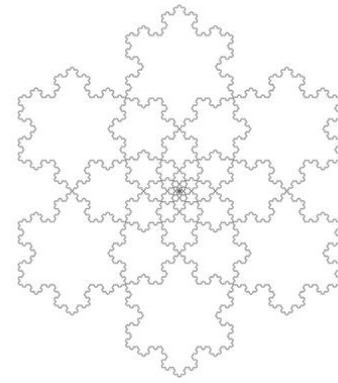


## Design Principles for Powerful Professional Development: Summative Insights Derived from the Lived Experience of the Jim Joseph Foundation Professional Development Initiative

**fractal** (*noun*) A curve or geometric figure, each part of which has the same statistical character as the whole. Fractals are useful in modeling structures (such as eroded coastlines or snowflakes) in which similar patterns recur at progressively smaller scales

The Jim Joseph Foundation Professional Development Initiative has taken place over the past three years on a series of registers: first, for the more than 400 educators who participated in the various program cohorts managed by 10 program providers; then, for each of the organizations who led those programs, and especially for the program directors who themselves made up a cohort of their own; and finally for the broader field of Jewish education for which this collective effort has constituted a grand, even unprecedented, experiment.



The Rosov Consulting team has tried to ensure that our evaluation work gave attention to each of these different strata, while also considering their intersections. Gathering data about the participating educators and what they gained from the programs while both facilitating and assessing the Professional Learning Community made up of the program directors, we have been able to observe at different orders of magnitude the structures (the program elements) that underpin powerful professional learning whatever the context. We have witnessed a kind of fractal phenomenon.

Our understanding of these matters draws from profoundly different data sources. Individual program **case studies** and data from **clinical interviews** have delivered insights into these experiences at the highest level of resolution even while each has been concerned with a different unit of analysis: the program, on the one hand, and the individual participant, on the other. The **Participant Audit** and the **Shared Outcomes Survey** have generated very different perspectives, helping expose cross-cutting patterns as they surface from the responses of hundreds of individuals—first, before they started the programs and then six months later. These surveys don't quite function as pre/post instruments, but they do keep separate participants' motivations and expectations, on the one hand, and the outcomes observed after the programs' conclusions, on the other. Finally, repeated interviews with **organizational supervisors** and with the **PLC participants**

make possible a kind of meta-analysis of all of the evaluation elements and offer a vantage point from which to consider the broader implications of the Initiative for the field.

The very different vistas opened up by each of these sources help us see the extent to which the delivery of meaningful professional development, whether for frontline educators or for the kinds of senior educators who participated in the PLC, involves keeping each of five strands in a state of creative tension.

**1. Both utility and ultimate meaning:** Whatever their level of seniority, participants want professional development to deliver learning of utility, what we called in our analysis of Participant Audit data learning that “enhances their professional self-efficacy.” And yet, professional development assumes special significance for participants if it also allows them to experience “holistic professional growth” and if it gives them a chance to stretch, explore new ideas, and think of themselves differently. Our case studies, clinical interviews, and shared outcomes data show that these two outcomes are not mutually exclusive, as is often assumed.

**2. Both personal growth and professional belonging:** The two signature frameworks for high-quality professional development—personal mentorship and cohort-based experiences—address distinct learning needs. Professionals cherish the opportunity to grow their skills and their understanding through mentorship and thought partnership with a “significant other;” this is the most effective (although not especially efficient) means by which to learn “new ways of thinking and doing.” At the same time, they celebrate professional development that introduces them into thick professional networks. These networks can function as a learning resource, but they take on greater significance when they enable educators to find a place within meaningful professional communities. Almost all our data sources (program director interviews, clinical interviews, shared outcomes survey, case studies) highlight the yin and yang of these two experiences.

**3. Both diversity and commonality:** Program participants and PLC members all noted how stimulating it was when they learned alongside people whose professional profiles differed from their own and who saw the world differently. At the same time, they were frustrated when the members of their group did not have enough in common professionally that they couldn’t go beyond surface issues to questions of the deepest significance. Ensuring the best possible mix of diversity and commonality is one of the most difficult challenges for providers of professional development. It requires knowing enough about program applicants ahead of time, while also having a sufficiently deep applicant pool that potential participants can be comfortably turned away.

**4. Both space and structure:** Some of the case studies show that participants struggle when given too much space to figure out things for themselves. Some PLC members were also frustrated that they weren’t bound more closely together with their fellow cohort members through a stronger set of shared obligations. Too much structure and too many obligations quickly become constricting, especially in programs that run over long periods of time. Professional development programs face two challenges: they’re competing for attention with the demands of their participants’ day jobs—they can’t ask too much of them; and they’re

serving adult learners who often want space to figure out things for themselves—they don't want to be infantilized. The sweet spot between too much structure and too much space is likely different for each individual participant.

**5. Both work and play:** Professional development provides a valuable break from routine. Of course, if it didn't go deeper than being a time-out, its value would be limited. People want to be taken seriously, and they (usually) relish intense, intellectually stimulating work. And yet if the experience is too intense—a case of all work and no play—it would disappoint, too. Participants in cohort programs enjoy the opportunity to kick back and get to know their peers in social settings, especially over meals. These encounters are what underpin the formation of strong professional communities. Again, finding the right balance is as much art as science.



Of course, there's a gigantic literature about best practices in professional development. These five insights drawn from our work are not intended to ignore what is already well established. We're hopeful, though, that just as the learning derived from self-discovery is typically more powerful than learning derived from instruction, so the insights we've drawn from our own lived experiences and from the instruments created specifically for this purpose carry a special force. We're hopeful they can serve the Jim Joseph Foundation as it pursues its ongoing efforts to elevate and enhance the field of professional development in Jewish education.