

Replacing Anxiety with Curiosity: Creating PD workshops for faculty

When Yossi Hoffman, Senior Technology Support Specialist at The Abraham Joshua Heschel School, participated in the Azrieli AI Playground last year, he left with more than a collection of new AI tools. Conversations with fellow participants helped shape a philosophy for introducing generative AI into schools and training faculty that is thoughtful, values-driven, and deeply human.

Over the past year, Yossi has translated those ideas into a series of professional development workshops for Heschel faculty and students, helping educators move beyond uncertainty and toward confident, critical engagement with AI. His goal has never been simply to teach people how to use AI, but to help them think more deeply about when, why, and how it should be used.

A central theme of Yossi's workshops is replacing anxiety with curiosity. Rather than viewing generative AI as either a threat or a magic solution, participants are encouraged to **experiment**, **ask questions**, and **critically examine** both the strengths and limitations of these rapidly evolving technologies.

One memorable activity brought **teachers together with high school computer science students** for collaborative "vibe coding" exercises. In one project, a student designed an "AI or Not AI?" game using Shakespearean and other literary texts, prompting rich conversations about authorship, creativity, and what distinguishes human writing from machine-generated text. The experience reinforced an important lesson: AI literacy develops through exploration, reflection, and dialogue.

Yossi's workshops are grounded in **two influential frameworks** that emerged during his conversations with leaders in the AI education space:

1) **The Jagged Frontier**, a concept popularized by Wharton professor Ethan Mollick in his book *Co-intelligence*. The idea is that AI performs exceptionally well in some areas while struggling unexpectedly in others—and that this boundary is constantly shifting. Rather than placing complete trust in AI or dismissing it because of its mistakes, educators are encouraged to develop calibrated expectations, learning where AI can genuinely add value and where human expertise remains indispensable.

2) **The Human-AI Sandwich**, has been shared by Rabbi Tzvi Hametz, one of the presenters at the Azrieli AI Playground. Its message is elegantly simple: a human begins with an idea, AI assists in developing it, and the human returns to evaluate, revise, and make the final decisions. By placing human judgment at both the beginning and end of every interaction, the framework ensures that technology serves creativity rather than replacing it.

The workshops also emphasize that schools should be intentional about the AI platforms they embrace. Yossi encourages educators to seek out organizations whose work strengthens human relationships and meaningful learning, highlighting initiatives such as PlayLab and [The Rithm Project](#) as examples of people-centered innovation.

Yossi's work is a powerful example of what the Azrieli AI Playground was designed to foster: not simply introducing new technologies, but building a community of educators who continue learning from one another long after the event concludes. The ideas exchanged during those conversations have already begun influencing classrooms and professional development programs, demonstrating how collaborative exploration can lead to thoughtful innovation.