

## Blog Post: Rethinking Jewish Identity: Questions and Thoughts from Day 1

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What happens when you get about 45 sociologists, educators, historians, scholars of literature, and people who work in philanthropic foundations in one room to talk about Jewish identity? What happens when they challenge assumptions about what “Jewish identity” means, and how the concept works in the Jewish community and in Jewish educational settings?

We’re finding out now, at our conference on [Rethinking Jewish Identity and Jewish Education](#).

When I invited [participants](#) to share their thoughts and questions at the end of the first day (Sunday, March 30), here’s some of what they offered:

- If and when we talk the language of good/bad, who sets the standard for what is considered good? According to whose educational vision?
- With all the idiosyncratic, individualistic forms of identity now expressed and valued, what, if any, glue is there among the Jewish people? What is shared?
- Is the language of “measurement” too constraining? Do we take sufficient responsibility for the (educational or mis-educational) effects of our social scientific interventions?
- What does it look like when educators think they are fostering (or some other verb) Jewish identity – as oppose to teaching or some other construction? Does it make a difference to practice?
- In thinking about the person with a practical identity – for example, a teacher, but maybe a Jew – what would the person say and/or do, or not say and/or do to cease being a teacher?
- Does it matter if the (woman) teacher says “ani rozeh” and not “ani rozah,” i.e., if she makes a grammatical mistake? If it does, why does it?
- How does written language (especially text creation) fit into “The Language of Jewish Identity”? Written language includes revision, so perhaps greater intentionality, as well as greater permanence?
- I wonder what happens if we can’t even define Jewish identity. There’s something

that feels simultaneously critically important and terrifying about this conversation.

- How might the conversation in this room get “pushed” both up (to funders and communal leaders) and down (to our students who are the future leaders)?
- How do Jewish institutions and ideologies interpolate subjects who then are “Jews”? I.e., in what sense does someone naming you as a Jew or calling you a Jew turn you into a Jew?
- The most useful thing today was Eli Gottlieb’s dissection of how misshapen metaphors structure our chaotic, unreflective approach to education.
- I don’t understand why it matters if we (or educators) mix our metaphors about Jewish identity. So what?