



Tiyul – Shabbat B’Yachad, Temple Isaiah

LOS ANGELES, CA

WHO ARE THE LEARNERS? THE TEACHERS?

- Religious school age kids, grades K-6 and their parents
- Recruited four teachers as well as a director
- Teachers bring experience in camp and/or informal models
- All tend to be young, innovative, and able to think outside of the box

Participating families self-select. They care deeply about Judaism and about the Jewish experiences their children can have in connection to the congregation. When asked for input, parents asked that the teachers be able to role model for the children that living a rich Jewish life could also be “cool”. The teachers create lessons plans for each session. None of them teach in the regular religious school program. In the coming year, the model will include seventh grade as well.

WHEN DOES THE MODEL TAKE PLACE?

- Families meet three times a month in and around Shabbat with one week “off”
- One Shabbat morning, one Havdalah session, one Friday night
- Next year they may schedule fewer Friday night sessions and increase the Shabbat morning sessions
- Children in the third grade attend Saturday sessions for an additional half hour in order to be on par with their peers in the traditional model who begin Hebrew study that year.

The congregation tries to strike a balance between solid learning and being part of the larger temple community. Friday night sessions include a Shabbat dinner and then services but little formal learning. Parents of children in third grade and older siblings were able to join Café Israel, an informal opportunity to gather during Saturday Hebrew sessions. Over time, other families joined in just to add to their community experience.

WHERE DOES THE MODEL TAKE PLACE?

- In the synagogue building

The original Tiyul program, for 4-6 grade children and their families, involved learning off-site, but parents felt it was too much “schlepping”. They preferred to be at the congregation.

HOW IS THE LEARNING DESIGNED?

- Each session incorporates both learning and tefilah.
- Children and adults learn in parallel sessions with children divided in approximately three age level groups.
- Worship involves video projection instead of siddurim.
- During Shabbat morning worship, two parents are responsible for holding the etzei chayim during the Torah service while the reader stands in the middle and children gather around to watch.

Learning is organized around a central theme for the year like Torah or Israel. Individual Saturday sessions focus on one element of the larger theme. In the coming year, the smaller themes will be more diverse to create a better developmental fit for the different age groups. Parents felt strongly that they wanted to experience learning at an adult level. They come together with their children during most worship experiences. Parents feel equipped to lead their children in Jewish living once their needs as learners have been met.

WHY IS THE LEARNING DESIGNED THIS WAY?

- To create a rich sense of community. Families want to be part of something bigger.
- To provide opportunities for families to “do” Jewish learning.
- To experience Shabbat as a community.

Parents felt strongly about wanting to explore the connection between Jewish living and their lives as parents. They also wanted a more intimate experience of Judaism in the context of community.

KEY FIRST STEPS TOWARD IMPLEMENTATION

- Families invited to participate in two pilot sessions during the spring

- Rabbi called families directly if he thought it would be a good fit for them
- Interested families invited their friends to join them
- Also utilized traditional methods of promoting a new program (eg. Mailings, bulletin articles, flyers)

Inviting families individually and directly continues to be the most powerful way to bring new families into the model. When the time comes to consider whom to call, the Director of Lifelong Learning turns to the current TSBY families for suggestions.

GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES PROVIDING SUPPORT FOR TSBY

- Lay governance in transition.
- Parents provide valuable feedback to professionals.
- Next year, may formalize lay involvement by asking one parent to be the “chair” of the parents.

The initial model grew out of the congregation’s work with the RE-IMAGINE Project. Once implemented, professionals took the lead. However, professionals maintain an open channel of communication that allows parents to shape the model’s evolving design. Additionally, due to the requirements of being a Legacy Heritage Grant recipient, the congregation convened several focus groups around the alternative model.

BUDGET/RESOURCES

- The congregation initially received a Legacy Heritage Grant to support their work in innovation.
- Initial staffing included one of the clergy as well as the administrative support of his assistant.
- This year, the congregation’s rabbinic intern took on TSBY as her entire portfolio.
- Prep time for teachers costs more than for regular religious school.

Having initially received a Legacy Heritage Grant, the congregation now needs approximately \$15-20,000 to run the program. They are looking to hire someone half-time, with educational and some administrative experience to lead and administer the model going forward.

INTEGRATION OF TSBY FAMILIES AND LARGER CONGREGATIONAL COMMUNITY

- Children in grades 4–6 attend Hebrew classes with their peers mid-week
- TSBY families encouraged to participate in other congregational programming and events
- On Friday nights, TSBY families join the congregation’s regular service

Integration continues to be a challenge. Families with children in the older grades feel it less as their children attend mid-week. In some cases, families have chosen to return to the regular religious school model in order to provide their children with a broader social connection within the larger congregational community.

IMPACT ON LEARNERS, TEACHERS, CONGREGATION

- The ongoing evolution of TSBY represents a commitment on the congregation’s part to supporting a culture of ongoing experimentation and educational innovation.
- TSBY no longer perceived as alternative, but as the paradigm for Jewish education at the congregation.
- A new program created, Kulanu, for parents not involved in TSBY to come once a month to engage in learning that parallels what the kids learn in the traditional religious school. The leadership applied a core element of Shabbat B’Yachad to the rest of the congregation.
- Currently creating a 7th grade track within TSBY. Parents will learn to read Torah, will be baal kriah for the first aliyah at their son or daughter’s bar/bat mitzvah. Ceremonies will take place as part of TSBY Shabbat morning service.

Central to the TSBY experience is a willingness on the part of the congregation’s educational leadership and participants to allow the model to evolve over time. All involved understand that not every element of the model will be successful and that even successful elements may be phased out in future years to make way for new approaches. Ideally this will be the approach taken to learning throughout the congregation well beyond TSBY.