

# MTEI Principles of Professional Development in Jewish Settings

(DRAFT, March 15, 2016)

At MTEI, we have a shared vision of teaching and learning for students, teachers, and professional developers. This vision includes a set of practices and dispositions we hope all teachers will have at their disposal, which they can draw upon and vary depending on context, students, and subject matter. This vision guides the design of our professional development offerings, and fostering this vision is one of the key goals of our professional development work. We articulate this shared vision with the following interrelated principles:

1. **Jewish education should be centered on big Jewish ideas and texts, including the idea of learning Torah, very broadly construed.** We consider Jewish learning to be an essential component of Jewish education and a value we hope will be held dear by teachers, learners, and their communities. We value Jewish literacy, broadly conceived, and the exploration of central themes and concepts of Judaism and Jewish history.
2. **We see four crucial interrelated elements in all learning situations: teacher, learner, and content, in a context.** These four elements and the connections between them are fruitful objects of collaborative inquiry. While all four of these elements are inextricably and dynamically linked, we focus on the four with an explicit intention to support MTEI participants in bringing more depth of learning of Jewish content in their settings.
3. **Learning is rooted in inquiry.** Inquiry is at the core of studying texts, investigating teaching practices, learning about learning, and learning from each other in community. What it looks like to adopt and foster an “inquiry stance,” is core to our work.
4. **Our vision of professional development focuses not on individual inquiry, but on collaborative inquiry,** because we believe that collaboration with peers and colleagues strengthens learning, builds community, adds meaning and purpose, and improves practice. Learning together has a variety of strengths that individual learning does not have. We take our place in the lineage of Jewish learning across time, which values a moral and practical commitment to our colleagues’ learning, through practices such as supporting and challenging each others’ ideas with sensitivity and intellectual honesty.
5. **Creating a culture or community of collaborative inquiry is on-going, intentional work that supports and is supported by the environment we create.** To “create a culture,” we consciously set up conditions aimed at helping participants feel comfortable taking risks and being vulnerable. The environment that supports the

work of learning, and doing the work of learning together also supports the creation of the environment. Building a professional and relational collaborative learning community is both *how* we do our work and is an *outcome* of our work.

6. **Our vision of a Jewish learning community, a relational/professional learning community, and a democratic learning community all include placing a high value on inclusion of multiple perspectives and interpretations.** Much of our work together, thus, invites us to foster a stance of curiosity and to explore multiple perspectives and various possible interpretations of the object of our inquiry, whether it is a traditional text or a “text” of teaching practice.
7. **How we talk together is crucial to our learning experiences and our relationships.** Normal discourse patterns often impede learning. Some of these habits include speaking more than listening or listening without speaking; leaping to judgment of a person or of the meaning of a text or practice; or falling into predictable power dynamics (e.g. some people are seen as having the “right” answers). Actively developing and practicing skills of deep listening, encouraging everyone to find his/her voice, and honoring multiple perspectives strengthens trust, creates a culture of productive challenge, and promotes learning.
8. **When these principles are enacted, teachers learn and learners teach.** For the MTEI faculty, part of the value of teaching at MTEI has been our own sense of growth through planning and teaching together. In other words, we learn as we teach. And because we all, faculty and participants, share our perspectives and interpretations with each other, we all teach as we learn. We celebrate this blending of teaching and learning, teacher and learner. This blending is part of what we mean by “professional relational learning community.”
9. **There is moral meaning in the work we do.** We believe that Jewish education is ultimately about creating a more just, equitable way of being in the world (among many other things). We try to model that in the work we do and to support Jewish education to contribute to justice in the world more broadly.