

# Peoplehood Education – Pardes/Delet Retreat

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## Chicagoland Jewish High School

**Location:** Chicago, United States

**Website:** <http://www.cjhs.org/>

At most Jewish schools, Jewish education remains confined to the classroom and ceremonies. At Chicagoland the goal is to prepare students “to live Judaism as responsible and involved citizens in the modern world.”

Chicagoland staff strives to create “a dogma free institution” by creating spaces for students with different Jewish identities to talk together. “The goal is for each kid can develop their own voice and gain the ability to participate in informed dialogue and collaborate with others in building a Jewish community.” A successful graduate will seek to be part of the larger Jewish community in college and adult life.

The school seeks to create a microcosm of the broader Jewish community where the students are able to develop social, leadership and ritual skills and knowledge for a Jewish life. Informal and formal education are designed to complement one another in order to generate a lived experience of being part of a larger global Jewish collective.

### **Informal education**

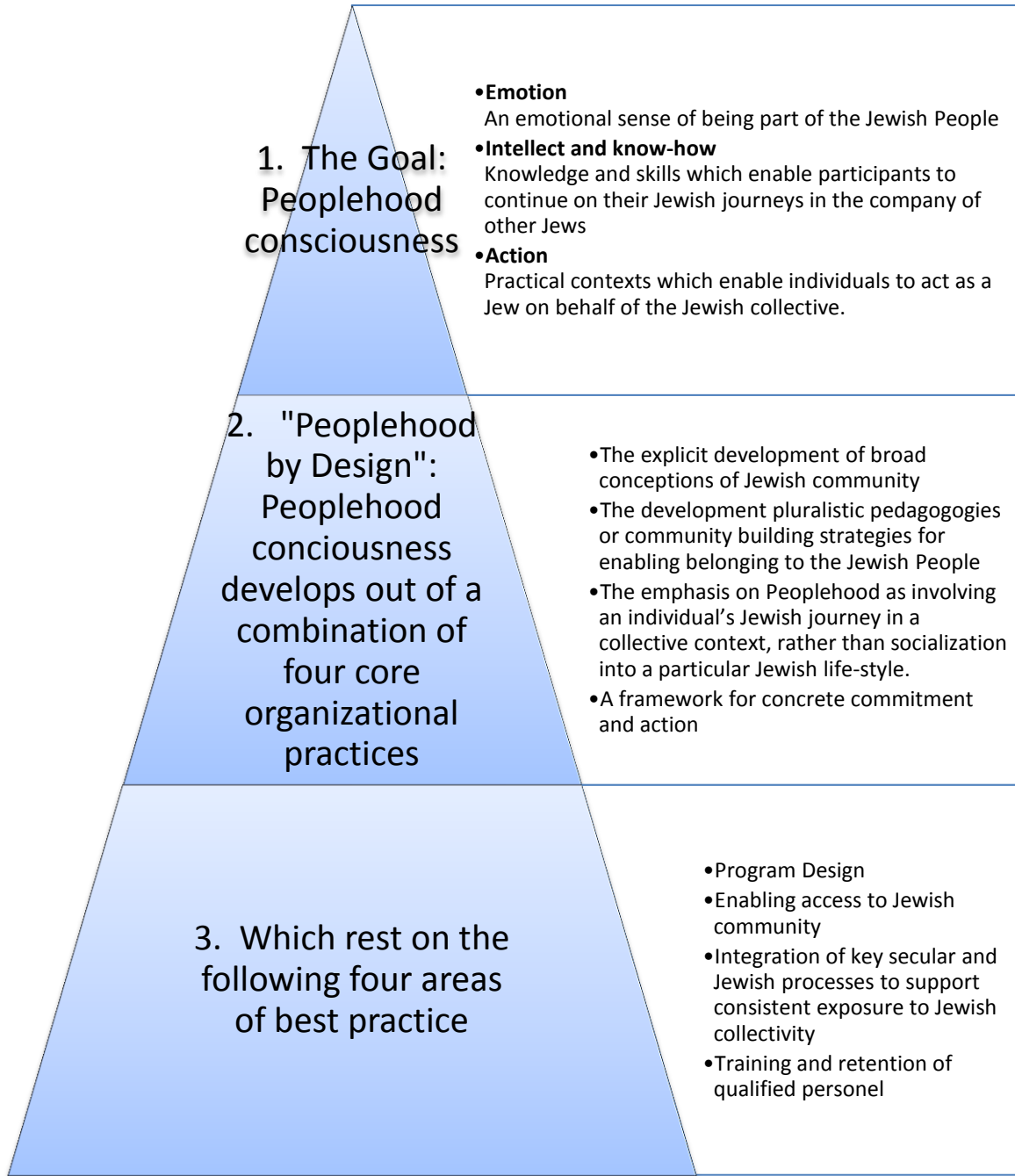
Students are partners in building the school. Students initiate and run social action and community development initiatives. Israel education is a large part of the school’s culture, including a senior year Israel trip with extensive pre and post educational activity in school and partnership programming with the Kiryat Gat community in Israel.

### **Formal education**

Jewish Studies are designed to encourage critical thinking which enables students to draw on skills and knowledge to pursue a Jewish life which is meaningful to them. Whether Talmud, Tanach, modern Jewish thought or contemporary Jewish society the goals is for students to ask “what does this mean for me.”

**David Mittelberg (forthcoming 2010), "Jewish Peoplehood Education,"** in H. Miller, L. Grant, L. and A. Pomson (eds). *The International Handbook of Jewish Education*, Springer, The Netherlands.

- ✓ Jewish peoplehood education enhances the identity of Jews by virtue of the connectivity between different types of Jews.
- ✓ Jewish peoplehood education seeks to discover commonalities among Jews from different countries out of respect for differences between them.
- ✓ Jewish peoplehood education is propelled by soft ideology and seeks to build bonding social capital between Jews of different ideological persuasions and different backgrounds.
- ✓ Jewish peoplehood education recognizes the importance of the Hebrew language and culture but engages Jews in a multi-lingual framework.
- ✓ Jewish peoplehood education is symmetrical, reciprocal and mutual, thereby laying the groundwork for synergy within the global Jewish community.
- ✓ Jewish peoplehood education strives to establish transnational frameworks of activity amongst school populations that include students, teachers, parents and community institutions, thereby striving to generate communities that are infused with a strong sense of belonging to a global Jewish people.
- ✓ Pedagogic goals of Jewish peoplehood education for participants include emotional commitment, reciprocal knowledge, caring and engagement based on global Jewish literacy.
- ✓ Jewish peoplehood education occurs in an environment where multiple identities are valued as a virtue, constituting recurrent transnational personal Jewish relationships, embedded in institutionalized school-to-school partnership relationships.



## PEOPLEHOOD CHECKLIST FOR EDUCATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Jewish Peoplehood practices within the education sector is a subset that is represented in its most coherent and advanced state when an organization views Jewish learning as the engine for wider processes of Jewish belonging to local and global Jewish community.

### Individual

A common theme among Peoplehood organizations is the rejection of the idea that Jewish learning is only “Ishma” – “learning for its own sake.” While increasing an individual’s desire to engage in Jewish learning is important, Peoplehood education also includes the following goals:

- ✓ Jewish learning is viewed as relevant for an individual’s social, family or professional life
- ✓ Beyond personal Jewish growth, Jewish learning imbues the ability and desire of an individual to seek out interaction with other Jews in contexts outside of the classroom
- ✓ Jewish learning provides deep awareness of belonging to the Jewish People and motivates an individual to contribute to Jewish community and society as an agent of the Jewish People.

### **Community**

Peoplehood education does not rest on a narrow relationship between teacher and student but occurs in the context of community.

- ✓ Peoplehood education is not a “discipline,” but is a core process for enabling dynamic and meaningful experience of living in a Jewish community
- ✓ Individuals are empowered to serve as communal leaders with an expanded understanding of themselves as representing the good of the broader Jewish community
- ✓ Peoplehood educators do not overly commit to a particular Jewish ideology. The goal is not to promulgate a particular Jewish way of life but rather to motivate the student to continue to pursue his or her personal Jewish journey in the context of Jewish community.

### **Organization**

Jewish Peoplehood organizations predicate their success on providing educational frameworks that serve as a gateway into Jewish community and motivate individuals to intensify their life-long Jewish journeys.

- ✓ The organization puts resources into Jewish learning opportunities for their professionals. Life-long Jewish learning is vital for professionals and lay leaders to develop and maintain a vibrant Jewish vision of the organization.
- ✓ Success is predicated on:
  - Providing an enabling framework for intensive and meaningful Jewish experiences which occur in the company of Jews of different backgrounds
  - Nurturing a sense of commitment to other Jews locally and globally
  - Developing a normative sense of lived pluralistic Judaism, which might include a commitment to religious practice but goes beyond.

Jewish learning is not limited to classrooms and acquisition of disciplinary based knowledge; rather, there is an explicit attempt to link Jewish learning to Jewish life through a mix of formal and informal educational techniques (see Chicagoland Jewish High School case study on previous page).