

# Finding our Why



**M.A.P. FOR JEWISH  
LEARNING & LIVING**

*[My Aspirations Playbook](#) (MAP) can serve as a tool for developing a shared understanding of the purpose of Jewish education in a particular community. This lesson is intended to help educational stakeholders like lay leaders or parents clarify their views. Before engaging with lay leaders, the facilitator should feel confident that board members understand they have a vested interest in and obligation to the Jewish educational program.*

*This session taps into expectations people may already have for the educational program at your organization, then asks participants to consider why the Jewish educational program is structured the way it is and why it focuses on the content it does. This lesson can be used as the first in a series of conversations with parents and/or lay leaders that will result in a clearer sense of direction for innovation in your community. You can find resources for additional conversations [here](#).*

## Goal

Participants will clarify the purpose of engaging with MAP, their aspirations for Jewish education, the assumptions underlying these aspirations, and the implications of these aspirations.

## Materials

- Flip chart or board
- Signs around the room (taken from Kress, “Expectations, Perceptions, and Preconceptions: How Jewish Parents Talk about ‘Supplementary’ Religious Education”)
  - Connection to heritage, positive pride in Jewish identity, carrying on Judaism to the next generation
  - Jewish friends and community
  - Literacy and desire to participate in Jewish ritual life and traditions (holidays, worship, Shabbat)
  - Jewish values, self-confidence, leadership
  - Preparation for b’nei mitzvah
- Purposes of Jewish Education handout
- Way to show a video:  
[https://www.ted.com/talks/sir\\_ken\\_robinson\\_changing\\_education\\_paradigms](https://www.ted.com/talks/sir_ken_robinson_changing_education_paradigms)  
(RSAnimate, 2010)
- Markers
- Index cards

## Plan

### *Introduction* (10-15 minutes)

Welcome participants to this important discussion which is part of a process that will affect the school and beyond. Begin by tapping into the “why” of Jewish education. Point out the signs around the room, and explain they came from a study of parents. The ideas on the signs are reasons parents expressed for sending their children to a Jewish education program.

Invite participants to choose the sign that best represents their top reason for sending their children and/or what they think the top goal of the Jewish educational program is. Once everyone has gone to a sign, ask participants to introduce themselves to this subgroup and explain what they think the sign means and why they chose it.

### *Activities*

#### Purposes of Jewish Education (10 minutes)

Ask if any group has something they would like to share. Reconvene and ask: Was there any idea on any sign that you were opposed to or that you consider a very low priority? Discuss briefly.

Distribute the Purposes handout. Explain these are from philosophers of Jewish education, much broader than the parent expectations or hopes we just discussed. Allow participants to read and discuss in pairs. Do any of these align with or contradict the parent goals in our first activity? Do any of these seem to represent an old idea of Jewish education? A forward-thinking idea that seems new to them? Which one interests them the most? Do the purposes of Jewish education change if we see them from the perspective of our children rather than the parents, the organization, or tradition? Are there any purposes that seem to be emerging as the most relevant for us?

#### “Why do we do that?” (10 minutes)

Explain that the way we understand purposes directly affect how we design Jewish education. Introduce the following video from Sir Ken Robinson, a reformer of public education, who challenges our assumptions about schools, how they are structured, and towards what ends. Show the last five minutes of the video, starting at the 6:33 mark.

Return to the purposes and think-pair-share to discuss, using the following questions raised in the video:

- How might the structure and content of our program help us meet our broader purpose?
- How might what and how we educate hamper us in fulfilling the purposes we have identified?

Ask one participant to explain briefly why it is important to identify our “why” in designing, implementing, and evaluating a Jewish education program.

*Conclusion* (10 minutes)

Explain that clarifying the “why” can affect our program in small (individual lesson plans) and big (changing the entire structure) ways. Spend a few minutes targeting where your participants think this process could lead using this concluding activity.

Replicate the graphic below on a poster or white board. Invite participants to make a mark on the target where they think a process around the purposes of Jewish education at their organization could and should lead. Once all the marks are on the target, try to come to a consensus on the “hoped for” outcome of this process for your organization.

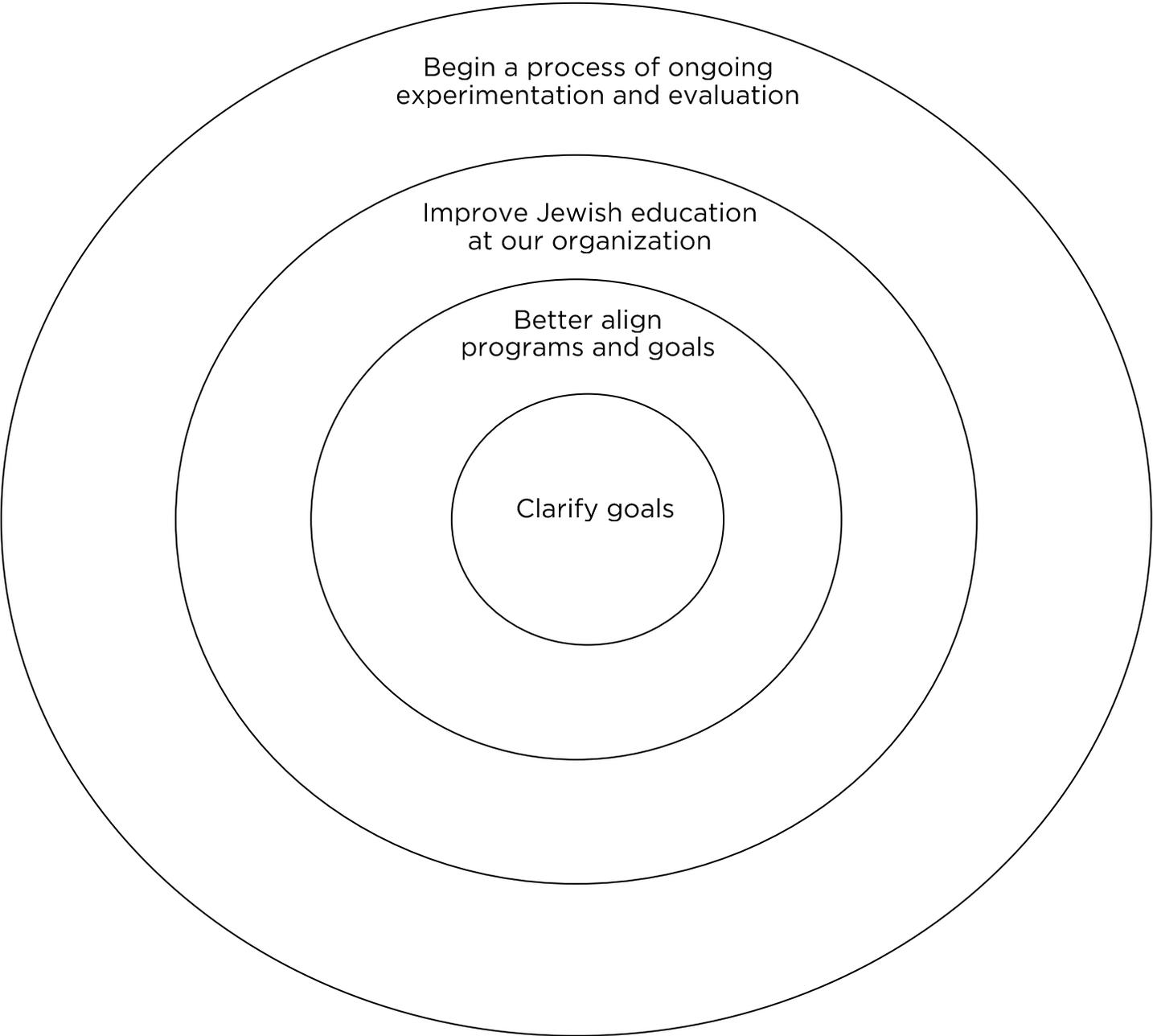
### Reflection:

At the end of the session, ask each lay leader to complete the following sentences on an index card:

One thing that excites me about this process is \_\_\_\_\_.

One thing that makes me nervous about this process is \_\_\_\_\_.

Collect the cards as participants leave to review later. A bulletin article summarizing this meeting and the general consensus could be helpful in affirming the participants’ ideas and reflecting them back to the organization.



**Connection to  
heritage, positive  
pride in Jewish  
identity, carrying  
on Judaism to  
the next  
generation**

# Jewish friends and community

**Literacy and  
desire to  
participate in  
Jewish ritual life  
and traditions  
(holidays,  
worship,  
Shabbat)**

Jewish  
values,  
self-  
confidence,  
leadership

# Preparation for b'nei mitzvah

## Purposes of Jewish Education

"The present should provide a starting point for diverse future possibilities, for both the individual and the community. The Jewish past is, at most, a matrix of future possibilities-- models for self-formation, possible exemplary figures-- aside from being indispensable for understanding the present." -- Brinker in Fox, Scheffler, Marom, eds. (2003)

"Jewish education is to be evaluated according to its success in fostering in its graduates four qualities: 1) Love of learning Torah... and love of the fulfillment of the commandments between man and God, 2) Acceptance of the Torah as a moral guide, along with the recognition that its moral precepts have undergone constant revision and refinement, 3) A way of life that creates a community, 4) A relationship to the Jewish people in all the lands of their dispersion." --Greenberg in Fox, Scheffler, Marom, eds. (2003)

"Jewish education is the tool for making ascribed identity into chosen identity." --Meyer in Fox, Scheffler, Marom, eds. (2003)

"...Jewish supplementary education can be a setting for the growth of joyful, positive Jewish identity, deep learning, and relationships. It can be an environment that teaches for integration into Jewish community and for a sense of responsibility and citizenship in Jewish life for both children and their families." --Battis and Happel in Schuster, ed. (2019)

"Jewish tradition and culture do not aim to make us more Jewish. They aim to make us better human beings..." --Woocher in Kress (2013)

"Jewish learning is intended to help us understand ourselves, our communities, and the world around us. Jewish wisdom, traditions, and culture are resources for navigating the joys and challenges of our daily lives, enabling all of us to thrive." -The Jewish Education Project, My Aspirations Playbook