Disability Awareness: A PBL (Project Based Learning) Lesson
By Diane W. Zimmerman

WHAT IS PROJECT BASED LEARNING (PBL)?

Project Based Learning is a teaching strategy that enriches student learning through inquiry. It begins with a driving question—an authentic query about a meaningful topic for students—and it ends with learners presenting the results of their work in a public forum, oftentimes in a venue other than the classroom. Because PBL gives students a voice in the learning process and capitalizes on their natural desire to learn, it holds special promise for Jewish education. When well implemented, project based learning activities will enable students to acquire a deeper understanding of and make personal connections to their Jewish heritage.

IMPLEMENTING PBL: SEVEN EASY STEPS

1. The teacher identifies a content area for the project, and goals and objectives to be achieved.
2. The teacher develops a driving question that not only is related to a real-world problem, but also has authentic meaning for the students.
3. With guidance from the teacher, students generate questions they must answer to solve the problem.
4. With input from students, the teacher creates a timeline for the project and communicates it to students and parents.
5. Students research answers to the questions, reading textbooks and newspapers, searching online resources, conducting interviews, taking field trips, etc. Learning happens at school and at home.
6. Teachers and students continually evaluate the learning process.
7. Students present their results in a public forum, such as an assembly, a museum exhibit, a newspaper article, or a webpage.

USING PBL FOR TEACHING JEWISH VALUES

Project based learning is an excellent tool for engaging your students in learning that has an authentic and meaningful purpose that will relate to their lives inside and outside of school. The planning process is outlined in a graphic organizer, which can be used as a template for future PBL plans.

Note: Teachers need to prepare the student inquiry process and might want to choose the presentation format before presenting the project idea to the class. Students must feel that

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the project is an authentic inquiry and not just another assignment. Consider using the Online Learning Center, where students can share research with group members, blog about issues related to the project, and even present the final project.

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<th>Project Title:</th>
<th>Disability Awareness: Lifnei Iver Lo Titen Michshol (do not put a stumbling block before the blind)</th>
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<td>Overview:</td>
<td>Students will apply the Jewish value of lifnei iver lo titen michshol, do not put a stumbling block before the blind, by creating a plan for making their synagogue more accessible to everyone.</td>
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| Driving Question: | The driving question focuses the project from start to finish and should be relevant to students’ lives.  
Jewish Disability Awareness Month (February) helps remind the synagogue community to think about those who might have challenges when entering the synagogue building or accessing their services. The Jewish value of lifnei iver lo titen michshol, do not a stumbling block in front of the blind, reminds us that making our synagogue and schools accessible to all is a core Jewish value.  
How can we help guide our synagogue in creating a space that is accessible to all and emulates the Jewish value of lifnei iver lo titen michshol? |
| Goal(s):      | Students apply the Jewish value of lifnei iver lo titen michshol, do not put a stumbling block before the blind, to their own synagogue and/or school. |
| Special Note: | February is Jewish Disability Awareness month, but this PBL can be done at any time. This PBL may also be tweaked to incorporate an end product of the students’ interest instead of the one suggested in this PBL. Alternative end product suggestions are provided below. |
| Timing:       | Number of learning sessions: 4 – 10 (depending on the amount of depth desired and the presentation format)  
Class time per session: 40 – 60 minutes |

**Introduction to the study and project (creates a need for the learning)**

It is important that students feel excited about the project and commit themselves to it. They should feel that the project is relevant to a real-life concern, and that it is not merely an assignment from a teacher. The need for the project might come from the students themselves, be brought to the students’ attention by the teacher, or be made relevant by a request from the synagogue leadership.

The PBL should start with the teacher creating the need to learn, and then encouraging the students to use their natural desire of inquiry to go to the next steps. Suggested introduction to create the need to know:

- A member of the synagogue leadership team brings the concern of accessibility to the class and asks the students to provide input.
- A student may come to class on crutches, and the need for accessibility might become relevant to his/her classmates. This need might also come from having a student who is hard of hearing, blind, in a wheelchair, etc. in the class and the students begin to realize there is a need for the synagogue or school to be more accessible.

### Enduring Understanding

The Enduring Understanding is what we want students to take away at the end of the project and should be the focus of the learning.

The Jewish value of *lifnei iver lo titen michshol*, do not put a stumbling block before the blind, guides decisions on how we treat people with disabilities.

### Learning Objectives and Student Inquiry

When using PBL, learning is based on the students’ need to know. Teachers, however, must develop learning objectives in advance.

Students will...

- Apply the study of Jewish text to disability awareness within their own synagogue or school.
- Compare the treatment of people with disabilities in today’s world to the guidance provided in our ancient Jewish texts.
- Examine the accessibility status of their own synagogue or school and make recommendations for change.
- Put themselves in the place of a person with disabilities and attempt to access various parts of the synagogue/school.

The project begins with the students developing a list of questions that will guide their learning. For example:

- Why was Jewish Disability Awareness Month started?
- What do our ancient texts say about people who are disabled?
- What do our ancient texts say about how we should treat people who are disabled?
- How is our synagogue accessible to all, and in what ways is it not accessible?
- How can we work to improve our synagogue’s or school’s accessibility?
- How do I treat people who are disabled? How should I treat them?
- What is it like to have a disability and want to access our synagogue or school?

### Suggested Activities to promote the learning process

The learning process is planned by the teacher with input from the students based on their questions (above). Possible learning activities:

- Text study of Jewish sources which provide guidance on how to treat people who are disabled.
- Bring in guest speakers to share their personal experiences with accessibility.
- Role play having a disability and getting around the synagogue/school, and then reflect on this experience.
- Survey the congregation/families to find out what accessibility issues
or concerns they think need to be addressed.

- Perform an accessibility assessment of the synagogue or school.
- Research what changes might be made to the synagogue or school to make it more accessible. Include a cost vs. needs analysis.
- As a class, read a biography or short novel about a Jewish child with a disability and have a class discussion. Suggestions include: *My Invisible World: Life With My Brother, His Disability and His Service Dog* by Morasha Winokur and Donnie Kanter Winokur (Better Endings New Endings, 2009) (*Fetal Alcoholism*) or *Cakes And Miracles: A Purim Tale* by Barbara Diamond Goldin and Jaime Zollars (Marshall Cavendish Corporation, 2010) (*Blindness*)
- Watch *Praying with Lior* (First Run Features, 2009), (boy with Down Syndrome & his faith) and have a follow-up discussion. For more information about the DVD: [http://www.prayingwithlior.com/](http://www.prayingwithlior.com/)

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<th>Resources for Student Study</th>
<th>All of the following resources are ready to download and print: <a href="http://www.behrmanhouse.com/rl/disability-awareness-a-pbl-project-based-learning-lesson">www.behrmanhouse.com/rl/disability-awareness-a-pbl-project-based-learning-lesson</a></th>
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<td>Getting Ready to Learn about Disability Awareness:</td>
<td>An introductory exercise to find out what the students know, and to help them begin to inquire about the Jewish value of <em>lifnei iver lo titen michshol</em>, do not put a stumbling block before the blind. Consider using the same or a similar worksheet at the end of the project to help assess student learning and thinking.</td>
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<td>Text Study #1:</td>
<td>A resource page with texts and a student worksheet to help students understand how our texts are a guide to how we treat people with disabilities.</td>
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<td>Text Study #2:</td>
<td>A resource page with texts and a student worksheet to help students understand the role of the community in disability awareness and accessibility.</td>
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<th>Planning an Authentic End Product:</th>
<th><em>PBL end products must be authentic, and therefore address a real need. End products should be presented in a venue beyond the classroom, if possible.</em></th>
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| Students will present recommendations on ways to make their synagogue or school more accessible to people with disabilities. This might be done by: | - Creating a video presentation or PowerPoint presentation  
  - Presenting to the synagogue or school lay leadership team  
  - Writing an article for the synagogue or school newsletter |

Students may also choose to increase disability awareness within the school. End product ideas include:

- Create a book for younger children that may help them understand people who have disabilities.
- Create art work (with the help of the art teacher or a guest artist) to reflect on their personal feelings about their learning. This could be individual projects or a large class project such as a mural.
- Create skits that can be used to teach others about disability awareness.
- Create a video that teaches others about disability awareness.

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<th>Reflection and Evaluation:</th>
<th>Students and teachers should engage in reflection and evaluation during the project and also when it’s completed.</th>
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<td>Student Reflection and Evaluation:</td>
<td>During the learning stages: How well am I working with my group (helpfulness, sharing ideas, treating others with respect)? What do I plan to do next to help my group? What other information do we need to further our research? After the project: What did I learn about the Jewish value of lifnei iver lo titen michshol? Why is lifnei iver lo titen michshol an important Jewish value to others/to me? How will my understanding of lifnei iver lo titen michshol, guide my thinking and actions?</td>
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<td>Teacher Reflection and Evaluation:</td>
<td>During the project (with the purpose of providing students with feedback, and to adjust the project as needed): Rate students’ level of engagement and ability to work individually and in a group: Are the students learning the essential information about Disability Awareness from a Jewish perspective? Have they acquired the background needed to understand the importance of disability awareness as a Jewish value? After the project: Looking back on the process, did the students demonstrate understanding of Jewish value of lifnei iver lo titen michshol? Did the end product reflect this knowledge? Do you believe students will be more cognizant of the value of lifnei iver lo titen michshol in their own personal decisions? How well did the students work as a group? What would you do differently next time?</td>
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