

EDUCATIONAL VISION—

*“Education
is not preparation
for life;
education
is life itself.”*

—John Dewey

WHY JEWISH EDUCATION

Jewish education presents an opportunity unlike any other in today’s fast paced world. Jewish education is the opportunity for Jews to discover, develop and define their unique and important voice; not only among the multitude of voices transmitted from generation to generation, but as viable contributors toward the ultimate endeavor: the upward march of humanity. My vision for Jewish education is that each individual Jew finds their own voice among this conversation, stake a claim in this unbroken chain, and find a fulfilling path through life that is shaped and guided by a Torah of their understanding. It is my role as educator to facilitate deep, meaningful learning whereby education is a means of self discovery.

EDUCATION BEGINS WITH CURIOSITY...

Humanity’s intrinsic curiosity provides a platform upon which educators must scaffold experiences, skills, perspectives and passion. John Dewey once poignantly wrote that, “Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself.” In this way, education is the garden that encourages the sprouting seeds of curiosity as a means of personal self-discovery and growth. In this growth centered philosophy, Jewish Education must be developmentally appropriate and foster social, emotional, cognitive and spiritual flourishing. As learners grow, their uniqueness begins to manifest and it is our privilege as educators to serve as their guide to inspire them to wrestle, just as our ancestors have done for millennia. What we teach and how we teach it must be steeped in the idea that learners must be able to see themselves in the content; they must be able to connect their story to the lessons and the lessons to their story, because it is their story.

HUMAN CENTERED DESIGN...

In order to be successful in the endeavor of Human Centered Design, it is imperative that educators understand the critical role that relationships play in a successful learning environment by embracing trust as a hallmark of education. Deborah Meier astutely points out that families who choose to attend school, namely Jewish supplementary school, have an inherent trust in its efficacy. However this choice-based trust is flimsy and all but unfounded. It is upon the educator to establish and maintain a sense of trust and dependability for our students, such that they might understand that we are deeply invested in their success. To facilitate this relationship and to ensure that the curriculum is relevant and authentic, we must invest in the philosophy of Human Centered Design. By designing our learning around the needs, pain, concerns of our students, we are able to

“The student is infinitely more important than the subject matter.”

—Nel Noddings

quickly and effectively display an imperative level of care that continues to be more and more important with each passing day.

PROJECT BASED LEARNING...

As stated previously, education is life; there is no distinction! In this way, education should be a reflection of the skills and processes necessary to succeed in life. This standard of education is especially true in Jewish Education where the goal is not necessarily to memorize facts and information, but to foster the skills necessary to live a life of meaning and to immerse ourselves in the work of repairing the world. With this in mind, Project Based Learning allows students to engage in the process of solving real problems. A curriculum must represent the curated an environment in which, “the student is infinitely more important than the subject matter.” Students thrive in an environment designed to prioritize their intrinsic motivations and worth over preset content.

JEWISH CAPITAL...

My personal mission for Jewish education is to alleviate what I call “the museum effect.” The museum effect takes two noteworthy forms: speaking of the Jewish people in the third person (i.e. “Jews pray three times a day”) and similarly, or perhaps the cause of the former, a lack of alignment between what is “taught” at religious school and what is “practiced” in the home. I do not propose by any means that all Reform Jewish families start observing Shabbat according to halacha, but it is time we as Jews begin to find ourselves in our tradition. It is my job as educator to guide this process. According to Alex Pomson and Randall F. Schnoor in their book “Jewish Family: Identity and Self-Formation at Home,” the formation of one’s identity is intrinsically tied to family networks as a significant source of cultural capital. The experience of being around other Jews in Jewish settings is instrumental in the development of Jewish knowledge, fluency and competency. It is the responsibility of the school to guide families through this process, providing programming and ideas to make Judaism both accessible, unburden-some and genuinely authentic.