

**MELTON  
RESEARCH  
CENTER**  
for Jewish Education

Feb. 14, 1985

Rabbi Nancy Fuchs-Kreimer  
RRC  
Wyncote, PA 19095

Dear Nancy,

I've been thinking about the May session with the poets and want to throw out a few thoughts for you and your committee to consider.

As an education person I often have to try to think out sessions and meetings (such as the poet's conference) and I wonder about the way it seems to be shaping up. I think the idea of us six scholars teaching the poets has a lot of merit as an idea, but what will it really be like in the flesh. The following issues and questions come to mind:

--what is the goal of the conference? Is it to show these folks how great Judaism is? That Jewish texts can be used in poems? that they should be writing such poems? IN other words, what are the poets supposed to get out of this?

--Isn't it a very passive model? It seems like basically we're there to shtup these guys with Jewish texts for three days. But I'm not so sure that that is a healthy kind of set up. It tends to infantilize people and make them annoyed to be only on the receiving end and feeling like the village fool (remember Ulpan??).

--What about the situation of the scholar who is simultaneously teaching people who don't know much (the poets) while his/her peers are also sitting around (being bored?). Should these talks be basic intros to these texts? And if not, what?

I would like your group to consider-- to use the curriculum jargon--simulating amongst yourselves what this would really look like in the light of these kinds of issues. Maybe, for instance, the poets should be asked to present something to us. Maybe they should be given a Jewish text and show us what they get out of it. This is a very fancy group of poets, serious people with a lot to say. I'm afraid that the current format is both unclear (it feels like you're saying: let's put these 12-14 people in a room and see what happens) and not as productive as it might be. The scholars also should get some guidance about what you have in mind. Ideally, your grant should pay for the scholars to come down and talk with you ~~before~~ before this thing.

Don't get me wrong: I don't mean to be critical. I really am trying to be helpful, but I'm concerned that this wonderful opportunity may end up very disappointing. From my own experience I know that often we put a lot of time into all the nuances of who should be invited and how should it be paid for, etc. and we assume that the actual program will be a hit "naturally." It explains why 75% of the "good idea" conferences I go to end up disappointing.

I'm urging you to think this through, think about what is supposed to really happen, and also to give some guidance to the participants.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Barry".

Barry Holtz