ARJE27 Breakout Session Descriptions

AI 101 for Jewish Educators

Dan Medwin, RJE

Davis Academy

Your vision matters. Your ideas matter. But often we don't have the time or knowledge to bring them to life. AI can help. Learning how to use AI matters, both for Jewish educators professionally, but also to know what our students are going through. In this workshop, participants will learn how vibe-coding can unleash their creative potential. By the end of the session, they will know how to, and have already begun, creating their own webpages or apps.

Beyond the Labels: Understanding the Emotional Needs of Today's Jewish Teens

Beth Lipschutz, and Rachel Margolis, RJE

Jewish Federations of North America (Beth Lipschutz)

What do we really know about the emotional lives of today's teens? Beyond the labels and assumptions, research and data can help us better understand what Jewish teens are experiencing, what they want the adults in their lives to know, and what they need to thrive. Together, we'll explore how congregational leaders can help create communities that foster connection and resilience in young people – and how supporting the caring adults who work with teens is an essential part of that effort.

Building Spaces That Matter: Creating Transformational Spaces

Beverly Socher-Lerner

Makom Community

Together we will explore how to create a learning environment where learners see Jewish space as a place that lifts them up and doesn't bring them down. Embracing this approach to Jewish space ensures learners and their families build Jewish self-confidence and WANT to be there. Drawing on case studies spanning ages from Makom Community, you'll leave with a concrete first step for bringing Makom's pedagogy of Jewish Placemaking into your own community.

Covenantal Community: A Kaplanian Approach to Belonging

Joel Abramovitz

Reconstructing Judaism

Mordecai Kaplan, the founder of Reconstructionist Judaism, argued that belonging is more than being welcomed. It means being in relationship, with obligations to one another. His idea of covenantal community speaks to any educator who wants learners, families, and colleagues to know that they matter and that what they bring is needed. In this interactive session, participants study Kaplan's ideas, try out practical tools in small groups, and co-plan ways to bring a covenantal approach to belonging into their own communities.

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Creating Communities with Intention

Debbie Niederman, RJE, and Seymour Kopelowitz

MTEI

Creating community requires intention. Drawing on the MTEI principle of the Intentional Creation of Community, we will use text study and the lens of mattering to explore what transforms a group of individuals into a community. Together, we will identify rituals, structures, and educational choices that communicate “You matter here.” Participants will leave with strategies and concrete ideas for intentionally cultivating mattering in their own setting.

Designing *L'kaf Zchut*: Making Mattering Happen. Designing Communities Where Kids Belong

Rachel Dobbs Schwartz and Elana Perry

Jewish Kids Groups

Community isn't created merely by placing learners in the same classroom, synagogue, or program. True community requires intentionally designed structures that ensure individuals feel known, valued, connected, and essential. Drawing from Jewish Kids Groups' experience fostering relational community across diverse ages, schools, and attendance patterns, participants will engage directly with simple, effective practices that cultivate a culture of mattering. Together, we will analyze why these approaches succeed and explore how participants can adapt them to deepen belonging within their own educational environments.

Developing Goals and Competencies for Mattering, Belonging, and Becoming

Lauren Reeves, RJE

Beth Emet The Free Synagogue

How do we share our goals of mattering, belonging, and becoming with teachers, families, and learners? This session will explore one option to develop competencies for religious school learners. We will discuss the distinction between learning goals and competencies and investigate where one example of competencies might show up in religious school programs. It will be helpful to come with examples of your program's stated learning goals as one starting point for our conversation.

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Does Mattering Survive Conflict? Balancing Relationship, Boundaries, and Responsibility

Leslie Rosen Stern

Meeting Your Mission, Inc.

What happens to mattering when we disagree, need to set a boundary, correct behavior, or make a decision someone may not like? This interactive session explores how educators and leaders can stay connected while still doing the work their roles require. Through real-world scenarios and practical language, participants will examine how to hold relationship, clarity, and responsibility together in difficult moments, so that even in conflict, people still know they matter.

Ensuring Every Family Matters in Family Education

Jordanna Flores

URJ Camp Newman

Excellent Family Education is incredibly difficult to achieve. By quilting together several areas of research, Jordanna has developed a tool to guide your design. By breaking down each component, we'll get you started on crafting rich content where each family matters and Jewish joy sparkles!

From Belonging to Mattering: Building Jewish Pride

Mara Braunfeld

The Jewish Education Project

What if every Jewish learner, family, and educator walked through the world sure that they matter? What would we have to notice, prioritize, and let go of to make that true? When people know they matter in Jewish community, Jewish pride follows: the confidence to live Jewishly and the sense that Judaism adds meaning to our lives. Through text study, partner conversation, and a noticing inventory, we'll use new national research, the Jewish Pride Outcomes, and resources from the Deep Rich Jewish Content toolkit to make mattering concrete and applicable in our own settings.

In Every Generation: Stepping Inside the Passover Story

Jonathan Shmidt Chapman

The K'ilu Company

How can we invite learners to experience the story of Passover—and all of our stories—as if they were there? Through sensory storytelling, immersive theater, and imaginative play, participants will experience K'ilu's approach to bringing Jewish stories to life and explore how these techniques can transform learning into an interactive, participatory experience. Together, we'll discover practical ways to create unique and meaningful Passover experiences in early childhood, religious school (K–8), and family engagement settings.

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The Israel We Carry: Educators' Personal Israel Compass

Sarah Weiss-Poland

IsraelLINK

Before we can create space for students to explore their own relationship with Israel, we need to understand what we bring into the room. In this interactive workshop, educators will build their own PIC (Personal Israel Compass) by exploring the experiences, values, people, and moments that have shaped their Israel stories, developing language for their relationship with Israel, and examining how they understand and define Zionism within that relationship. Participants will consider why where we stand matters and how greater self-awareness can strengthen a relational approach to Israel education, one that creates the conditions for students to develop authentic relationships of their own.

Jewish Identity, Belonging, and the Power to Make a Difference

Geffen Rosenthal

Facing History and Ourselves

When students feel seen and valued in the fullness of their identities, they are better positioned to engage deeply, take risks, and find meaning in their learning. How can Jewish education create experiences in which learners feel that their Jewish identities matter--not only as part of who they are, but as a source of connection and purpose? How can a strong sense of Jewish belonging inspire ethical reflection and responsibility toward others? In this session, we will explore the relationship between Jewish Identity, belonging, and moral agency to consider how educators can cultivate experiential learning environments where learners see themselves within the diversity and richness of Jewish life and empowered to make choices that help shape the Jewish community and the wider world.

Leadership Matters: How Resonant Leadership Fosters a Culture of Mattering

Micol Zimmerman Burkeman

Wonder Coaching

A culture of mattering begins at the top. How a leader engages their team sets the standard for how their team engages the community. Effective leadership is not a one-size-fits-all game. Instead, resonant leaders adapt their leadership approach to the specific needs of their team, leveraging emotional intelligence to help shape culture, build trust, and align their decisions and actions with shared values. In this session, participants will explore resonant leadership theory, examine their own leadership style and presence, and articulate their personal leadership values. They will leave with a deeper understanding of their unique vision for leadership, concrete strategies for strengthening relationships and teams, and tools for fostering a culture of mattering.

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The Leadership Practice of Mattering

Debbi Cooper

M²

The desire to matter, to feel valued and to know we add value, is a fundamental human need, and leaders shape whether the people around them experience it. This interactive session breaks mattering into the values it's made of, such as recognition and intentionality, and looks honestly at what gets in the way, including when other good values like efficiency or urgency compete with it. Participants study Jewish texts and rituals that already build mattering into communal life, then practice small, authentic acts of mattering suited to their own role. Each participant leaves with a specific commitment for their workplace and a partner to check in with. Whether you lead a classroom, a staff, or a congregation, you'll walk away with practices you can use.

Mattering as a Decision, Not a Feeling

Iggy Gurin-Malous

Beit T'Shuvah (Los Angeles)

"You matter" has been the motto of Beit T'Shuvah, Los Angeles' Jewish recovery community, for nearly four decades. Its absence is a presenting problem and its restoration is the treatment plan that brings that hard-won practice to Jewish educators. We study Jewish text and wisdom to teach how to implant this idea through practice. where judging "as though they matter" turns out to be a verdict on a scale of merit, not a feeling.

Placing Spirituality at the Heart of Jewish Education

Sue Bojdak

Jewish LearningWorks

This is a critical time for Jewish education to return spirituality to the forefront of our work, honoring its place as a tool to help the next generation find meaning, create purpose, and embrace hope. What do we mean by "spirituality" and how is spirituality experienced and cultivated? Join the conversation that Jewish LearningWorks has been having with educators over the past two years. Explore the framework we are building, study some of the tools our colleagues are contributing, and bring your wisdom, experience, and questions to the table.

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The Power of the *Vav*: Both/And Educational Leadership

Tali Zelkowicz

Spertus Institute for Jewish Learning and Leadership

Jewish educators matter both as transmitters of content who specialize in growth, challenge, and achievement and as translators of meaning who specialize in attuned support, relevance, and belonging. For over a century, though, educators have tended, unnecessarily, to treat these roles as two opposing purposes between which they somehow need to choose. Both/And leadership is an intellectual and practical framework that can empower educational leaders to embrace and even maintain the productive tension between equal, inter-dependent and opposing principles of our work. This interactive workshop offers participants an intimate dive into decades long assumptions we've been making across the field about what Jewish educators are and are not, and explore and imagine renewed potential if we believed deeply that all Jewish educators, whatever their setting, matter in both ways.

We Matter: Trans & Nonbinary Belonging in Jewish Learning

Micah Buck

Keshet: For LGBTQ+ Equality in Jewish Life

In a time in which the dignity and identities of transgender, nonbinary, and gender-expansive youth are increasingly under attack, belonging in our Jewish learning spaces matters more than ever. From curricular choices that reflect gender diversity to classroom practices to navigating common misconceptions about gender-diverse youth, we will explore key best practices for belonging in the Jewish classroom. These core practices are critical for belonging for gender-diverse youth, and serve to create classrooms that are more engaging, equitable, and supportive for all learners.

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The Z-Word: Reclaiming Zionism in Jewish Education

Josh Weinberg and Lesley Litman

URJ/ARZA, Lesley Litman Consulting

Zionism has become one of the most contested and misunderstood terms in Jewish life. What is it, how do we teach it, talk about it, and make space for meaningful engagement with Israel across generations? For teens and adults alike, Jewish educational institutions have a responsibility to create environments where questions are welcomed, complexity is embraced, and connection to Israel can grow through learning, relationships, and honest conversation. Together, we'll explore why Zionism belongs in our educational spaces, ways to do so along with what a thoughtful and inclusive Reform Zionist approach looks like, and how we can equip educators to engage learners.