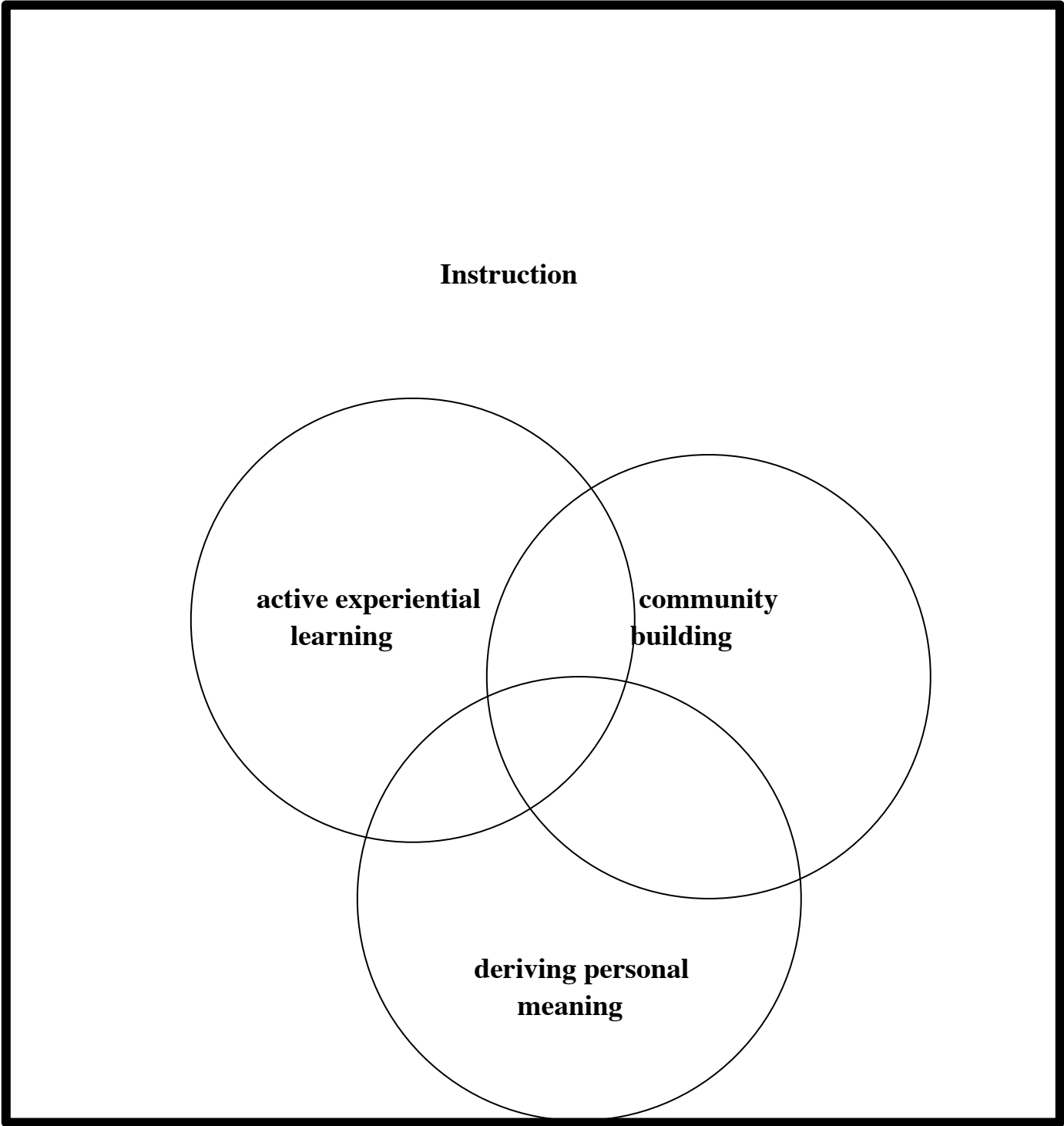


Enculturation



Experiment in Congregational Education —
A Project of the Rhea Hirsch School of Education, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Los Angeles
The work of the ECE is made possible by gifts from The Nathan Cummings Foundation and the Koret Foundation.

Educational Concepts

Enculturation

Excerpts from John Westerhoff's *Will Our Children Have Faith?*

While admitting that learning takes place in many ways, church education has functionally equated the context of education with schooling and the means of education with formal instruction. The public schools have provided us with our model of education and insights from secular pedagogy and psychology have been our guides. ... this must change. (p.7)

We need a new way of thinking about educational method, a way that emphasizes what we know, what we are and what do. ... Shared experience, story telling, celebration, action and reflection between and among equal “faithing” selves within a community of faith best help us understand how faith is transmitted, expanded and sustained. And so I contend that understanding the process of interaction in community between “faithing” selves—what I have called enculturation—is the best way to understand educational method in a faith community. (pp. 86-7)

When we make enculturation the means of Christian education ...we consider the sorts of experiences and interactions, between and among persons within a community of faith, which encourage and support the expansion of faith. (p.99)

From Isa Aron, “The Malaise of Jewish Education”

To equate education with instruction is to assume that knowledge, skills, and even attitudes and practices are objects that can be handed down from one person to another. It is to assume, further, that these objects can be collected, codified, segmented, and packaged in textbooks and other learning materials. The school, according to this view, is a “delivery system” in which teachers, administrators, and a variety of specialists work together to transmit these objects to their students as efficiently as possible.

An alternative paradigm has been suggested by John Westerhoff, in his book, *Will Our Children Have Faith?*—the paradigm of “enculturation.” This paradigm takes as its model the situation of a young child, or a visitor to a foreign country, as he or she absorbs a new language, new customs and values, and large amounts of information. The newcomer’s learning is not planned or measured; there is no “proper” order by which to learn, and no way of segmenting into portions the knowledge he or she acquires. Learning in such a situation is both more holistic and more serendipitous; it is also more enduring.

Successful instruction is usually founded on a base of successful enculturation, which provides the student with both the motivation to learn and opportunities to consolidate that learning.

Enculturation must be the priority of the supplementary school for the simple reason that it is a prerequisite for valuing and retaining the contents of instruction. Instruction and enculturation are not incompatible goals; in the best of all worlds one would have time to pursue both. But given time constraints, a supplementary school may have to give one educational approach priority over the other. In making this choice, supplementary schools must never lose sight of the fact that instruction without enculturation is hollow and superficial.

From Isa Aron, “From the Congregational School to the Learning Congregation”

Some years ago (Aron 1989) I contrasted the paradigm of "instruction," as practiced in the public schools, with that of "enculturation," a term borrowed from the Christian educator John Westerhoff (1976). I argued then that the instructional paradigm is successful if and only if it is buttressed by a variety of external motivations: laws which compel children to attend; societal expectations that schooling correlates positively with one's earning potential; and competition for college entrance. Lacking these sources of motivation, the Jewish school has suffered from the comparison with public school; Judaic studies, even in day schools, continue to be seen as less important than general studies. I suggested that rather than adhering to the instructional model, the congregational school ought to conceive of its educational task in different terms -- as one of enculturation. In so doing it could offer its students something that instruction alone cannot, a loving induction into the Jewish culture and the Jewish community.

In the ensuing years I have begun to see the issue in terms that are broader and more radical, concerning the totality of congregational education, as opposed to the congregational school as a self-contained entity.¹ What would it look like if education was seen as the concern of the entire congregation, rather than being relegated to its school(s)? Who would be the learner? Who the teacher? In what settings and through what modalities might synagogue members learn about being Jewish? These questions cannot be answered by an outsider looking in, or by a theoretician or philosopher looking down. Each and every congregation must answer them for itself; these answers would best be arrived at through a series of conversations, among congregants themselves and between congregants and professionals.

¹ I am indebted to Sara Lee for this formulation.

Active Experiential Learning

***From Good Ideas to Foment Educational Revolution: The Role of Systemic Change in Advancing Situated Learning, Constructivism and Feminist Pedagogy* by Carr, Jonassen, Litzinger and Marra**

Knowledge is a product of activity, not a process of acquisition. Knowledge is not, as traditional conceptions of learning assume, a set of mental abstractions that can be acquired and then applied to practice. Rather, meaning results from cognitive and social activity that is intended to fulfill a purpose (e.g. solve a problem, design something, improve personal performance). Meaning accrues from authentic activity that is constructing and using knowledge to fulfill some purpose. Perhaps the easiest way to distinguish between situated and traditional conceptions of learning is that situated learning holds that activity and perception precede conceptualization, whereas tradition requires conceptualization before activity.

Community Building

From Jonathan Woocher, “Toward a ‘Unified Field Theory’ of Jewish Continuity”

For education to be maximally effective, there must be a living Jewish community in which what is being taught and learned is already visible and valuable. (p.32)

The key question from the standpoint of Jewish continuity is whether nontraditional Jews can be brought to see that their personal stories are connected to traditional and historical Jewish narratives (“master stories”) and to a living community that tells and enacts these stories and then made to view these narratives as norm-giving. For this to occur, three things must happen: First, Jews must be encouraged to become storytellers and to share the narratives of their lives with other Jews. Second, Jews must have the opportunity to hear and grapple with the master stories, not as dicta to which they must conform but as templates that they can use to give their personal stories increased scope and resonance. ...Third, the Jewish community must struggle with how to enact its master stories—how to realize and call attention to the behavioral implications implicit in them. (p.27)

Deriving Personal Meaning

From Franz Rosenzweig, *On Jewish Learning*, p.98

"Learning" -- the old form of maintaining the relationship between life and the Book -- has failed. A new "learning" is about to be born -- rather, it has been born.

It is a learning in reverse order. A learning that no longer starts from the Torah and leads into life, but the other way round: from life, from a world that knows nothing of the Law, or pretends to know nothing, back to the Torah. That is the sign of the time.

It is the sign of the time because it is the mark of the men of the time. There is no one today who is not alienated. All of us to whom Judaism, to whom being a Jew, has again become the pivot of our lives -- and I know that in saying this here I am not speaking for myself alone -- we all know that in being Jews we must not give up anything, not renounce anything, but lead everything back to Judaism. From the periphery back to the center; from the outside in.

From Mordecai Kaplan, *The Future of the American Jew*, p. 468

Our main concern in popularizing adult Jewish study should be to make it relevant and vital to present realities. ... Some of us may be so conditioned as to find delight in learning anything that has to do with Jewish life, past or present, near or remote. ... But if we expect [most Jews] to devote some time each week to studies that have to do with ... Jewish living and thinking, they must be convinced that those studies will help them make the most out of their lives as human beings. ... [Adult Jewish study] must, above all, get as many of the Jewish laity as possible to cope personally with the problem of Jewish survival and growth, for only then will that problem receive a satisfactory solution.

Burton Visotzky, *Reading the Book*, p.240

[I]t is a two-way process. We bring our insights to illuminate the Bible and the more we do so, the more the text of Scripture illuminates our lives. The pleasures and insights of reading in community not only give each individual profit from that encounter but offer the gift of community as a necessary concomitant. In laughter and in amazement we discover that most precious hidden aspect of the biblical text—ourselves.

Joel Grishaver, *Learning Torah*, p.11

The heart of Torah learning is a kind of special dialogue. The text is read slowly, word by word. As we read, questions emerge. We struggle to solve these questions. Along the way, other voices, other Jews who have looked at these words before, join the discussion with their commentaries. They point out problems, they share their personal solutions. The conversation continues. Between students, between teachers and students, the perceptions differ, the inferred meanings conflict, and the quest continues. In the end, the learner is left staring in his/her own text, the voices and insights of many others are heard, but for each learner the passage has yielded a personal understanding. Jewish text study is a wondrous combination of learning from others and finding out about yourself.

Experiment in Congregational Education —

A Project of the Rhea Hirsch School of Education, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Los Angeles

The work of the ECE is made possible by gifts from The Nathan Cummings Foundation and the Koret Foundation.

The Design Process

Managing Two Streams of Innovation

Over the next nine months you will be managing *two* streams of innovation-

The Pilot Stream- managed by a Pilot subteam. Their work to be implemented in 2004-05

The pilot sub team is “testing out questions” that arose when planning your larger initiative (i.e. methods of learning, times that will work, identifying the learners). Feedback from this testing will be given to the Initiative Stream to shape their work.

The pilot sub team is generating buy in and interest in a new kind/structure of learning. Stakeholders experiencing the pilot will say, “this is good/worthwhile/meaningful...I want more...I open to more.”

The Initiative Stream-managed by Initiative subteam. Their work to be implemented 2005-6.

The initiative sub team is planning the larger “new model,” that will be offered in Fall 2005. They are thinking of marketing, training, budget, resources etc.

Fluidity Between Sub Teams

The subteams must be able to communicate with each other. What is the Pilot subteam learning that will inform the work of the Initiative subteam? What does the Initiative subteam need the Pilot subteam to be testing out for them?

Sample Project Time Line and Interactions

Experiment in Congregational Education —

A Project of the Rhea Hirsch School of Education, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Los Angeles

The work of the ECE is made possible by gifts from The Nathan Cummings Foundation and the Koret Foundation.

Note: Each congregation’s timeline will vary. This is an example to show the interaction among the three groups.

	October	November	December	January	February	March and Beyond
Task Force (TF)	Vision written Identify Shape of “new model” Identify-questions for “testing out”	Vision shared with Stakeholders-interactively (e.g. Memorable Jewish Learning exercise)	Identify ways to permeate congregation with Vision, Symbols, Stories, Communication Select One proposal for initiative	Identify governance that will continue to oversee pilot and initiative Identify key concepts to carry on: Self Renewing Congregation		Review work of PST and IST
Pilot sub team (PST)	Propose pilot ideas that will test questions and generate interest	Plan to implement pilots: staffing, marketing, recruitment, budget, curriculum, logistics, evaluation		Pilot Evaluate Feedback to TF and IST	Pilot Evaluate Feedback to TF and IST	Pilot Evaluate Feedback to TF and IST
Initiative Sub team (IST)		Meet to formulate three proposals for review by TF/ Governing Body	Move ahead with TF decision-expand subteam to gather congregation’s expertise	Plan and design initiative: Staff, Marketing, Budget, Curriculum, Logistics, Evaluation, enrollment	Work moves ahead, incorporating feedback and generating new questions for TF and PST	Continue

Experiment in Congregational Education —

A Project of the Rhea Hirsch School of Education, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Los Angeles

The work of the ECE is made possible by gifts from The Nathan Cummings Foundation and the Koret Foundation.

Experiment in Congregational Education —

A Project of the Rhea Hirsch School of Education, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Los Angeles

The work of the ECE is made possible by gifts from The Nathan Cummings Foundation and the Koret Foundation.
