

Becoming an ‘Offensive Lineman of the Jewish Sport of Identity Formation’

Bradley Cohen, RHSOE '09

People often ask me why I am not becoming a rabbi. Growing up I had plenty of opportunities to develop my leadership skills. I attended an HUC-JIR Cincinnati trip, was a member of NFTY, and went to the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism in Washington, DC, but it was not until my senior year of high school that I realized that being a Jewish educator could be a possibility for my path in life.

My journey began as a seventeen-year-old *madrich* in a 5th-grade religious school classroom, where I enjoyed getting to know the kids but was often bored. As I bonded with the students I noticed that they were also bored by the methods that the teacher used. I wanted to find a way to help inspire the students to love Judaism the way I did.

One of my mentors, Robin Eisenberg, RJE, helped me improve my skills in working with the students. My rabbi, Daniel Levin, N '96, connected me with his classmate, Katherine Schwartz, MAJE/SJCS '96, who invited me to teach at her synagogue.

One of my special interests has been working with students with disabilities. I have volunteered with the Special Olympics and a life skills special education class, and been a manager at an inclusion-based preschool. In my teaching in Jewish Education, I've always asked for the students with disabilities, or behavioral issues, knowing that every child deserves as many opportunities as possible to develop a love for Judaism.

The Rhea Hirsch School of Education is innovatively developing future Jewish leaders in this field with faculty who are modeling cutting-edge techniques. For example, Dr. Isa Aron led our class through a thirty-minute synectics activity (a problem-solving method that stimulates thought processes of which the subject may be unaware) in which we created an analogy for our relationship with the *Torah*. The activity not only taught me the skills to use this method with my own students but it also allowed me to explore my relationship with the *Torah*.

The combination of class work and my professional development internship has helped further develop my skills. My mentor at University Synagogue, Rachel Margolis, MAJE/SJCS '07, is a visionary in the field of Jewish education whose teachers and staff are fully integrated into the synagogue community. She has provided an internship opportunity for me where I can create, learn, lead, and strengthen my abilities.

The Rhea Hirsch School of Education is an intentional, thoughtful, creative, and innovative program that is reshaping Jewish education with a faculty that is passionate about their mission. The Jewish world needs all kinds of players on its team to be successful, and Rhea Hirsch is doing its part to strengthen our people. ■



Bradley Cohen, RHSOE '09, engaging the youngest generation.

I believe that Jewish educators are the ‘offensive linemen of the Jewish sport of identity formation.’ Offensive linemen are known for being in the trenches, working hard, and protecting others; without them the plays could not be successful. Without Jewish educators, Judaism would suffer. We are the leaders who connect with and want to inspire a new generation of Jewish living and learning. I'm not receiving this degree because I want recognition; I am doing this because I want to make the Jewish people stronger.

Over the next five years, I was able to develop my skills as a teacher working at Congregation Har HaShem in Boulder, CO, while studying Speech Pathology and Audiology at the University of Colorado. I was encouraged to develop new programs and projects and had the opportunity for mentorship that helped me grow. Ultimately, I wanted to be a stronger Jewish leader and realized that the Rhea Hirsch School of Education was a place that could help me achieve my goal.

