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## JUST ASK

by Emilia Diamant

One of the reasons I was so inspired at NewCAJE last year was the Young Professional (YP) post-conference. In a room with Cherie Koller-Fox, Yavilah McCoy, Joanna Ware, and others, we discussed the barriers that keep people from congregational life. Being an educator at a Reform synagogue in Raleigh, NC, has put me square in the middle of what we were all saying we didn't want — heterogeneity and stagnancy with no movement toward meeting the Jews of tomorrow where they are. Through the conversation that afternoon I came to the realization that no matter where my career path takes me, Jewish education will be a part of it. That being said, the Jewish education models of the past (Sunday School, learning Hebrew through memorization and books) do not seem as important to me as our world changes. If we, the 20- and 30-somethings, are shifting away from what we knew as students, it's time for Jewish education to evolve alongside us.

I am not suggesting we throw out what we've been doing, but rather we look to our constituents and see what might be worth changing. There are a few principles I feel our model of Jewish education should be based on:

1. Inclusion—of all types of people, families, ability levels, education. If we are not actively inclusive and finding ways to celebrate difference, we are irrelevant.
2. Tradition—there's a reason we've been doing things this way for so long. Something about it resonates, whether it is the way we sing *Aleinu* or how we teach the *Alef Bet*. Many of my YP counterparts feel that tradition is stifling, but rather I suggest we find ways to make the traditions of our ancestors work for us.
3. Exploration of Space—it's time to move out of synagogues and out of JCCs. It's time to find people where they are and explore Judaism there, together. Whether it's in an art gallery, a yoga class, or a bookstore, it would behoove Jewish educators to find a way to meet people, physically, where they are.

These are not revolutionary concepts. They are things that many have said before, and that they will continue to say. While I know that many different groups drive change, I think that it is educators who have the greatest capacity to affect the most change. Without our educational leadership and teachers driving our people, we will not get there. By ensuring our children are inclusive, traditional, and able to explore their world, we can create a generation of Jews who will be able to push their elders outside of their comfort zone, toward something exciting and new.

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The old adage rings true...if not us who? If educators don't take a stand and say, "WE MUST CHANGE AND GROW," then we never will. It is this opportunity that I found the strength to begin to push for at NewCAJE last year.

So how do we get moving? As Jews, I believe our best work comes from grassroots movements. From someone reaching up, saying "This is what we want," instead of it coming from the top, dictating what the agenda is. If we look to our constituents, ask them what they need as well as what would motivate and excite them, we'll get the answers. Students have opinions, their parents know what they want, and singles can tell you what would get them involved, if you just ask.

It's time to start asking the questions and truly listening to the answers.

*Emilia Diamant was born and raised in the Boston area. As a product of Congregation Beth El of Sudbury and NFTY/URJ Camps, she has always had a strong link to Jewish education. This link was formalized two years ago as she began a job at Temple Beth Or in Raleigh, NC.*

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