a child with really significant dyslexia, it would be very, very challenging." As was noted in the Special Education Practices section of this chapter, three out of the six schools examined address the difficulties students with disabilities face learning a second language by offering a modified Hebrew program.

Another challenge faced by Solomon Schechter schools is their limited budget. Committing to meeting the needs of students with disabilities requires investing a great deal of money in a variety of areas: employing extra specialists or paraprofessionals to address the needs of students with disabilities, training teachers to work with students with disabilities, acquiring and learning how to use various evidence-based interventions, etc. Because they are private schools, the special education programs at Solomon Schechter schools do not receive federal funding, as they would in public schools. These programs receive their funding from the general or additional tuition paid by the parents of students utilizing these services and these funds limit what a school can accomplish. Many of the individuals interviewed wished they could serve every student that wanted to attend their school; however, structural limitations facing the schools prevented them from meeting 100% of the need they encounter.

CONCLUSION

This exploration of special education has illuminated how private institutions set out to address individuals with disabilities who wish to join their community. Operating outside federal legislation presents a unique opportunity as well as additional challenges for these Jewish day schools: they are able to create their own programs to deal with special education without any restrictions, yet they do not have the benefit of the guidance and funding the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) provides for public schools. Originally, I anticipated that the ties Solomon Schechter schools have with Conservative Judaism would produce guiding principles in the creation of their special education policies and practices; yet the data did not support this hypothesis.

What this study uncovers is these schools' perceptive awareness of the needs of their student populations. As private schools, Jewish day schools are under no legal obligation to provide special education services to their students, yet all of the Solomon Schechter schools examined provide at least some amount of support to their students. With the exception of one independent program housed in the Gesher School, the schools all had practices in place to meet the needs of a mildly impacted population. While I expected that these day schools would not have the resources to meet the needs of a more severely impacted population, it was surprising to learn that all the schools operate without any codified policies, taking a very individualized approach to their special education programs. Each school demonstrated a great deal of flexibility in their practices; the interviewees indicated that they constantly adapt their programs to suit the needs of the students enrolled in their schools. Case-by-

case approaches allow these schools to meet specifically and immediately the needs of individual students. Operating without regulations for identification and diagnosis, they also are much freer than public schools to support students as soon as they demonstrate a need.

Despite their independence from following the federal regulations, most of the participants interviewed demonstrated a keen awareness of what special education looks like in the public school sphere. Many compared their own programs to those run by public schools; either remarking with gratitude that they do not have to follow the same policies, or speaking with admiration for all that public schools can accomplish that is beyond the scope of what most private schools can offer. It appears beneficial for Solomon Schechter schools to remain aware of the policies and practices of public schools so that they might adopt ones that suit the needs of both their schools and their students while retaining the freedom to reject or modify the rest.

Many of the schools interviewed appear to take the concept of "least restrictive environment" under advisement at least to some extent when making placement decisions for their students. All the participants interviewed discussed the importance of using modifications in the general classroom for students with disabilities or with learning difficulties. However, most individuals reported that their schools also rely on a pull-out method of supporting students one-on-one or in small groups. In these programs the person in charge of support services at the school reinforces a concept for the students or helps them with their work a few times a week in a room outside their general classroom, typically a resource room. Current trends

in public education suggest that many schools are attempting to develop more inclusive programs with students of multiple ability levels being taught in the same classroom. It would be interesting to follow the development of the Solomon Schechter school special education practices over the next several years to ascertain whether they begin to phase out their pull-out programs and depend solely on an in-class delivery model.

Unsurprisingly, most of the interviews revealed some degree of acknowledgment of Jewish principles that influenced the formation of the school's special education practices. It was expected that the participants would directly address the Jewish roots of their programs in more depth and more detail, yet this did not occur. While we cannot draw conclusions about the influences of Judaism on these special education practices, given the roots of Jewish education, it follows that Judaism would influence a group to reach out to students with disabilities. As discussed previously, the beginning of Jewish education in the United States had a very communal focus (Engelman, 1969). Schools were set up that allowed children to attend even if their parents could not afford the tuition. This concern for the welfare and education of students outside the profile of a typical Jewish student positions the institution of Jewish education to be more inclined to support the inclusion of students with disabilities in their classrooms. Whether or not this is a reality remains to be seen. Further probing of Solomon Schechter schools or perhaps a comparison of such schools with other religious private schools would be necessary before drawing any conclusions on this topic.

With a new administration leading the country, the state of public education in America will no doubt come under a great deal of scrutiny. The Bush administration greatly changed special education with the introduction of high stakes testing for all students as described in No Child Left Behind. The field of special education will likely experience much growth and development in the coming years with the question of inclusion coming even more into the forefront. As these topics continue to be teased out in the public arena, the private sector's inclusion of individuals with disabilities will hopefully progress as well. Understanding the ways private institutions develop their own policies and practices for dealing with people with special needs, especially with respect to religious institutions, requires continued attention and research. This study serves as a starting point for further research, as there is still much to be explored on the topic.

Limitations

It is important to note the limitations of this study. First, a sample of convenience was used with regards to the schools interviewed. Six schools were ultimately sampled, though many more were contacted in the initial stages of this study. Most frequently schools were contacted but not interviewed due to a lack of communication on the part of the school. I sent e-mails as an initial mode of contact and most schools responded to the initial e-mail, but many failed to make contact after an e-mail was sent attempting to arrange an interview. One school responded declining an interview because the board of directors of that Solomon Schechter school did not feel comfortable with the school discussing their policies and practices.

Perhaps without data collected from that sample an important piece of this topic is missing. Ultimately, for these reasons, only six schools were interviewed. It is my hope that data collected from these schools are reflective of Solomon Schechter schools at large; however, the sample size is too small to generalize about all Solomon Schechter schools.

In searching for potential interviewees, I contacted whomever had contact information on their school's website. Some schools listed the e-mail addresses for all of their faculty members. In such cases, individuals were contacted with job titles that most closely fit the aims of this study, such as director of support services. When only one person's contact information was listed on the website, that person was contacted regardless of his or her position title. Perhaps people holding different positions in the schools, such as head of school or director of admissions, may have different levels of familiarity with their school's special education programs than the people who actually work within such programs. The variation amongst job positions of individuals interviewed for this study is potentially beneficial because it allows for the perspectives of both individuals working within and outside of special education programs in Solomon Schechter schools to be heard. However, perhaps different comparisons could be drawn if the person interviewed from each school held the same position.

Originally, this study set out to compare special education policies of Solomon Schechter schools with the special education policies laid out in the federal legislation. Only after several of the interviews were conducted did I discover that it was likely that none of the schools would be able to produce policies comparable to

IDEA. The interviews did yield much information on the practices of each school regarding special education. With more investigation, it would have been interesting to compare the practices of the Jewish day schools with practices of public schools. While all public schools are bound to adhere to the guidelines set out in IDEA, certain components are interpretable and special education looks slightly different at every school. That being said, it is likely that public schools would not openly and honestly discuss their special education practices with an undergraduate researcher as they are bound by law to structure their programs in a certain way and would not want to admit to any deviations from IDEA. The special education programs of the schools examined are mainly compared to the federal legislation in terms of the practices of the schools and the practices set out in the Act. The extent to which public schools fully comply with such practices requires more in depth investigation and is explored by some of the literature reviewed in the prior section on special education.

Future Directions

This study can serve as a starting point for future investigation. With scant existing research on special education in Jewish day schools, more studies need to be conducted in order to better understand the field. Within the Conservative Jewish community in the U.S., Solomon Schechter schools can be directly compared to public schools in the same area and of comparable size. Such a study would allow the practices of the Solomon Schechter schools to have a better comparison than solely discussing them in relation to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. A comparison of services offered by schools across religious denominations also

would enhance an understanding of how religion and culture play into the determination of which services a school will offer. I hypothesize that the day schools in Orthodox Judaism would more comfortably speak of the Jewish principles that influence their special education practices, but those types of schools may not necessarily offer more support services than the Solomon Schechter schools. Looking more globally, a cross-cultural study of special education legislation across countries run by both secular and religious governments may help address the question of religion's role in such determinations. A better understanding of how culture and religion factor into special education decisions will allow professionals working with students with special needs to more accurately assess the needs of these individuals based on their religious and ethnic backgrounds.

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