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A Library Education Program For Ḥaredi Librarians: Background and Description of the Program

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ABSTRACT

The paper describes the author's experience of establishing the first program for professional education of librarians from the Ḥaredi community in Jerusalem. The paper describes the various problems that the author encountered in establishing the program. The aims of the program are described as well as its curriculum. Some data about the students and the libraries is also included.

BACKGROUND

Jerusalem has a large population of stringently orthodox Jews who regard themselves as *Ḥaredim* (literally, "the trembling ones"). Constituting an estimated thirty percent of the city's population, they segregate themselves in closed neighborhoods and do not mingle with non-religious Jews. Ḥaredim do not usually have television sets and they do not participate in the cultural activities that take place in Jerusalem. Also, they do not use the municipal libraries that are located in most neighborhoods throughout the city.

The Department of Religious Culture in the Jerusalem Municipality, recognizing the cultural deprivation of this population, opened five public libraries in various Ḥaredi neighborhoods by December 1999. These libraries are located primarily within schools. One library is located in a community center. The collections in the school libraries consist mainly of juvenile literature, along with some reference materials. (The community center library has some adult fiction, in addition to books for the younger reader.)

The reference collections are relatively small, and most of the books are in Hebrew. All of the books are written by religious authors for the Ḥaredi community, mainly children and youth. All titles have been reviewed by rabbis or other community leaders to check if they meet the required standards. For these reasons, four of the libraries have relatively small collections, numbering about 3,000 titles each. One library has a bigger collection, almost 8,000 volumes (with

internal duplication of many titles). Only one library has English as well as Hebrew books. All libraries receive five authorized periodicals. Until recently, the staff in these libraries, mainly women, had no background or training in librarianship.

The head of the Department for Religious Culture at the Jerusalem Municipality, Rabbi Gavriel Shtauber, understood that in order for them to provide the best possible service, staff in these libraries needed to receive professional training in librarianship.

INITIAL PROBLEMS

There were two programs in Jerusalem for professional education in librarianship: one was at the Hebrew University and required a bachelor's degree as a prerequisite. The other was at The David Yellin Teachers' College and required only a *Bagrut* certification (*Bagrut* is the state examination for high school graduation).

Neither of these programs was suitable for the Ḥaredi community. First, Ḥaredim usually are unable to study at university and thus cannot earn a bachelor's degree. For its part, the David Yellin College is a secular institution, where men and women study together. The women's dress code is improper by Ḥaredi standards, and the overall atmosphere is unsuitable for the Ḥaredi community. So, the question remained: What can be done to create a program that will simultaneously meet the professional requirements, and fit in with the religious and cultural requirements of Ḥaredi people?

Some time before this initiative, the Bet Ya'akov teachers' college in Tel Aviv (a Ḥaredi institution) offered a professional training program for school librarians.

This program was organized, in most respects, according to principles established by the Ministry of Education and Culture, for professional education of public and school librarians. But, for various reasons, the program did not receive the Ministry's recognition. I was asked to help to create a program that would meet at least the minimal professional requirements, on the one hand, and the cultural and environmental requirements on the other.

The problems that I faced were twofold:

1. What will the curriculum of this professional education program be?
2. Where and how could we carry it out?

In deciding about the curriculum, I had to take into account that the program could not be lengthy. This was because it was clear that it had to be subsidized. Potential students (women only) would be unable to pay the real cost of such a program. In addition, they would not enroll in a two- or three-year-long program such as the one at David Yellin College, due both to financial reasons and to the fact that they have large families and are unable to leave their homes for long periods of time. In view of these constraints, I had to create a short-

term program in which its participants would be taught the main principles of librarianship and be able to apply them at work.

I searched through various library education programs that existed in Israel at that time (2000), and found a program of professional library education that was designed specifically for librarians in kibbutzim. This program took place within the Levinski Teachers College in Tel Aviv. The program was composed of three stages:

◊   The basic stage, lasting one academic year and comprising 180 hours (one study day with six lessons per week).
◊   The second stage, involving 112 hours in twenty meetings.
◊   The third stage, with 35 hours in six meetings. This last stage included teaching about the Internet.

The program for kibbutz librarians was not recognized by the Ministry of Education and Culture as a certified professional education program, because in their opinion it did not meet the minimal professional requirements. Nevertheless, it existed for many years and served the population for which it was designed. Therefore I decided to adopt many of its components. The program was adjusted to the needs of our population, and was not identical to the kibbutz librarians' program.

Our program was initiated and executed by the Jerusalem Municipality and the Jerusalem Society for Community Centers, which are not educational institutions. We had hoped that after our first course was completed, one of the Ḥaredi teachers' colleges would include it among their special programs. To our great regret, this did not happen. Had we been able to include it in the teachers' college program, we could have recruited students more easily and also given them some sort of academic accreditation. The fact that the program was not accepted by the colleges proved to be a major obstacle to the Ḥaredi library program's creation and continuation.

We also consulted with the Department of Libraries in the Israeli Ministry of Education and Culture, which understood the special problems that we faced. Its staff agreed that there ought to be a special program for professional library education for the Ḥaredi population; however, they were unable to assist us.

So, aside from building the curriculum, we had to find a place with the proper atmosphere for our students, along with a computer laboratory where they could study and practice library computer applications.

PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

The aims of the program were:
1. To train teachers, library workers, or other individuals wishing to work in a public or school library in the Ḥaredi sector, in the professional principles of librarianship.

2. To teach students about the organization of information.
3. To familiarize students with the daily activities of the library.
4. To teach students how to guide clients to the available resources in the library and other agencies.
5. To teach library management principles.
6. To teach pupils research skills that can be applied for preparing papers for their school assignments.

The Structure of the Program

The program was divided into three parts, with each part comprising sixteen meetings, one meeting per week. The first part included five hours of study; in the second and third parts there were six hours of study in each meeting. One day each term there was a field trip to a library. The last day of the program featured a workshop on The Library and the Community.

The course took place at the Pedagogical Center of the Jerusalem Municipality, which is centrally located. (In-service training of teachers and other school personnel takes place there.) The Pedagogical Center has both a library and computer laboratories. It is not an isolated place and is not in a Ḥaredi neighborhood—the students thus needed to leave their everyday surroundings in order to participate in the course.

THE CURRICULUM

These are the courses that were included in the curriculum:

◊   Introduction to Librarianship—14 hours
◊   Cataloging—46 hours (including computer applications)
◊   Classification—36 hours
◊   Library resources and reference tools—32 hours
◊   Children's literature—14 hours
◊   Reading encouragement—12 hours
◊   Library management—20 hours
◊   Indexing—24 hours
◊   Guidance in preparing papers—16 hours
◊   Computer applications in the library—16 hours

The students were required to write papers for each course, and take exams at its conclusion.

In addition, there were three days of library tours and two days of workshops. One workshop was devoted to creating accessories such as signs, bulletin boards, display cases, and other things that enhance a library's appearance; as already noted, the other workshop dealt with The Library and the Community.

In total, the program consisted of 270 hours (plus the tours and work-shops). The students who were not working in libraries had to put in 50 hours of practical work in a library chosen by the course's professional manager.

All of the teachers in the various courses were experienced both as librarians and teachers in specific fields. Most of them were teaching in other professional library education programs, as well. Most teachers were not Ḥaredim, and some were not even religious.

The program began on April 16, 2001, and ended on July 1, 2002. For the time being the program has not been repeated. The students displayed great interest—and even enthusiasm—in the program and the profession. Those who were already working in libraries (eleven women), gained professional tools for their work. All of the students thought it was worthwhile, even though they had to devote a great deal of effort in order to fulfill the program's requirements. All of them expressed the wish for continuing education. They felt that they obtained only the most basic qualifications for this profession, and that there was much more that they needed to learn in order to become fully professional.

THE STUDENTS

To publicize the program, an advertisement was placed in a number of Ḥaredi newspapers. Those who applied, after inquiring about the program's specifics, were interviewed by the course's administrator and by me. The minimal requirement for participation in the program was completion of high school. After interviewing the applicants, twenty-nine women were accepted. Twenty-seven were married women with large families; six were teachers; eleven were working in the newly established libraries and also in other libraries, mainly within educational institutions. The others were housewives or were employed in part-time work. Most participants were living in Jerusalem, with five students coming from out of town.

Twenty students completed the program, while others participated only partially or withdrew before it ended. Fourteen of the twenty students were working in libraries by the time they finished the course.

All of the students showed great interest in the subjects taught in the different courses, and some expressed enthusiasm. All felt that this program was only a start, and its continuation would enable them to do better work and accomplish more.

THE LIBRARIES

It is important to state that the libraries in and of themselves—as well as the professional education program—are pioneering activities among this kind of population. Ḥaredim are able to borrow books through something called a "book *gemach*" (a lending library), usually situated in a private apartment. The books—mostly Hebrew or English fiction—are donated by private individuals.

The main activity of these places is to loan books free of charge. But these are not libraries.

The libraries that were established by the municipality are public libraries. Some are located in schools and serve also as school libraries. Two are located in community centers. In these libraries books are purchased regularly, according to a collection development policy. All of the books and journals are purchased through the municipality. People can come and read in the library, the libraries are equipped with computers and a collection-management system.

The libraries' holdings are small—as noted, between 2,000 and 3,000 books in each library. Some libraries have small reference collections. All books are "authorized" by rabbis or headmasters (in cases where they are housed in school libraries). Each library subscribes to five journals: *ha-Modi'a; Yated ne'e-man* (both daily newspapers), *'Olam ha-ḥasidut* (a magazine), and the children's papers *Zeraḳor* and *'Itonli.*

Most of the readers are youngsters between the ages eleven and eighteen. But there are also adults, mostly women.

All of the libraries have read-aloud programs for young children. The libraries are managed locally by librarians, graduates of our program. There is a supervisor for the libraries, whose office is located in the Jerusalem Municipality, and there are in-service training programs initiated by the supervisor.

Each library has a computer, which is equipped with a collection-management system, but it is intended for use by the librarian only. The readers are unable to use the catalog, as each library is very small and there is no space for additional work stations. (This might change over time.) There are no Internet connections in these libraries.

These small libraries are crowded with readers. Some libraries lend 150 and 200 items each day, and the largest library, with about 3,000 titles, lends 250 books daily. (These figures are for June 2004, a month when there were no holidays.) In order to grasp the meaning of these numbers I requested some data from the Department of Libraries in the Ministry of Education and Culture. The Department carried out a survey among 232 public libraries in Israel. Main libraries and branches in urban areas reported that an average of 1,826 books were lent per month. In the Ḥaredi libraries the average number of books lent was between 3,000 and 5,000 per month! This demonstrates just how much these libraries are used.

As we librarians know, the thirst for knowledge cannot be stopped. I am sure that these small libraries will develop into large and important institutions. The professional education program, which for the present is not being continued, has planted the seeds for future development.

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