

# Professor starts a new program to help close the gaps in the schools of Israel



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Israel

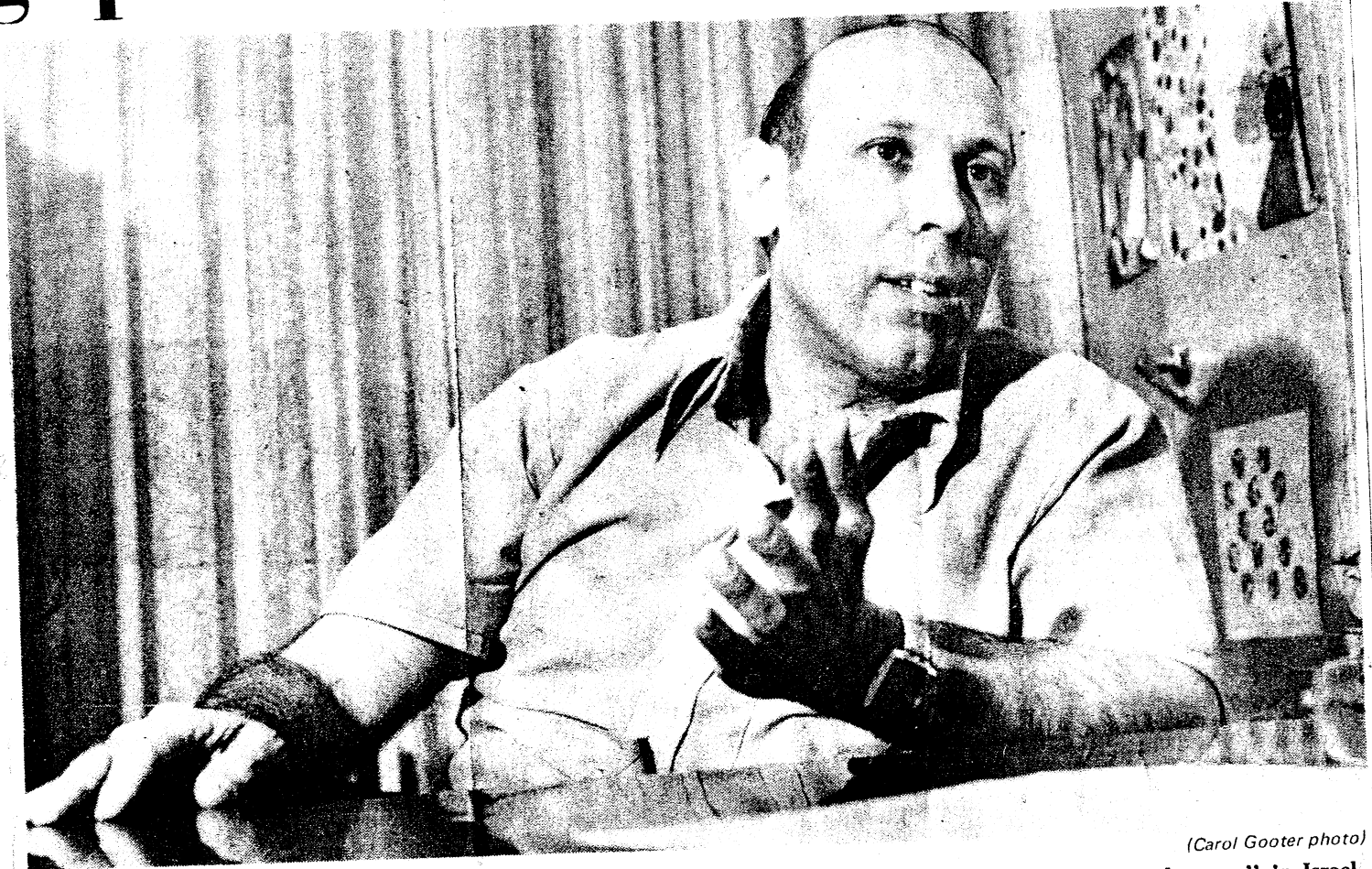
By MARCIA KRETZMER

## JERUSALEM —

Three separate committees are busily dissecting over five years' experience of the "reforma" — the controversial program intended to close the educational gap in Israel, through socially integrated schooling, and a specially designed curriculum.

Early results of the committees' review show that the "reforma" can point to success on the social level: pupils from disadvantaged homes are benefitting from contact with their peers from relatively well-established families. But the much-hoped for improvement in educational attainment among disadvantaged pupils has so far failed to materialize: grades and examination results still lag behind those of their more privileged classmates.

The CJA talked to Dr. Eliezer Jaffe of the Hebrew University School of Social Work about the "reforma" and other aspects of the social gap in Israel. Dr. Jaffe came to Israel from Cleveland, Ohio 20 years ago. He lives in Jerusalem with his social worker wife and their four children. Unfailingly courteous and quiet-spoken, Dr. Jaffe's mild-mannered demeanor does not prevent his making trenchant attacks on outmoded social service programs, nor being an out-



(Carol Gooter photo)

American-born Dr. Eliezer Jaffe of the Hebrew University School of Social Work. He talks about "closing the gaps" in Israel.

spoken champion of grassroots initiative in project planning.

He formerly headed the Jerusalem municipality's welfare department, was a member of the Prime Minister's Committee on Disadvantaged Youth, and a co-founder of ZAHAVI, the Association for the Advancement of Large Families in Israel.

**Jaffe:** We are bound to continue the "reforma" — and not only because so much has been invested in it. We know there has been no educational damage to pupils from privileged homes, and it's helping to break down the ghetto walls. In the U.S. the goal is equal education. The Israeli goal is two-fold: social and educational. The social goal is real, not a by-product of the educational goal.

**CJN:** Are the ghetto walls being broken down only within the school?

**Jaffe:** So far there is little information on the social carry-over of integrated schooling in after-school hours or on Shabbat.

**CJN:** Then are social policy planners correct in seeing the school as a major arena for closing the social and communal gap in Israel?

**Jaffe:** Closing the social gap is a war, and in a war you don't fight on only one front.

Education is a major front. The army used to be considered another, but this is easier said than done. The military machine can throw young people together, but integration doesn't just "happen" in the army, any more than it happens outside. And as for using army personnel for social work — to send women soldiers into development towns is all very nice, but it's sending the least trained girls to grapple with the most problematic populations.

**CJN:** What do you think of former chief-of-staff Mordechai Gur's recent statement that few people of Oriental background are found in the army's upper echelons due to features of their mentality?

**Jaffe:** What was the big surprise? Everybody knows this. It would be healthier to bring our expectations of what the army can do socially within the realm of reality. The only worrying aspect of his statement was the use of the term "mentality," which suggests a dangerous tendency to stereotyped thinking.

**CJN:** If problems which can't be handled in the schools and army lie in the home, doesn't this have a lot to do with low-income families living in overcrowded, inadequate housing?

**Jaffe:** Begin, in his approach to Diaspora communities, was quite correct: housing is a very major issue. The premier's plan is to rehabilitate 45,000 families in 160 neighborhoods, over five years, at a cost of \$1¼ billion. But I am worried. The idea has not been followed up with the proper aggres-

siveness, in terms of concept implementation. For a start, the time-table is wrong — I don't think it can be done in five years. Then I am afraid the physical planners will focus on buildings and neglect community strength. The "software" is being neglected because you can't put a plaque on software.

Third, can the sums be raised? The two-thirds of the money to be raised abroad is over and above the regular campaigns of the UJA and Keren Hayesod. The uncertainties are dangerous for the leadership here and abroad. The housing project could be one of the greatest achievements of the last 30 years — or it could be one of the greatest fiascos.

**CJN:** What would make it a fiasco?

**Jaffe:** The renovated buildings turning into new slums through lack of co-ordination between authorities, neglecting to involve local residents in planning, improper land-use, with profits going to speculators, or leakage of the money out of the pot through extravagance.

**CJN:** Let's move from substandard housing to some of the people who inhabit it. You are a founder of ZAHAVI, the association which grapples with the difficulties faced by large families. How did ZAHAVI get started, and how do you see its role?

**Jaffe:** The other founder, Avraham Danino, came up with the idea. He's of Moroccan birth, a Haifa inspector in the education

ministry, also involved in services for disadvantaged youth. He was dissatisfied with party political efforts in the field, and realized they did not have grassroots interests at heart — especially not those of large families.

We founded ZAHAVI — the name stands for "the rights of families blessed with many children" (it also means "my gold") — and the idea spread like wildfire. We now have 8,000 registered members. The basic philosophic commitment behind ZAHAVI is that people opting for large families should be able to do so without stigma, and should have the same rights as others.

**CJN:** But is this option unconditional, in your view? Conventional family planning wisdom says parents should be able to support the children they bring into the world.