



Educator's Corner

Turning the Tables: When Mentors Become Students



By Dean Dr. Rachel Lerner

In the spirit of the ongoing structured pursuit of professional development, I have begun my journey through the Senior Educators' Cohort (SEC) of M²: The Institute for Experiential Jewish Education. The Senior Educators' Cohort has three components:

1. Three seminars delving into their curriculum around Jewish experiential education;
2. An individual capstone project where participants articulate their core beliefs around their work, and;
3. Individualized mentorship.

Just like my students, I found myself back in class taking notes on new ideas, exploring theory around values-based teaching, and workshoping ways to bring the ideas into our own individual practices as Jewish educators. Through conversations with my new diverse colleagues from all facets of education, we played around with ideas in the abstract and pulled them into specific examples through case studies and individual planning.

We began our year-long reflection that will lead to the capstone project. I brought pictures and artifacts that represent the challenges I face in my work. Through an interactive walking activity in a beautiful lush park, I asked difficult questions of myself and my colleagues, striving to uncover a deeper understanding of our challenges. In many ways, this process feels similar to what our students at the [School for Jewish Education and Leadership](#) at AJU go through over the course of their studies as they find who they are as educators.

I met my incredible mentor for the first of six times this year. My mentor is thoughtful, kind, will ask the hard questions, and really make me think about how best to serve my students and who I am as an educator. Just as our students use SMART goals, I will too - and to have someone hold me accountable for those goals and ask me the important questions is what I need to take the next step in not only my education but to better serve future educators.

While I'm excited for *what* I'm learning, like many professional development programs, it is also the *who* that makes the difference – the tables have turned. I've already learned from a variety of educators, made a new professional and personal circle of colleagues and peers, and have begun my journey with my mentor. I know, just like our students, that it is both *what* I'm learning and *who* I'm learning from and that will impact me this year.

If you or someone you know is passionate about early childhood education, our program is currently accepting applicants. Please visit aju.edu/education for more information.

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Who Should Take this Course

This extension class is an excellent opportunity for teens who love teaching, and current or aspiring preschool educators to meet other passionate educators in the Jewish setting from around the country virtually

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