Playgrounds and Partnerships: Jewish Educators come together to explore AI

Like all educational institutions, Jewish day schools are grappling with the impact of AI on their mission. Initial conversations centered on policy and learning in general, but the explosion in AI-driven educational tools has quickly moved the discussion to the nuts and bolts of classroom instruction: curriculum design, lesson-planning and assessment.

To that end Azrieli Graduate School of Jewish Education, with the generous support of the Zalik Foundation, conceived of a unique professional development (PD) opportunity for Judaic Studies teachers. Rather than bringing in an expert to teach a single skill within a set timeframe —the traditional PD model—Azrieli sought to gather **practitioners** who could share their experiences with AI and, in a spirit of **play** and **experimentation**, explore and begin testing a wide range of tools that might advance their students' learning goals. We called this an "AI Playground for Jewish Educators," which was held on July 31 in – where else? – an actual day school: The Frisch School in Paramus, NJ.

Three day school EdTech directors – SAR High School's Rabbi Avi Bloom, Melvin J. Berman Hebrew Academy's Rabbi Tzvi Hametz and Ida Crown Jewish Academy's Rabbi Dr. Binyomin Segal – were invited to design and lead the day. Twenty Jewish educators and administrators from a variety of day schools in NY/NJ, Florida, Maryland and Illinois met and were treated to three sessions by the coordinators, each followed by a "co-lab," a mixture of collaboration and experimentation ideally suited to improving one's understanding and use of emergent technology.

The first major session, *Big AI Model Deep Dive*, brought live demonstrations of **Perplexity, NotebookLM and ChatGPT** – the most recent version unexpectedly released only two days earlier, a stark reminder of the breakneck speed of change in AI – along with guided prompt experimentation. Participants marveled at ChatGPT's "Agent Mode" capable of autonomously building websites, planning itineraries, or generating slideshows; "Voice Mode," which enables natural conversation-based learning experiences, and "Study and Learn Mode" where AI coaches students toward understanding with prompts and questions rather than by providing answers. As Rabbi Eli Ciner, Frisch's head, observed, opportunities for students to practice foreign languages or receive personalized tutoring are endless.

The mid-day *Design Sprint* tapped into AI's multimedia magic—integrating image generation, music composition, voice cloning, and video production. Educators saw how early investment in creating characters and surrounding sets could yield months of material with minimal preparation each week.

From the last session, "*EDU Tools Firehose,*" came a deluge of (mostly free) possibilities, designed specifically for educational uses, including **MagicSchool.ai, Eduaide.ai** for lesson creation; **NotebookLM** for turning PDFs into source-linked study guides and podcasts; **Snorkl** and **SchoolAI** for real-time feedback and reasoning analysis; and **WayGround** for transforming documents into gamified review experiences.

The spirit of experimentation carried over into the *AI Tools Co-Lab* after each session, where participants built, tinkered, and critiqued. "Jewish educators have got this," said one participant. "I saw people approaching AI with curiosity, humility, and deep professionalism. The educators and tech leaders at this conference are taking the challenge seriously."

Participants left the conference feeling "empowered, informed, and ahead of the curve," but also with more practical tools: digital passports of pre-written prompts and year-long subscriptions to ChatGPT Plus – an "AI Swiss army knife" – giving them the means to continue their AI journey over the coming year, ideally in a framework of their design, which they were invited to co-create.

Many lessons were learned at the Playground, as evidenced by several social media posts and Dave Weinberg's [substack reflection](#). The day underscored a growing realization: AI I not just another tool but may become the operating system of education itself. As AI agents begin to coordinate and act in complex ways, schools will need to rethink how curriculum is designed and delivered.

As one Director of Educational Technology observed, "the tools themselves are less important than developing meaningful classroom applications that enrich Jewish learning. With everything AI can now do, what should education itself look like? What are the skills, habits, and values we must still prioritize?"

These are the questions Azrieli is convening Jewish educators in various ways to discuss and explore. Stay tuned.