



Educator's Corner

Bringing Unique Backgrounds Together in the Classroom: Meet Maya Evashkovsky



Maya Evashkovsky is a doctoral student in special education at the University of California, Los Angeles. Her research interests include collaboration issues in the special education classroom and perspectives on disabilities and ableist beliefs of special-education teacher candidates. Maya was born and raised in Israel, and in recent years resides with her partner and daughters in Los Angeles County, California.

What do you love most about teaching at AJU?

There are many things I love about teaching at AJU. First, the beautiful Familian Campus is a unique place for education. Coming out of the pandemic and long months of remote teaching to this beautiful campus is a true pleasure. Most of all, I am thankful for the students I get to meet every week. They are curious, hard-working, honest critical thinkers. We can engage in personal and professional discussions that critically examine how we learn and how we teach in our different communities.

What are the values you instill in your lectures? How do these values relate to our institution?

I like to think of my classroom as a democratic space, where all opinions should be heard and considered and all have equal importance. My students and I come from different backgrounds; I was born and raised in Israel, while they have American backgrounds. I spent years teaching public schools while they are experts in the area of Jewish education. This richness of cultural and professional experiences allows us to bring our unique background to the classroom, aligned with AJU's diversity and community values. Also, we spend significant time discussing diverse learners and ways to accommodate and support all learners in a meaningful way.

What are some methods you use to ensure diversity and inclusivity in your lectures?

The course I teach, *Educational Psychology*, is designed as a flipped classroom. Students engage with the reading and material in advance, and the class time is dedicated to discussion and exploration of the weekly themes. While the lessons and theories frame our discussion, we use the lens of Jewish education and schooling experiences to contextualize *Educational Psychology* in our daily educational work.

What course would you like to see taught in the next few years?

In recent years, the Israeli educational system has had a growing number of non-traditional schools. These schools are inspired by Waldorf philosophies, Montessori education, and democratic school systems. I would love to see a course that introduces these alternative education approaches and the reason for their growing popularity. Students can engage in discussion around these different approaches, strengths and weaknesses, and how Jewish education can incorporate some of their ideas.

What is an exciting project you are currently involved in outside your work at AJU?

To be completely honest, there is one project I should be involved in, which is completing my dissertation. But in between work and writing, I am excited to be part of UCLA's Center X that supports K-12 teachers in their work around LA.

What's a book you are reading right now and why should we read it?

When I am not reading professional literature, I choose to read Hebrew books. Currently, I am reading David Grossman's *More Than I Love My Life*. I enjoy Grossman's book that depicts Israeli characters, characters that carry their tragic histories into their life in the kibbutz. It was recently translated into English, and I highly recommend it!

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