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# INNOVATION

## The First Idea is Rarely the Best Idea



BY SIMON KLARFELD

*Deliberate consideration of who to invite into conversation about an innovation is valuable. Although it is a less direct path to implementation, the experimentation, tweaking, and ninety-degree turns enrich results.*

**THE FIRST STEPS** of a creative act are like groping in the dark: random and chaotic, feverish and fearful, a lot of busy-ness with no apparent or definable end in sight. There is nothing yet to research. For me, these moments are not pretty. I look like a desperate woman, tortured by the simple message thumping away in my head: "You need an idea."...You need a tangible idea to get you going. The idea, however miniscule, is what turns the verb into a noun—paint into a painting, sculpt into sculpture, write into writing, dance into a dance.

— Twyla Tharp, *The Creative Habit: Learn It And Use It For Life: A Practical Guide* (Simon & Schuster, Inc., 2003), <http://www.twylatharp.org/bio.shtml>

If we consider different modalities of creative expression, we find that in every single one, there is hardly ever one singular and direct path to success. In jazz music, for example, artists will often speak to their most prolific works being born out of a kernel of an idea but not fully developed until trying out different syncopated rhythms, crescendos, and diminuendos. They hope that those riffs will resonate with the audience in an attempt to help them connect with the music.

To up the ante even further, jazz musicians will strengthen the depth of their work by adding in other musicians to "comment" on their primary melody, bringing different textures, voices, and rhythms to create an entirely different experience for the listener.

As an educator, we always need to determine who or what will be the best members of our ensemble. Who will bring vibrancy to the texts we read or to the curriculum that we develop in order for our audience (students/ community) to have the best possible learning experience?

In determining your ensemble you should consider inviting people you trust, who aren't outright naysayers, and people who

on the one hand think alike but on the other hand are diverse enough in their experiences and creative outlets that you are not speaking to yourself. Ideally they may be your professional colleagues, but they could also be a member of your family, a friend, a “veteran,” or a mentor.

If we work with the assumption that collaboration is the best way to achieve the best ideas, then our best work will no doubt come from a discourse that is rich in diversity of people, concepts, and values.

We also must consider the best environment in which the ensemble can bond and the music of our teaching can flow. Toward that end, the successful evolution of an idea, which will ultimately allow an initial raw concept to develop into a rich meaningful experience, needs to be developed in a physical and mental space that allows for creativity, risk taking, reflection, and finessing. When choosing a space, consider the difference between a sterile classroom and a lake-side gazebo.

Once you have your kernel of an idea, the ensemble gathered, and your best location to work within, there are three things you can do:

1. Experiment with the idea—flesh it out, try it out, asses it, see what might work and what definitely won't.
2. Adapt it, tweak it, look at it from a different perspective, improve it, and then record it and put it aside, allowing time to start again fresh to make sure that you haven't missed any big ideas.
3. Take a ninety-degree turn—use your working assumption, but implement it in a different way. Take your core educational theme that you want to explore with your *chanichim* (students) and change a key variable (location, time period,

or tone). Lastly we can learn a great deal from others outside our immediate world, who can help shed light on our approach. A look at the diverse representation within the Project InCITE (<http://www.projectincite.blogspot.com>) cohort underscores this point. ■

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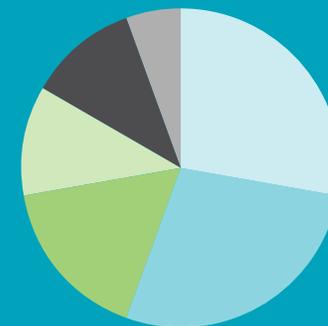
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## INSTITUTIONAL REPRESENTATION IN PROJECT INCITE

Representation includes JCCs, Synagogues, National Organizations, Youth Movements, Day Schools, Israel trips, Online Learning.



- Reform
- Non Denominational
- Zionist
- Orthodox
- Conservative
- Progressive