

Moving from your Panic to your Comfort Zone

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Retrospective on Hadar's Day School Educators' Institute with the Pedagogy of Partnership

By Eli Savage

In June, I was part of a cohort of 20 Jewish educators who participated in the [Pedagogy of Partnership](#) Track of Hadar's [Day School Educator Institute](#). This intensive week of inspiring personal and professional learning combines Jewish text learning, led by [Hadar](#) faculty, in a lively *beit midrash* setting with interactive training in the Pedagogy of Partnership, a holistic Jewish approach to teaching that supports students' intellectual, social-emotional and spiritual growth.

I first heard about this opportunity to deepen my ability as a teacher to build collaboration skills in students in mid March. As I read on about the opportunity, I learned that among other things, it was going to provide an educational framework for improving the partnerships of '*chevrutah*.' As a general studies teacher (middle school English and History), I was not sure how this applied to me and had some serious second thoughts about my attendance. I assumed that the *chevrutah* partnership would only address Jewish studies teachers and their abilities to have students learn the text. Admittedly, I became skeptical also when I heard that part of this conference was giving teachers an opportunity to engage in Jewish learning through *chevrutah*. Well... I couldn't have been more wrong about this experience as an invaluable learning and growth opportunity for myself.

After Allison Cook and Orit Kent, workshop leaders and directors of the Pedagogy of Partnership (PoP), assured me that this conference was for me, I decided to take the leap into the unknown and take a risk by going. When I stepped in on day one as the only Canadian (representing a Modern Orthodox/Zionist school, Netivot Hatorah in Toronto), I could almost

instantly feel I was in the right place. The Hadar Yeshiva staff told the over 30 teachers from all across the U.S. (and the only Canadian – me!) that we should immerse ourselves in text study so we could feel the role of a student and lover of Torah study, and we should resist the urge to tie everything back to our students.

This was just the trigger I needed, and from that point on I moved from the panic zone to the comfort zone (this phrasing is based on a group exercise we engaged in at the workshop to help us get to know one another and also reflect on our growing edge). As I studied with Rabbi Elie Kaunfer, the Executive Director of the Hadar Institute, the classical texts came alive. I delved into texts about the origins of Rabbi Akiva and the necessity for an awareness of the tension inherent in Jewish community building and pluralistic decision making.

My work with my *chevrutah* was a great segway to my afternoons, which got us to really understand what true partnership is. Through PoP, I was introduced to the educational framework of the triangle pedagogical model of text to student, student to student and text to text. I was able to once again move from the panic to the comfort zone as Allison and Orit were able to unpack for us the universal learning skills that underlie the work of collaboration. It was so meaningful for me as an educator to clarify and reinforce my belief in a whole child approach. A whole child approach takes into consideration, among other things, a child's ability to develop relationships, manage stress and make applications to their lives as human beings. If we work from the premise that the PoP approach is constantly getting teachers and students to pay attention to their character when engaged with learning, then the whole child becomes addressed more. I was able to take away a whole system of addressing key learning skills including listening, articulating, wondering, challenging and deepening our commitment to text study. So often, as teachers, we become solely focused on the curricular goals or covering content. This can overlook all the important learning skills emphasized through the PoP model.

Having gone through the PoP training, I intend to this year very consciously approach how I am teaching in a different way. Firstly, I want to follow-up on my summer study by getting students to develop empathy for their partner or *chevrutah*. I hope to have other teachers observe me using this process from both disciplines, Judaic and general studies. One of the reasons for this is that when students can see that healthy relationship based education is not limited to one discipline, hopefully they can transfer better and see that partnerships with people and texts are integral to learning both in and out of school. They will learn to value these skills as a whole and not just limit them to one course or discipline of study.

The most beautiful part of what I can take away from my experience is that as a teacher I am inspired to now judge my impact on my students not just based on the content that I teach but also based on the growth of their partnerships and their abilities to respect each other and the text in turn. I also intend to continue my Torah study as a way to inspire myself as a Jewish teacher in a day school setting and as a plain old Jew. I am thankful for my school for supporting me in this professional development. I intend to continue my growth throughout the year with webinars and coaching based on my trial of this system.

Eli Savage teaches middle school Language Arts and Social Studies as well as a Facing History Holocaust course at [Netivot Hatorah](#). He also is the faculty advisor for student council and coaches his school debate team.