

Blog Post: You Never Know Where an Idea Can Go

By Sarah Birkeland
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Ever wonder where an idea goes? It might just travel half way around the world!

Last week we had the pleasure of hosting a small delegation from the Israeli Ministry of Education. Gila Nagar, Deputy Director General responsible for teacher education and professional development, and Shlomit Amichai, director of Teach for Israel and former Director General at the Ministry, joined us at the Mandel Center for a morning of lively conversation about their work and ours.



Sharon Feiman-Nemser, Sarah Birkeland, Shlomit Amichai, Gila Nagar

They came to discuss recent reforms to teacher preparation, induction and professional development in Israel, including much tighter integration among these three previously separate processes. New teachers now receive three years of mentoring and professional development targeted toward their specific needs. Experienced teachers pursue individual growth plans within a shared overall framework of effective instruction. The changes they described were far reaching and impressive.

Where did the impetus to rethink Israel's approach to teacher development come from?

Gila Nagar pinpointed it exactly: a talk that Mandel Center Director Sharon Feiman-Nemser gave, and Gila attended, in 2005 at the Mandel Leadership Institute in Jerusalem. In that talk Sharon introduced the idea of a professional learning continuum to strengthen and sustain teaching. In Gila's words, "Sharon is widely admired in Israel and when issues related to teacher preparation, mentoring, and induction get discussed, she is considered the most authoritative voice in the field. After hearing her lecture and reading her work about the teacher development continuum I was inspired to start moving forward the current professional development reform in Israel to provide effective support through teachers' entire careers."

The continuum of professional learning is a straightforward idea: *teachers learn to teach over time, beginning with initial preparation and continuing on the job.* Yet it flies in the face of our deepest assumptions about teaching and learning to teach. The stark division between pre-service and in-service teacher education in this country, and the current push to evaluate schools of education based on their graduates' performance, both imply that teachers should learn how to teach before they enter the classroom. And we have a long way to go before all schools are good places for teacher learning as well as student learning. The idea of a continuum of teacher learning is only beginning to gain traction in the US, but Israel is off and running. Kol ha kavod, Gila and Shlomit. And kol ha kavod, Sharon. Keep having those good ideas; you never know where they might go!