

Reimagining Congregational Education Community of Practice
 Menu of Visioning Exercises

	Name of exercise	Description and Overview	Time
1	A Memorable Jewish Learning Experience	A great exercise to get task force members thinking about how people learn best. Good way to do introductions at the first meeting	45 - 60 minutes (depends upon the number of task force members, and how much they have to contribute to the debrief)
2	Challenging Our Limiting Assumptions	Useful when: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TF members seem too complacent • There is a lot of disagreement • You have set a high bar and want to dig in • You have an extended period to do visioning 	30-40 min for brainstorming assumptions + 20-45 min for the variations
3	Working with Vision Fragments	This is for those who would like to do visioning in just one meeting, and/or do not want to do #2.	Allow an entire TF meeting

More to come:

- Ideas about when and how to write a draft of the Vision Statement
- An exercise for doing “commentary” on drafts of the Vision Statement



A Memorable Jewish Learning Experience

Usage

This exercise helps people learn more about each other and uncovers the characteristics of memorable Jewish learning.

Grouping of Participants

The ideal group for such an exercise is 10 to 15. A smaller group may not be sufficiently diverse, while the stories of a larger group could get repetitive and boring. This means that a large Task Force will need to be divided into smaller groups. Time should be allotted at the end for someone from each group to report briefly on the similarities and differences they heard in their discussions.

Time Required

1. 2 minutes for each participant,
2. 15-30 minutes for summary discussion.

Materials

Flipchart
Markers

Facilitation

1. Within the group, have each person spend no more than 2 minutes sharing with the others a memorable Jewish learning experience. They should tell something about the context, what the experience was, and the reason they think it is memorable. As each person speaks, someone should keep a running list on flipchart paper of 2-3 word descriptions of each experience.
2. Post the list of experiences for the entire Task Force to see. Then ask, "Looking at all these experiences, what characteristics do you think made these experiences particularly memorable?" Comments might include: "brought me closer to a member of my family; , an opportunity to get to know my peers;.or learned a new skills"" Have someone keep a running list of these characteristics on flip chart paper in front of the group.
3. As participants look at the list, pose the following questions in order . Be sure there is a task force member taking notes that summarize this part of the discussion
 - Looking over this list, what are the big ideas that pop out? Are there any themes or threads? If so, what are they?



- What does this tell us about the situations and circumstances that have the greatest impact on our lives and shape who we are as Jews?
 - What if education in our congregation purposely set out to create these kinds of experiences with these kinds of characteristics? How would the results be different? What might be the impact on the children? On their parents? On our congregation?
 - What would we have to do differently in order to make these types of experiences the norm in our congregation?
4. To sum up, ask: In what ways has this discussion been different from how you typically talk about children's learning?
 5. Wrap-up up by mentioning that this list and the notes from our discussion will be saved, so they can contribute to writing our vision statement at a later date.

Variations

Some congregations that have used this exercise have preferred to ask about people's memorable learning experiences in general, not specifically Jewish ones, because that will stimulate thinking about a broader range of experiences. You may choose to ask the question this way from the outset, or you may decide to ask people to report on 2 learning experiences, one general and one Jewish.



Challenging Our Limiting Assumptions

Grouping of Participants:

The first part of this exercise can be done with the task force as a whole; the second should be done in small groups of 3–5.

Time Required:

45 minutes for the first part; 30 minutes for the second. You may decide to have some task force members continue working on Part 2 on their own or in small groups prior to the next task force meeting, at which time they will have an opportunity to review the rewritten assumptions.

Materials:

- Two flip charts and markers

For the variations:

- Red and Green sticker dots (7 each for each participant)
- A small stack (20-40) of 3x5" post-its.

Facilitation:

PART 1:

Participants sit in a semi-circle (with two or three rows, if necessary); two flip charts are at the front of the room, with a recorder at each one. The facilitator asks people to brainstorm the assumptions they, or their fellow congregants, have about learning in the context of the congregation. The accuracy or truth of these assumptions will be discussed in Part 2. Part 1 is a brainstorming exercise, so there are no wrong answers. The recorders take turns writing down people's statements. If participants get stuck, the facilitator can prompt them by asking some more specific questions, such as: "What assumptions do we have about students? Teachers? The subject matter? The parents? The goals of learning?" etc. Some of the statements that will probably come up are:

- "many congregants assume that bar/bat mitzvah is the end goal;"
- "parents assume that they will simply drop off their kids;"
- One of the important goals is to solidify the students' Jewish identities.

If someone disagrees with one of the statements, invite them to articulate the opposite statement (e.g., "some parents would welcome greater participation, rather than simply dropping off their children.") If participants get stuck, the facilitator can prompt them by asking some more specific questions, such as: "What assumptions do students have? Teachers? The Board? What assumptions do people have about the subject matter? The



goals? The setting?"

Post the assumptions on the wall. By the end you will have at least 6 sheets of flip charts, and possibly many more.

PART 2: (ideally at small tables around the room)

In groups of 3–4, participants note the assumptions they believe to be true. Then they choose a small number they would like to challenge, and try to rewrite the statement so it becomes an assumption they can affirm. For example, “Many congregants assume that bar/bat mitzvah is the end goal,” could be challenged and re-written as, “We believe that Jewish learning is a life-long endeavor.”

The revised assumptions can be posted on the wall. The re-written statements (as well as the ones that are deemed to be true) should be saved, so they can be included in a draft of the vision statement (see # 5, above).

Variations

Take a “straw poll” at the end of Part 1: Give each TF member two piles of sticker dots: 5-7 red ones and 5-7 green. Give the group the following instructions:

- Take a few minutes to walk around and view the statements we have posted.
- Put a green dot on the assumptions you most agree with and you think are the most important to emphasize.
- Put a red dot on the assumptions you most disagree with, and think need to be challenged. If you have ideas about how to challenge them, write them down on a larger 3x5 post-it, and attach it to the poster or to the wall nearby

Rewriting these limiting assumptions is a difficult task, but one which is crucial for your vision statement. Most congregations appoint a sub-committee to re-write the statements after this meeting is over. Alternately, you may decide to spend a short amount of time in small groups rewriting the assumptions that received the most red dots.



Working with Vision Fragments

Some congregations prefer to begin their visioning process by discussing visions statements written by other congregations. To facilitate this process, this exercise offers what we call “vision fragments,” excerpts from vision statements that focus on key points. In our handout below, we offer 14 “vision fragments” to choose from, which might be too many to work with. So before embarking on this exercise, task force leaders will need to do some preparatory work.

Advance Preparation

Review the list of vision fragments on the handout below, and consider how many of these you want to discuss:

- Do you want everyone to review the same statements? If so, you will need to winnow down the list to 5-7. Eliminate the ones that seem duplicative, or don't fit with the culture of your congregation.
- Alternately, you might want people to consider the full range of statements, by giving different statements to different groups. Depending on the size of your task force, you may still want to cut down the number of statements.

Materials:

Copies of the Vision Fragments handout

A pack of 3x5” post-its, with a thin felt-tipped marker for each small group

Paper and Pen for each participant.

Part I

In small groups of 2-3 (you may want to divide the task force into groups ahead of time, to take full advantage of the diversity of task force members):

On the handout are a number of statements taken from the vision statements of different congregations. We call these “vision fragments,” because they are excerpts rather than full statements. This exercise uses these fragments as a springboard for articulating your congregation's vision of K-7 Jewish learning.

Working with the list you've been given:

- Read each fragment to make sure you understand what it is saying. You might try



re-stating them in your own words.

- Working together, circle the values that seem most important to you:
- Note that some of the values are what might be called “motherhood and apple-pie” values, values that everyone would endorse (like having a strong Jewish identity) but that don’t really give much guidance as to what your education program should stress.
- The values to circle and discuss are those that might lead you to design your program in a particular way. For example:
 - If spiritual development (taken from #1) is an important value, it might be important to incorporate worship, meditation and/or exercises in spirituality into the day-to-day program.
 - If you agree that the experiences of children should be “intimate, welcoming, engaging, and fun” (as stated in #4), how would that change your program’s structure and/or curriculum?

Write each of the values that your group sees as both substantive and important in large print on a 3x5” post-it. Place your post-its on a nearby wall.

During the Break Between Part 1 and Part 2

A small group should work to cluster the post-its. If possible, give a name to each cluster.

Part II

Consider re-mixing the small groups for this part.

Give each small group a small number of the values that were clumped together on the wall. Don’t worry if there are too many values for the groups to work with. More work can be done at a later date by the group responsible for writing a draft of the vision statement.

Instructions for the group:

For each of the values you have been given:

- Write a short explanation of WHY this value is important.
- On a scale of 1-10 (with 1 as the lowest and 10 as the highest), how high a priority is this value to your group?
- If you gave this value 7-10, brainstorm some concrete ways your synagogue could communicate these values to students in the education program and to their parents. Write these ideas down and share them with the coordinator or chair of the task force.



VALUE FRAGMENTS

These are taken from the vision statements of a variety of congregations. The full statements can be found in the ECE toolkit or in Isa Aron's *Becoming a Congregation of Learners*.

1. Each child's spiritual development is necessary for the integrity and the continuity of the Jewish community and for living responsibly in the world.
2. Our families and our community learn and live the mitzvot of Torah, Jewish values, a love of Israel, tikkun olam and prayer.
3. The best learning occurs when there is a living context in which a community values and practices what is being taught.
4. Youth Education Programs are intimate, welcoming, engaging, and fun. ... We develop in our children strong Jewish identities, instilling in them a pride in their Jewish heritage and a love of Jewish learning. We prepare our children to be fully participatory members of the larger Jewish community. Our classrooms challenge and inspire students using creative teaching methods combined with traditional text study and lively discussion. Jewish education enriches our lives with the words of Torah and centuries of cultural and religious belief. Our educational programs go beyond the classroom; they involve parents and reach out to the home, family and Jewish community.
5. Our students are encouraged to form a deep connection to the greater Jewish community and the Land of Israel. Our students are actively involved in Tikun Olam projects, which emphasize Jewish ethics and social values. Our parents pursue their own Jewish education in parallel with their children. Our learners are comfortable and at home at shul.
6. Our Temple will be a place where any question can be explored, and where the search for answers are in itself the journey. Through the diverse and enriching activities of its congregants, our Temple will link its members to the larger Jewish community.
7. Parents and other laypeople will have the opportunity to share their individual talents depending upon their individual skills.
8. We will create meaningful Jewish memories.
9. Learners will develop a strong sense of acceptance and belonging within their Jewish community.
10. Learners will build a foundation in all aspects of Jewish literacy.
11. Mastery of skills in Hebrew language, tefillah prayer, text and critical thinking are essential components of our educational philosophy.
12. We aspire to make Shabbat an ideal time to bring our community together in prayer and study. Through a variety of programming and tefillah options, generations of Temple families will unite while sharing the beauty of Shabbat.
13. We view family involvement as the cornerstone of our educational program.
14. Built on the principles of Torah, we strive to inspire learners at every age to live a vibrant Jewish life in the home, within the congregation and in the greater Jewish community.