



Jewish Educators will be on the Frontlines of the Recovery

By David Bryfman

The Jewish community, like most of the world, still does not yet know when the current crisis will end. We can, however, begin to think about parts of our life that will be different after this period than they were before. For Jewish education specifically, thinking ahead is critical; it will fall to Jewish communal and educational organizations to bring the Jewish community back to life, and to revitalize it so that it can emerge even stronger.

We accept that our world will look different in a post COVID-19 era; there will be mourning for what's lost, but new things built as well. So, I am starting to imagine a better future.

1. Relationships will matter (even more than before)

Like many forms of education, Jewish education has long been seen as the transmission of knowledge from one generation to the next. This period of isolation confirmed what almost every educator already knew: our youth can access knowledge whenever they want—often far more efficiently than many of their adult teachers. But what our learners crave, and what they need, are human beings that matter in their lives. It is logical that educators who care for their students are the ones most likely to connect with them, motivate, and inspire them. Based on a foundation of trust and respect, these educators can most effectively and positively transmit Jewish tradition.

2. Parents (and grandparents) will be stronger partners

We've all heard about parents who outsource their child's Jewish education to school or camp. But now we're hearing about families who are partners in these learning experiences. There is no reason why this shouldn't be the new norm even once this crisis passes. Families that support and participate in their child's education—secular and Jewish—show their children that education should be treated as a priority. For

educators, the message is clear: treat these adults as partners; if the educational offering is valuable for their children, it will become valuable for the entire family.

3. Technology must be embraced

If there were any doubters, the last few weeks have shown that technology is a powerful tool that can be harnessed for a greater purpose. It is not the only tool at our disposal, nor is it the solution in and of itself. But technology is a remarkably effective and efficient asset that can help our community achieve educational goals. Most importantly, technology is both a native, intuitive platform for our children. Ignoring technology, or implying that it is only a distraction, is to dismiss an essential vehicle through which our children develop relationships, engage in learning, and find meaning in life.

4. Classroom time should be maximized

For everything that we have seen made possible by technology, we also see its limitations. After COVID-19, online social and learning experiences will continue to be powerful tools. But we've gained clarity around those experiences and moments of learning that are best, achieved in person. Wherever the classroom is, educators will never again take this face-to-face time for granted. Instead, we will be able to design in-person learning experiences in intentional ways, enabling learners to gain deeper insights and thrive.

5. Jewish educators need to be valued

Our health workers and essential workers are indeed heroes of our time. But when we emerge from this crisis, Jewish educators across the country will be tasked with rebuilding much of Jewish communal life. The relationships and the connections they are maintaining with their students today will be the foundation of that growth tomorrow. How the Jewish world treats educators on the other side will be a real indication of our collective commitment to reinvigorating the community. Jewish educators, many of whom are now being furloughed or laid off, will need to be reemployed, paid more, valued more—and that is only the beginning of a new approach to supporting the infrastructure and people that enable Jewish education. Empowering a new generation of Jewish educators will become a communal priority as we strive to build generations of Jewish youth who are more resilient, committed, and proud than ever.

6. Humility must be shown

When people's immediate health and security is at stake, Jewish education takes a back seat. As we begin to see the light at the end of the tunnel, Jewish educators can begin to shine again, with a greater appreciation that we are not the only influence in

the child's life. Rather, educators operate in a large ecosystem of influencers, both human and other, in a child's life. Now is the time for Jewish educators to place the learner first. Seldom will one setting be able to provide all the needs for an individual – recognizing when one educator should step forward and when one should step back will become a focus for many Jewish educators.

7. Jewish education needs to be more accessible

Jewish education is too expensive and remains inaccessible to too many Jews. The future of Jewish education will be shaped by those who have the ability to change this.. This is not just a matter of financial investment but of strategic partnerships between funders and practitioners. The community cannot afford to lose a generation of young Jews because of political and financial partisanship.

As a result of COVID-19, the Jewish education of tomorrow cannot, and should not, look like the Jewish education of yesterday. As we emerge from this pandemic, Jewish educators must be part of the creative and visionary imagination that will revitalize the Jewish people. We are adapting now, and will continue to adapt to be even stronger in the future.

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