



Today, Tomorrow, and the Space in Between

By David Bryfman

Last week, as we brought in *Shabbat* together, our 50 staff joined on a zoom call and listed in the chat box all of the things that we are losing as a result of this pandemic. After 30 seconds of what seemed like endless “silence,” the chat box began to fill. Five minutes later, the list continued to scroll. And as it scrolled people wept and many held back tears. The loss of hugs. The loss of the known and predictable. The loss and mourning of friends and loved ones. The loss of being able to serve our educators. In both a professional and personal sense, the loss expressed by all was very raw and very real.

For us, naming our losses was a turning point. We acknowledged that from that day forward, we will be dedicated to both serving those in need right now *and* building for those people in the future.

The tension of ensuring the *survival* of a Jewish nonprofit and ensuring that it is well positioned to thrive on the *other side* of this pandemic is very real. The needs to survive now – rapidly shifting programs to remote platforms, creating resources uniquely designed for these platforms, sometimes making difficult budget decisions, and more – are not necessarily the same needs, exclusively, that will lead to a thriving organization in the future.

Thus, the pressure to excel at this unique moment while thinking and planning for the future is heavy. With limited resources available, organizations are clamoring to define their vital functions of today, sharing their success as they pursue this work, while simultaneously promote their value proposition for the future.

There is a tension within organizations who are simultaneously focusing on the urgency of today and the reimagining of tomorrow. But for us, we needed to focus, even for just a moment on that “in between time.” What defines that liminal space is an agency/organization transitioning from thinking about preservation and survival to employing thinking infused with creativity and with planning for the future. Of course, both mindsets might continue simultaneously for an extended period. But to hold both mindsets together *effectively*, one must acknowledge these different ways of thinking

and the different dispositions – patience vs. urgency, as just one example – that are required in each space.

There are important ways to mark each of these stages, to help people place themselves and understand the context in which they are working. Last Friday afternoon, at our *Kabbalat Shabbat*, we welcomed and received the *Shabbat*, by creating a space to let go of some of our pain and loss. In doing so, we intentionally marked our transitional moment from an agency on the front lines of resourcing challenged Jewish educators who needed every support and resource available to them, to an agency committed to re-imagining the future of Jewish education.

For our staff and our agency, it was a necessary moment in time, to mark the loss and to weep and mourn together. Only now do I believe that we are truly set to build a brighter future together.

Dr. David Bryfman is CEO of The Jewish Education Project, which has provided over 70 webinars since the pandemic began while also conducting think tanks and creative processes to imagine the future of Jewish education. Join David and a different guest each Wednesday at 2:00 ET for a live broadcast, [Adapting: The Future of Jewish Education](#).

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