



Informal Jewish Education in Schools

What are the core principles of informal education?

What are the benefits to young people?

What does good practice look like this?

How can we support and encourage informal education good practice in schools?

Core principles

- Experiential learning
- Conversations
- Self-selecting
- Choice

Barry Chazan

Informal Jewish education is rooted in the belief that education is ultimately about “creating culture” rather than transmitting knowledge

Informal Jewish education is uniquely equipped to introduce people of all ages to some of the great experiences and moments of Jewish life. Its focus on the person and its emphasis on actually participating in significant moments offers great promise for affecting individuals and the Jewish community very powerfully. It offers great promise for affecting Jewish feeling and behaviour. It can deepen some Jewish skills very well—for example, speaking Hebrew or reading Torah or building a *sukkah*—because in informal Jewish education one learns by doing.

It is very effective in helping individuals advance on their personal journeys and growth, as a plethora of voices from summer camps, Israeli trips, and other kind of informal education attest. Informal Jewish education may be less effective for systematic Jewish text learning, for a systematic expansion of Jewish literacy, and for the meta-analysis of Jewish ideas.

Mark Smith and Tony Jeffs

A definition

Informal education is the wise, respectful and spontaneous process of cultivating learning. It works through conversation, and the exploration and enlargement of experience.

What is informal education?

When we are engaged in learning projects we teach ourselves. In all of these roles we are also likely to talk and join in activities with others (children, young people and adults).

These ways of working all entail learning – but informal education tends to be unpredictable – we do not know where it might lead – and spontaneous.

Conversation

Informal education, we argue, is driven by conversation and being with others. It develops through spending time with people – sharing in their lives – and listening and talking.

It involves connecting with both ideas and other people. When we join in conversation it is often difficult to predict where it will lead. As such it can be a very powerful experience –



Dr David Bryfman (2016)

Dr David Bryfman's research found that American teens want to understand how...

- Will this engage me intellectually, physically and socially?
- Can I share this with my friends? (Jewish and other)
- Will this help me feel more connected to the many communities in which I exist?
- Can I apply this to my life?
- Will this help me develop skills that will benefit my life?
- Will this help me feel proud of being Jewish?
- Will this help me be a better citizen of the world?
- Will this help me make the world a better place?

What are the benefits to young people?

- Character development of young people
- To engage in an activity which does not have a defined outcome or award.
- Talking to someone 'safe' who wants to actively listen
- Learning how to have a conversation
- Emotional and spiritual development – who am I? Who am I in different contexts?
- It takes a community – exposure to 'external educators' who share their thoughts by engaging in meaningful conversations.

Good practice looks like:

- Less content – more conversations
- Good ratio of adults that want to spend time with young people
- Promote discussion of informal education with in the school body and on the leadership team as a way of encouraging the school to have less time of 'content' and more time on 'conversations'.
- Develop some sort of measurement activity – clear success criteria for informal education
- Further informal education skills – how to really listen to young people – to support educators to inform their thinking and their practice.
- Understand why informal Jewish education is important to young people.

How can we support and encourage informal education good practice in schools?

- Provide more training for informal educators in all settings
- Financial support
- Training in how to work with young people – different skills are required.
- LIMITING programmed time
- Additional training for creating 'free time' conversations
- Changing approach of parents towards other informal Jewish education provision
- Helping parents understand the important value their children gain from experiential learning
- Helping parents to value time spent on activities which do not have a defined outcome or award
- Emphasise the importance of conversations with children and young people

