Visions of Jewish Education

This book is intended to stimulate the philosophical consideration of Jewish existence in our time as reflected in Jewish education, its alternative visions, its purposes and instrumentalities, the values it should serve, and the personal and social character it ought to foster.

Prevalent conceptions and practices of Jewish education are neither sufficiently reflective nor thoroughgoing enough to meet the multiple challenges that the world now poses to Jewish existence and continuity. New efforts are needed to develop an education of the future that will both honor the riches of the Jewish past and grasp the opportunities for fruitful interaction with the general culture of the present.

To promote such efforts, leading scholars formulate their variant visions of an ideal Jewish education for the contemporary world. This groundbreaking book also illustrates the translation of educational ideas into practice and reports on a sustained effort to articulate such ideas as embodied in a particular school’s ongoing activities.

Intended to stimulate others to engage in a philosophical re-envisioning of Jewish life and learning, Visions of Jewish Education also should provide a new approach to reform efforts in general education as well as in the education systems of various religious and ethnic communities.

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Visions of Jewish Education

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Who is wise?
He who envisions the future.

Babylonian Talmud, Tamid 32a

To Jack, Joseph, and Morton Mandel

Men of vision
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Preface and Acknowledgments

Jewish learning has profound roots and far-reaching implications. Yet Jewish education is often treated in local and prosaic terms, concerned with means rather than ends, with instrumentalities rather than ideas. This book represents an effort to deepen and broaden the enterprise of Jewish education by eliciting variant visions of its rationale and import, relating educational activities to their bases in the learning of the past and in reflective anticipation of the future. We hope the book will stimulate philosophical approaches to education by all, whether Jewish or not, who consider themselves stewards of a precious heritage responsible for its creative preservation and renewal.

Our book is a product of intensive and continuous collaboration over a period of many years. We are jointly and fully responsible for every chapter not signed by a particular author.

We thank the various scholars who wrote the signed chapters. Without their essential contributions, there would have been no volume at all. We are grateful to the group of Jewish educators who participated in our deliberations. We are happy to acknowledge the work of our outstanding editor, Nessa Rapoport, of the Mandel Foundation, who was an active partner in developing the plan and content of the volume as a whole; we could not have brought the book to successful completion without her acumen and dedication. We also thank these members of the staff of the Mandel Foundation: Dr. Erin Henriksen, our assistant editor, for her excellent work and unfaltering devotion; Rabbi Jeffrey Saks for his thoughtful and critical reading of the manuscript; and Chava Sagiv, for her dedicated research and technical support.

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Preface and Acknowledgments

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About the Mandel Foundation

The Mandel Foundation was established in 1963 by Jack, Joseph, and Morton Mandel, of Cleveland, Ohio. The primary mission of the Foundation is to help provide outstanding leadership for the nonprofit world. The Foundation supports leadership education programs in its own institutions and at selected universities and organizations. It has these areas of priority: higher education; Jewish education and continuity; the leadership and management of nonprofit organizations; and urban neighborhood renewal.

The Mandel Foundation approach to philanthropy is characterized by a conviction that exceptional leaders, professional and volunteer, are the critical factor in contributing significantly to community and society. Such leaders are guided by a powerful vision of the future that is inspired by profound ideas, translated into clear purposes, and energized by imaginative resolutions to today’s problems. The Foundation also believes in searching for long-term, systemic solutions to problems, involving thoughtful planning, careful implementation, and rigorous evaluation.

The Foundation is committed to leadership education programs that cultivate vision and link compelling ideas to sound policy and effective outcomes. The conception and curriculum of these programs draw on ideas from a range of disciplines, including philosophy, education, Jewish studies, social sciences, policy studies, and social work, among others.

The Foundation supports the Mandel School in Jerusalem, an independent institution of higher learning whose mission is the recruitment, preparation, and placement of senior professional leaders for education and public service in Israel, North America, and globally.