

Engaging Leaders with Powerful Learning

Congregations in the Coalition of Innovating Congregations strive to create Powerful Learning that intentionally builds relationships, is life-relevant, is based in inquiry and meaning-making, and is rich in accessible Jewish content. This kind of learning takes more than good intentions – or even well-trained learning facilitators (i.e. teachers). It takes resources and strong support from leaders who share an understanding of and a vision for Powerful Learning. The steps below will help you use the Coalition’s new Powerful Learning Observation Tool to engage lay and professional leaders in understanding, envisioning, and committing to Powerful Learning in your congregation.

Steps to Engage Leaders

1. Decide Which Group of Leaders to Engage

- Important groups to engage may be an Education Committee, Educational Leadership Team, professional staff team, and/or the synagogue Board of Trustees.
- Set aside or request time with this group for conversation specifically designed to build their understanding of the kind of powerful, 21st century learning that you are trying to foster and support throughout your models and programs of Jewish learning.

2. Tap Into Leaders’ Experiences of Jewish Learning

- Ask members of the group to share with a *hevruta* partner their best, most memorable Jewish learning experience.
- Ask partners to discuss characteristics of those experiences, and then share with the full group.

3. Introduce the Four Design Principles

- Explain each principle in turn. If you have frequent access to this group, you might take one principle at a time and devote a separate session to each. If so, don’t expect every principle to be represented in every experience.
- Ask leaders to identify which of the principles seem to be present in their best, most memorable learning experiences. Ask them to share what they experienced that seemed to represent application of one or more of the design principles.
- Acknowledge that it is not always easy to observe—much less design—learning that implements the design principles. Making every learning experience extraordinary takes focused intent.

4. Share the Powerful Learning Observation Tool

- Introduce the Powerful Learning Observation Protocol. You can tailor the full tool to focus on just the design principles and components/examples you choose or use the condensed version.
- Ask leaders to use the tool to help identify which principles were present in their “best, most memorable” learning experiences. The tool should make it easier to identify powerful learning in action.
- Lead a discussion about how the type of learning described in the tool is different from conventional religious school classroom learning.

5. Identify the Need for and Types of Support They Can Provide

- If you have engaged leaders beforehand in helping design, implement, or support one or more new models of Jewish learning, ask them how they think the new model helps facilitate this new kind of learning for children and families of your congregation.
- Ask them to imagine what sorts of support learning facilitators (i.e. teachers) might need to shift their practice to design and facilitate this kind of learning
- Discuss (both telling and eliciting) what sorts of support they might provide to help make that more possible or likely.