



## Mandel Teacher Educator Institute

To Learn and To Teach | ללמוד וללמד

### MTEI's Principles of Professional Development in Jewish Settings

(Revised, November 2016)

These principles, taken together, articulate our vision of teaching and learning for students, teachers, and professional developers. 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.

- 1. Jewish subject matter knowledge at the core. Deepening Jewish subject matter knowledge is at the core of professional development. We consider Jewish learning,** in particular text study, to be an essential component of Jewish education and teachers, learners, and their communities will hold a value we hope dear. We value Jewish literacy, broadly conceived, and the exploration of central themes and concepts of Judaism and Jewish history. To teach, teachers need this literacy themselves and also the ability to translate and make it relevant for students' learning.
- 2. Learning rooted in collaborative 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, and it includes, among other things, an open-minded search for evidence upon which to build ideas and interpretations. 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.
- 3. Intentional creation of a culture of inquiry.** Creating a culture or community of collaborative inquiry is on-going, intentional work that supports and is supported by the relational environment we create. To "create a culture," we consciously set up structures aimed at helping participants have time to learn together, feel comfortable taking risks, being vulnerable, and developing trusting relationships. 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.

4. **Valuing multiple perspectives and interpretations.** Our vision of a Jewish professional, relational learning community includes placing a high value on the inclusion of multiple perspectives and interpretations and marshaling evidence to support our views. Much of our work together invites us to foster a stance of curiosity, to explore multiple perspectives, to look for evidence, and to consider various possible interpretations of the object of our inquiry, whether it is a traditional text or a “text” of teaching practice.
5. **How we talk together is crucial.** 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.
6. **Teacher, learner, and content, in a context.** These four interrelated elements exist in all learning situations, 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* into their settings. One of the crucial aspects of “context” in the realm of professional development is that schools need structures for teachers to continue learning through their work with children and through opportunities to learn with their colleagues and community.
7. **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.”
8. **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.

MTEI participants encounter and enact these principles in readings, presentations by MTEI faculty and most importantly, in their first hand experiences in the program. They also explore and experiment with them in their own professional work between seminars.

## **MTEI's Goals**

Goal 1: Participants will develop a repertoire of professional development principles and practices that enable them to engage teachers in the study and improvement of their teaching.

Goal 2: Participants will gain Jewish content knowledge that enriches them as Jewish citizens and professional development leaders.

Goal 3: Participants will work toward building a culture of collaboration and inquiry among teachers and other stakeholders in their institution.

Goal 4: Participants will come to see themselves as knowledgeable and skillful leaders in Jewish education who are part of a like-minded network of Jewish professionals.