

## *Gift #2: A Kaplanian Report Card*

In his chapter on Jewish education in Judaism as a Civilization Kaplan lays out his own vision of what a successful Jewish education might look like. In the attached “Kaplanian report card” I have tried to simplify his language and capture the core of each his concerns. I think this broad vision can serve as a useful mirror to where we have come to in 2016/5777 in Jewish education.

Of course I am using “report card” as a kind of hyperbole or metaphor. I am rather sure that the qualities that account for a fully realized dynamic vision of Jewish education cannot be “graded”. Ideas like kedusha/holiness, amiut (peoplehood), tzionut (Zionism), and tikun olam (word transformation) defy easy benchmarking.

Over the years, however, the report card has created much conversation for both Reconstructionist and non-Reconstructionist groups of educators I have taught. So I invite educators to use this educational tool in their own work as they prepare for the school year of 5777.

Mordecai Kaplan was very conversant with the educational philosophies of John Dewey. This linkage suggests two different ways to utilize the resource. Dewey was very aware that educational evaluation was inevitably two processes in creative, dialectic tension with one another. The Latin etymology of to “value” something hints at these two processes. Read one way evaluate means to “prize”. Read a second way it can mean to “measure against some higher standard. “

Your education committee or synagogue board could benefit from either of these processes. “To prize” would mean to follow the lead of the folks at Case Western Reserve University who pioneered the various methodologies of “appreciative inquiry”. It is critically important to appreciate a community’s educational strengths, to value successes. “Naming” these achievements can help any governing body feel more positive about their educational work. It can also provide the building blocks for future growth.

Clearly, “evaluate” also means to hold to a higher standard. In regard to each of the five arenas noted in Kaplan’s chapter on education in Judaism as a Civilization there is room for improvement and creative growth. Noting these arenas of challenge and positive growth can provide a road map for specific initiatives the community might launch during the coming year. The mantra of the Mandel foundation over the last several decades is very helpful in relationship to these imagined possibilities: Think Big and Act Small in the initial stages of the work.

For simplicity sake you might forego the work spaces that pertain to a local or Reconstructionist or national community and just discuss your own synagogue community.

Another possibility for going more deeply is to redo the rubrics for evaluating the five criteria for success to

My own Jewish education

The Jewish education of my children or grandchildren

Our synagogue education community.

For groups desiring the bigger picture we have attached a file with the results of a North American survey of individuals taking the survey.

After completing the process you might want to compare the results of your group with a national survey of some 60 lay leaders, Jewish educators, and Rabbis. The results of that survey is below the report card.

## A Kaplanian Report Card

*Based on the criteria for a successful Jewish education suggested by Kaplan in his chapter on Jewish education in Judaism as a Civilization (1934)*

*Assign grades 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest) for each of the following based on your subjective/gut assessment of where we stand today in Jewish education in 2015 and beyond*

	My Shul/School (or my own Jewish education)	The Reconstructionist Community or my Local Community (or my child or grandchild's Jewish education)	North American Jewish Community
Understand and Appreciate Hebrew Language and Literature			
Practice Jewish Ethical and Religious Values			
Participate in Jewish Life			
Give Artistic Expression to Jewish Values			
Cultivate Jewish Ideals and Role-Models			

*National Survey for Comparison*

Ratings gleaned from 60 respondents (approximately equal numbers of Jewish educators, rabbis, and lay leaders)

Criteria for success taken from Kaplan's chapter on Jewish Education in 1934 *Judaism as a Civilization*

Grades A (5) to F (1)

	My Shul/School	The Reconstructionist Community or my Local Community	North American Jewish Community
Understand and Appreciate Hebrew Language and Literature	3.2	3.4	2.5
Practice Jewish Ethical and Religious Values	4.2	4.4	3.0
Participate in Jewish Life	4.1	4.2	3.0
Give Artistic Expression to Jewish Values	4.0	4.0	3.3

Cultivate Jewish Ideals and Role-Models	4.1	4.3	3.4
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## 2. Composite Scores/Patterns across all Five Goals

Synagogues across all Goals : 3.94

Local/Recon community: 3.94

North American: 3.20

## 3. Composite Score Across Three Settings for Each Goal

Knowledge and Appreciation of Hebrew Language 3.0

Participate in Jewish Life 3.7

Practice Jewish Ethical and Religious Values 3.8

Give Artistic Expression in Jewish Life 3.7

Cultivate Jewish Ideals and Role Models 3.9

## 4. Collectively from lowest to highest grade

Knowledge and Appreciation of Hebrew

Participate in Jewish Life and Give Artistic Expression to Jewish Life

Practice Jewish Ethical and Religious Value

Cultivate Jewish Ideals and Role Models

5. Three patterns to note

---grades higher for their Jewish home community than wider Jewish world

--- according to a think-tank of educators, rabbi, and lay leaders who had the first crack at interpreting these results we are “soft graders”; Kaplan himself would have issued a much less positive report.

---unsurprisingly, knowledge and appreciation of Hebrew is the underachiever among the Kaplanian goals. One shudders to think what the grade might have been had Kaplan focused on “hebrew language skills” rather than “knowledge and appreciation” (but perhaps that is the value of revisiting the vision as most of our efforts are geared to skills; what would it be like if our Hebraic efforts were truly about knowledge and appreciation rather than mastery?).