

WE PLANT SEEDS



*A How-to Guide for Effective Jewish
Service-learning Programs*

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MODULE 6

EDUCATION JUSTICE

INTRODUCTION

One of the clearest ways that poverty and racism impact the lives of low income families and people of color is through hugely disparate outcomes in educational success. According to the Teacher's College at Columbia University, by the end of fourth grade, African American, Latino, and poor students of all races are two years behind behind their wealthier, predominantly white peers in reading and math. By eighth grade, they have slipped three years behind, and by twelfth grade, four years behind. In addition, Black¹ students are only about half as likely (and Hispanics about one-third as likely) as white students to earn a bachelor's degree by age 29. While these inequities are a symptom, rather than a root cause, they are a symptom with broad ranging implications for the lives of young people and families. In this module, we will explore the issue of educational inequity as well as what Jewish tradition has to say about this issue. This module includes:

- I. Understanding Educational Inequity
- II. Mentoring and Tutoring

I. UNDERSTANDING EDUCATIONAL INEQUITY

The texts and activities in this section are designed to help participants better understand educational inequity.

A. TEXT STUDY: EDUCATION AND INDIVIDUAL POTENTIAL

Purpose:

The purpose of this activity is to explore one Jewish perspective on the role of individual potential.

Overview:

This activity is facilitated in two parts - first the group reads the text and then discusses it.

Materials Needed:

- copies of "Text Study: Education and Individual Potential" (Appendix A)

Length of Activity:

15 minutes

Procedure:

1. Text (5 minutes)

The text for this activity is included in Appendix A. Hand out a copy of the text to each participant and have them read individually, in pairs or take turns reading it aloud.

2. Discussion (10 minutes)

Once the group has read the text, have them discuss the questions included with the text in pairs or in the larger group.

¹ We have chosen to capitalize the term "Black," acknowledging that some individuals prefer this term as their primary cultural/ethnic identifier, while others prefer the term "African American." We did not capitalize "white" because most Americans identifying as white also identify culturally with another country of origin (such as Irish or Polish) whereas many Black Americans whose ancestors were brought to the U.S. as slaves do not know their families' countries of origin. For two perspectives on this issue please see the following articles:

Tharps, Lori L. "The case for Black with a capital B." *The New York Times*. 18 November 2014. Web.
Pitner, B.H. The discussion on capitalizing the "B" in "Black" continues. *The Huffington Post*. 02 February 2015. Web.

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B. WALLY ACTIVITY

Purpose:

The purpose of this activity is to explore some of the underlying causes of educational inequity.

Overview:

This activity is facilitated in three parts - first the facilitator frames the activity, then participants create a root cause map and then they debrief the activity.

Materials:

- chart paper with Wally and description (see Appendix B)
- chart paper with Wally at the center
- handout with complete root cause map (Appendix B)
- markers for chart paper

Length of Activity:

35 minutes

Procedure:

A. Frame (5 minutes)

Using the “Wally Activity - Slide 1” (in Appendix B) as your guide, draw the contents of the slide on a piece of chart paper and explain to participants that we’re going to be exploring some possible underlying reasons for his lack of academic success.

B. Root Cause Tree (15 minutes)

On a separate sheet of chart paper, draw a smaller Wally in the middle of the paper. Brainstorm with participants various possible influences on or causes of Wally's reading level. Draw them around Wally. If the group is stuck, you might suggest one or two pathways from the complete root cause map in Appendix B. Trace potential causes as far back as you can. When the group feels they have finished mapping all of the root causes they can, hand out the complete root cause map in Appendix B. As a group note any root causes you missed as well as any your group thought of that are missing from map in the handout.

C. Debrief (15 minutes)

After you do this exercise, point out to the group that we are engaging in the exercise without being experts in the issue we are discussing. As a result, after listing our ideas, we should look at our ideas and ask, what assumptions are we making? What questions would we have to ask or ideas would we need to explore to learn more about this issue?

After discussing the assumptions, debrief the overall activity with the group, using some of the following questions:

- What perspective did engaging in this activity provide on the roots of educational inequity?
- Why is it important to understand root causes when seeking to understand and address a social issue?

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- Given the root cause tree we created, will solutions that focus exclusively on the educational context fully address Wally's challenges? What kinds of solutions might?

C. EDUCATIONAL INEQUITY PRIVILEGE WALK

Purpose:

The purpose of this activity is for participants to have an opportunity to explore the places in their own life where they have or have not experienced privilege - and how those have impacted their educational experience.

Overview:

This activity is facilitated in three parts - first the facilitator provides framing and instructions, then the group does the privilege walk and finally the group debriefs.

Materials Needed:

- 1 copy of Sample Prompts for Educational Inequity Privilege Walk (Appendix C) or your own prompts
- copies of "Privilege Walk Activity" map (Appendix C), if using individual maps
- coins or other small objects, if using individual maps

Length of Activity:

45 minutes

If you want to do this activity but don't have 45 minutes you can shorten it by using fewer prompts.

Note: This activity can be completed by physically walking in the room or using individual map handouts. Completing this activity as a physical walk requires a significant level of vulnerability and trust because responses are visible to the group. If a group doesn't know each other well or at all, it can be difficult to do this activity. In the privilege walk map version of this exercise, participants remain seated and their responses aren't visible to the group. These aspects may make it more appropriate for groups that haven't built trust with each other yet or for groups in which individuals have limited mobility.

Procedure:

1. Framing (5 minutes)

Explain to the group that this activity allows us to more viscerally gauge our own experiences of privilege related to education. Include the following points as framing:

- We're about to do an activity to help us each explore the ways we are and are not privileged and how that has impacted our education
- Differences in power and privilege are part of a larger societal system - none of these prompts concern things within people's personal control
- This activity is meant to:
 - » Help us understand the way systems of privilege related to education function

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- » Develop our awareness of our own privilege in comparison to others, and
- » Help us think about how we can use the privileges we have to create change, rather than to make us feel guilty about our privilege or judged by our lack of privilege
- [If using the privilege walk map:] Moving up is not good and moving down is not bad - while we acknowledge that certain judgments are sometimes attached to some of these prompts and responses, we encourage participants to attempt to suspend these judgments during the activity and, in reflecting on the activity, to ask themselves from where those judgments may come.
- [If doing privilege walk standing up]: Moving forward is not good and moving backward is not bad - while we acknowledge that certain judgments are sometimes attached to some of these prompts and responses, we encourage participants to attempt to suspend these judgments during the activity and, in reflecting on the activity, to ask themselves from where those judgments may come.
- That being said, talking about privilege and personal experiences may bring up strong emotions, and this is a common response.

2. Privilege Walk (20 minutes)

Ask participants to stand shoulder to shoulder facing the same direction in a straight line, without speaking. Instruct them to listen carefully to the statements you will read to them, and take the step required if the statement applies to them. If the statement does not apply to them or they do not want to respond, they can stand still. Use the Privilege Walk prompts in Appendix C for statements (you are of course welcome to pick and choose and/or add your own/adapt).

If needed, reiterate that this may feel uncomfortable. Emphasize to them that all of the statements that will be read concern things beyond their personal control - so while they may raise feelings of shame, embarrassment, defensiveness, etc, they are in fact not things that any of us choose. Encourage them to both notice when they feel uncomfortable, and to participate despite (and because of) their discomfort. At the same time, affirm that the nature of their participation is ultimately their own decision.

3. Discussion (20 minutes)

After you read the last statement, ask participants to remain where they are and to note where they are standing in relation to where others in the group are standing. The following questions can be used for a debrief discussion, either in pairs or as a larger group:

- What did you notice about yourself during the activity?
- Did the activity bring up any emotions for you? In what way?
- To which questions did you feel most uncomfortable responding? Why?
- Which statements did you find most meaningful or eye opening? Why?
- How has our socio-economic status, class, race, religion, gender, and sexual identity impacted our educational experiences?
- How might these factors impact the lives of the students with whom we are volunteering?

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- How can we be sensitive to these factors as mentors/tutors?
- What else can you do with this information in the future?

D. UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES OF STANDARDIZED TESTING (30 MINUTES)

Purpose:

The purpose of this activity is for participants to understand more deeply one facet of educational inequity - standardized testing.

Overview:

This activity is facilitated in two parts - first participants watch a video, then the group discusses together.

Materials:

- Access to an internet capable device to play [Unintended Consequences](#).²

Procedure:

1. Video (10 minutes)

Watch the video [Unintended Consequences](#).

2. Discussion (20 minutes)

Once you've watched the video together, either have folks break up into small groups to discuss or stay in one large group. Share the following questions with the group to guide their discussion:

- What are some of the unintended consequences of standardized testing that were shared in the video?
- In what ways are standardized tests negatively impacting academic success for students?
- Based on what you heard in the video and your own experiences with testing, are standardized tests fair for all students? Why or why not? What role do you think race, cultural background, or how much money a student's family has play in their success on these tests?
- How did the video make you feel?
- What do you think about the recommendations for changing the educational system? Do they seem realistic? Why or why not?
- What can we learn from this video to influence how we work as mentors/tutors?

E. REFLECTIONS ON EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE WRITING PROMPTS

Purpose:

The purpose of this activity is for participants to reflect individually in writing on their own educational experience and how that impacts their service in the education field.

² Race to Nowhere. "Unintended Consequences." Online video clip. *Youtube*. Youtube, 09 March 2011. Web. 05 February 2016.

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Overview:

This activity is facilitated in two parts - first participants journal individually, then the group debriefs together.

Materials Needed:

- paper or journal for each participants
- pens/pencils

Length of Activity:

20 minutes

Procedure:**1. Journaling (10 minutes)**

Give participants time to individually sit and reflect in writing on some of the following questions:

- What teacher most impacted you growing up? How would you be different had you not had them as a teacher?
- What were some of the barriers or challenges you faced in school? Were you able to overcome them? How?
- What did you like about school? What did you not like about school?
- Who did you turn to for support when you were having challenges at school? Were there adults at school you could turn to? In your community? At home?
- How did your home life affect your life at school?

2. Debrief (10 minutes)

Once participants have had time to journal individually, bring the group back together for a debrief using some of the following questions:

- Did anything jump out at you or surprise you in what you wrote?
- How might the educational experiences of the students with whom you are volunteering be similar to your own? How might they be different?
- Reflecting on what you wrote, how do you think your race, gender, sexual identity or how much money your family had impacted your education growing up?

II. MENTORING AND TUTORING

One of the main ways that volunteers often engage in issues of educational inequity is through mentorship and volunteering. The texts and activities in this section explore these roles from both a Jewish and secular perspective.

A. TEXT STUDY: WHAT MAKES A GREAT MENTOR/TUTOR (20-30 MINUTES)

Purpose:

The purpose of this activity is to explore a few Jewish perspectives on what makes a great teacher, mentor and/or tutor.

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Overview:

This activity is facilitated in two parts - first the group reads the text and then discusses it.

Materials Needed:

- copies of Text Study: What Makes a Great Mentor/Tutor (Appendix D)

Procedure:**1. Text(s) (5-15 minutes)**

The texts for this activity are included in Appendix D. Hand out a copy of the texts to each participant and have them read individually, in pairs or take turns reading it out loud. There are a number of texts included - you can pick a few to share with the group, share all of them and let participants choose where to focus, or assign specific texts to pairs/small groups, depending on the needs of your session.

2. Discussion (15 minutes)

Once the group has read the text(s), have them discuss the questions included with the text in pairs or in the larger group.

Note: These texts primarily speak about teachers - however the messages should be equally applicable to tutors and mentors.

B. LEARNING FROM OUR STUDENTS (40 MINUTES)

Purpose:

The purpose of this activity is to explore what we can learn from the students with whom we volunteer.

Overview:

This activity is facilitated in three parts - first the facilitator frames the activity, then the group engages in reading and responding to a variety of texts, then they debrief the activity together.

Materials:

- a copy of each of the texts in “Text Study: Learning from Our Students” (Appendix E), attached to chart paper; leave ample space for people to write on the chart paper
- tape
- markers

Procedure:**1. Framing (5 minutes)**

Hang the sheets of chart paper with the texts around the room. Frame this activity briefly by explaining that we are taking a “page” from our tradition by hanging up pages around the room to respond to, that will look like pages of Talmud once they have our conversations recorded on them. Explain that Talmud is written commentary that contains the conversations and arguments of many thinkers.

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Each page is structured with an original prompt in the center, comments around the original prompt and then a bar of additional commentary on the side. A singular page may document dozens of multifaceted conversations, all of which begin from the original prompt but diverge in many directions.

2. Gallery Walk and Chalk Talk (20 minutes)

Have participants walk around for 10 minutes and comment on the original texts (NOT commenting on each other's comments at first). Then have participants walk around for another 10 minutes commenting on each other's comments.

3. Debrief (15 minutes)

Bring the group back together and ask for volunteers to read out excerpts/recall the discussions on each of the posters. Use some of the following questions to draw out further group discussion:

- Did you notice any common threads or themes?
- Did you notice any differing opinions?
- Did anything you read surprise you?

Then, lead the group in broader conversation using the following questions:

- What kinds of perspectives on education do these texts present? Do you agree or disagree with them?
- What does it mean to learn from our students? How could we do this as mentors/tutors?
- What kinds of relationships do we want to have with our students? How can we build them?

CLOSING

Educational inequity is an enduring issue impacting many communities across the country. The activities in this module provide an opportunity to learn more about these issues, explore them more deeply, and consider how our experiences with education growing up relate to the service we do on the education field.

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APPENDIX A TEXT STUDY: EDUCATION AND INDIVIDUAL POTENTIAL

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Background:

Martin Buber was a 20th century Austrian-born Jewish philosopher best known for his philosophy of dialogue centered on the distinction between the I–Thou relationship and the I–It relationship.

Text:

Every person born into this world brings something new and different, something that never existed before. ... Every single person is a new presence and is called upon to fulfill her particularity.... And it is because this is not done that the Messiah is delayed. - Martin Buber, The Way of Man

Discussion Questions:

- Do you agree with this quote? Why or why not?
- What does this quote have to say about the implications and consequences of educational inequity?

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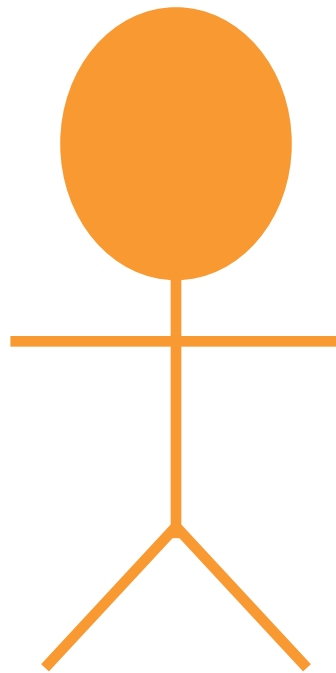
APPENDIX B
WALLY
ACTIVITY

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SLIDE 1 - WALLY

Wally is a 7th grader reading at a 2nd grade level.

Why?

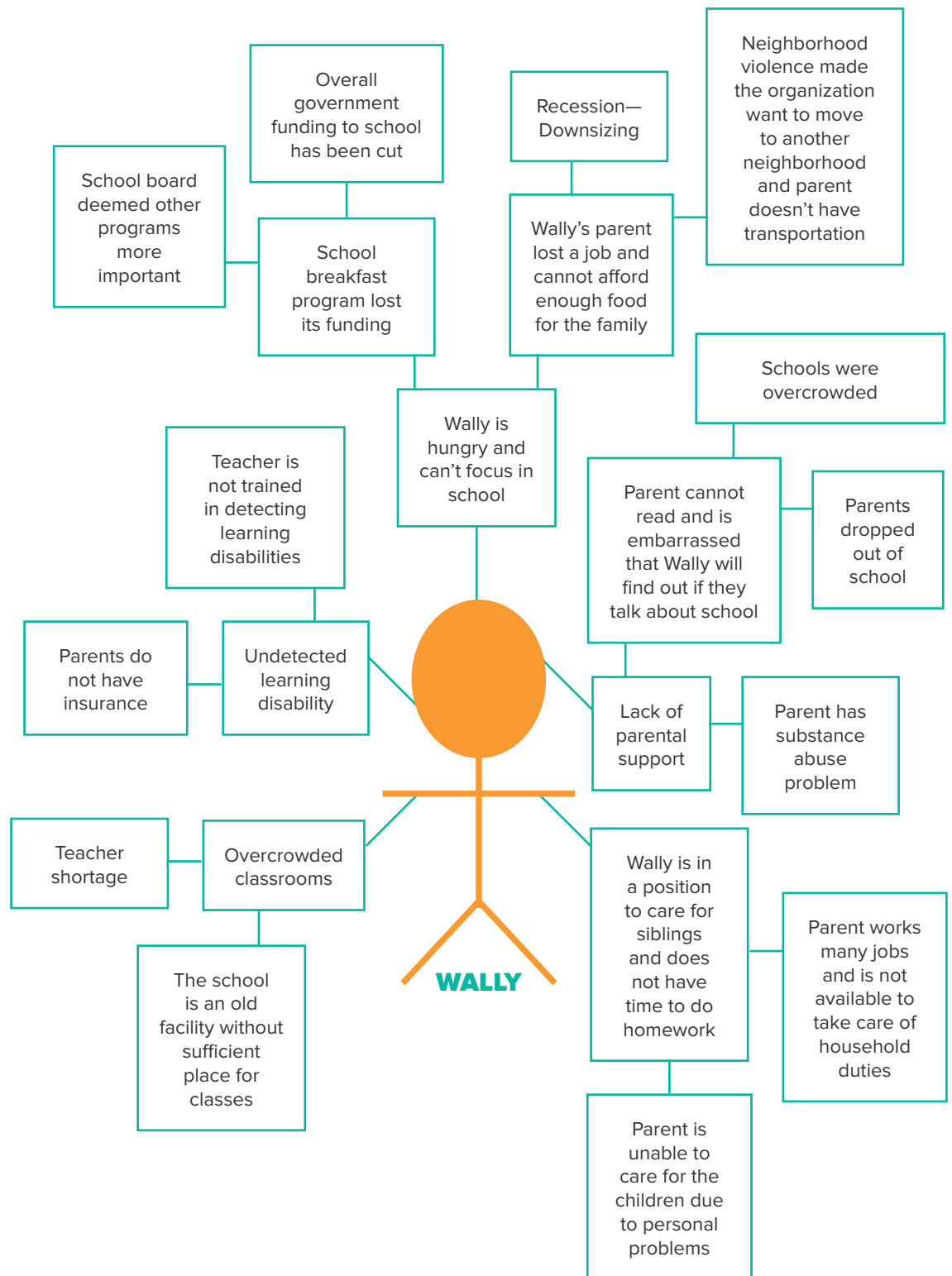


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APPENDIX B WALLY ACTIVITY

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SLIDE 2 - WALLY



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APPENDIX C SAMPLE PROMPTS FOR EDUCA- TIONAL INEQUITY PRIVILEGE WALK

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Notes:

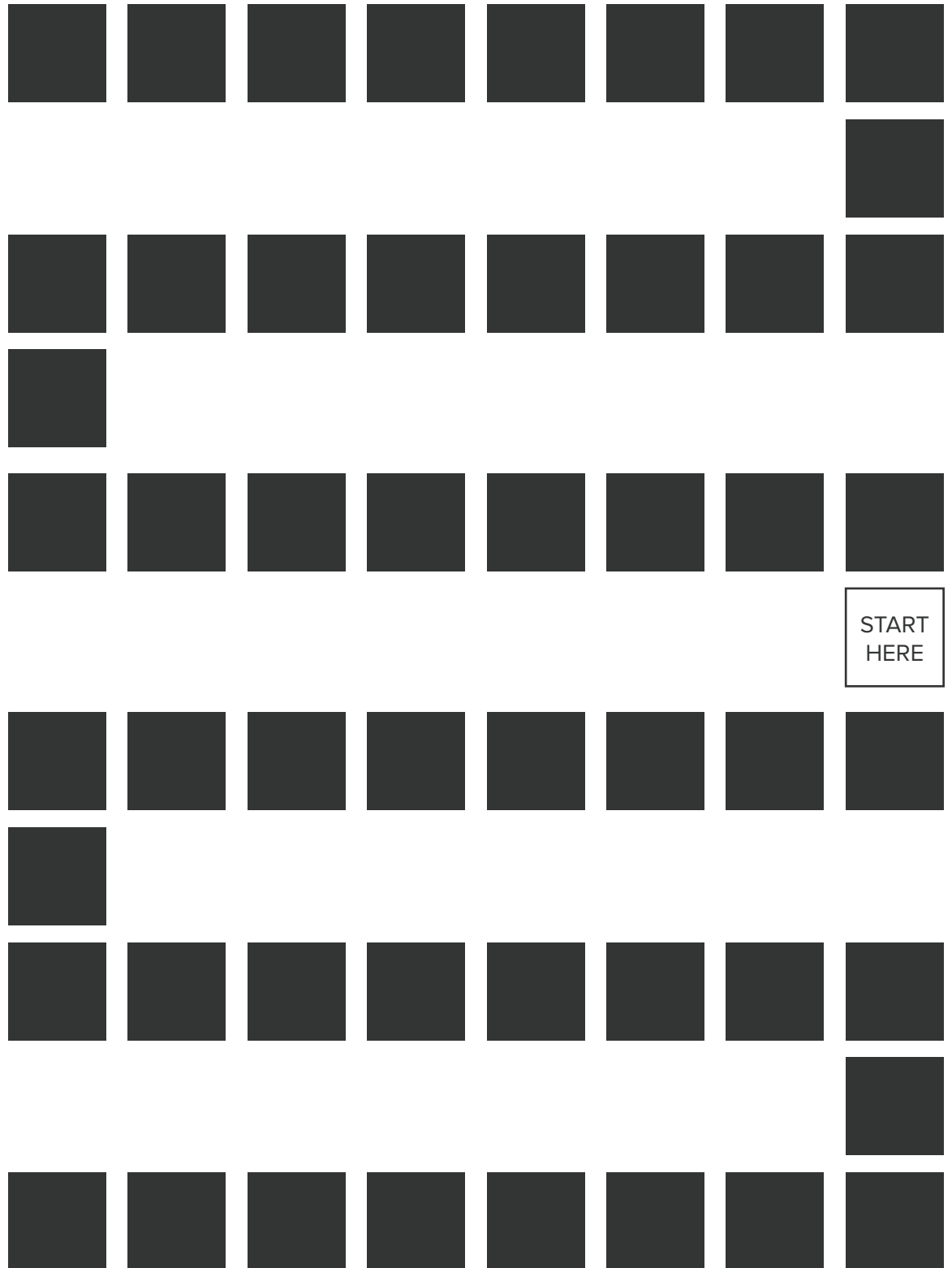
- *When doing this using a paper map, replace “forward” and “back” with “up” and “down.” When doing it standing up, use the prompts below.*
 - *You may need to adjust the tense of the prompts, based on the age of the participants*
-
- Take a step forward if both your parents went to college.
 - Take a step forward if your family encouraged you to go or assumed you would go to college.
 - Take a step forward if there was a computer in your childhood home.
 - Take a step forward if your family set aside money for your education.
 - Take a step forward if your family members had the educational background or language skills needed to help you with your homework.
 - Take a step forward if classes in your school were taught in your first language.
 - Take a step back if you had to change schools because your family was forced to move due to the loss of a job or an inability to pay rent.
 - Take a step back if you needed to get a job while in school in order to support your family.
 - Take a step forward if many of your teachers looked like you.
 - Take a step back if it was difficult for your parents to communicate with your teachers.
 - Take a step back if you were sometimes hungry in class because your family couldn't afford a meal.
 - Take a step back if you felt unsafe at school.
 - Take a step forward if you had somewhere safe to sleep and do homework every night.
 - Take a step forward if all your teachers assumed you were capable of learning the material and treated you with respect.
 - Take a step forward if your family provided you with educational enrichment such as music lessons or science camp, or took you to museums, plays, or historical sites.
 - Take a step back if you had to miss school for your religious holidays.
 - Take a step back if you had to miss school to care for family members.
 - Take a step back if your school had police presence, and they treated you like a suspect.
 - Take a step back if you missed school because you were sick or injured but couldn't afford to see a doctor or get medicine.
 - Take a step back if you decided against pursuing an educational opportunity because of its cost.
 - Take a step forward if you had the ability to choose where to go to school.
 - Take a step forward if there were newspapers in your house or your family regularly watched the news.
 - Take a step forward if your religious or ethnic group was taught about respectfully in your school curriculum.
 - Take a step forward if a family member regularly read to you as a child.
 - Take a step forward if a family member was involved with your school or PTA, or was able to attend parent-teacher meetings.

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APPENDIX C
SAMPLE
PROMPTS
FOR EDUCA-
TIONAL
INEQUITY
PRIVILEGE
WALK

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PRIVILEGE WALK MAP



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APPENDIX D TEXT STUDY: WHAT MAKES A GREAT MENTOR/ TUTOR

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Background Information:

Abraham Joshua Heschel was a Polish-born American rabbi, and one of the leading Jewish theologians and Jewish philosophers of the 20th century.

Judah the Pious was a leader of the Chassidei Ashkenaz, a movement of Jewish mysticism in early Medieval Germany.

Moses Maimonides, known as the Rambam, was a preeminent medieval Jewish philosopher and one of the most prolific and influential Torah scholars of the Middle Ages.

The Mishna is an important Jewish collection of laws and wisdom texts compiled in the second century CE.

The Talmud is an important collection of Jewish legal discussion, biblical commentary, and stories redacted around 500 CE

Aristotle was an important Classical Greek philosopher in the 3rd century BCE.

Texts:

Everything depends on the person who stands in front of the classroom. The teacher is not an automatic fountain from which intellectual beverages may be obtained. The teacher is either a witness or a stranger. To guide a pupil into the promised land, the teacher must have been there themselves. When asking themselves: Do I stand for what I teach? Do I believe what I say?, the teacher must be able to answer in the affirmative. What we need more than anything else is not textbooks, but textpeople. It is the personality of the teacher which is the text that the pupils read: the text that they will never forget.

- *Abraham Joshua Heschel, I Asked for Wonder: A Spiritual Anthology*

“Train up a child in the way the child should go,” the Book of Proverbs teaches. This means, if you see a child making progress in Bible studies, but not in Talmud, do not try to push the children by teaching Talmud, and if the child understands Talmud, do not push to learn Bible. Train a child in things that they grasp.

- *Judah the Pious, The Book of the Pious, section 208*

When a teacher’s students do not understand, the teacher should not get upset with them; rather, the teacher should review and teach the material as many times as necessary until the students understand the law thoroughly. Also, a pupil should not say “I understand” when they don’t understand, and instead should keep on asking questions repeatedly. If the teacher gets angry and excited on the student’s account, the student should say: “Teacher, this is Torah! I must study it, even though my capacity is limited.”

- *Rambam, The Laws of Torah Study, 4:4*

Rabbi Eliezer ben Shamua taught: The dignity of your student should be as precious to you as your reverence for your teacher. The reverence for your teacher should be as great as your reverence for God.

- *Mishna, Pirkei Avot, 4:15*

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APPENDIX D TEXT STUDY: WHAT MAKES A GREAT MENTOR/ TUTOR

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Our Rabbis taught: One's teacher is defined as the individual who has taught you wisdom and not the one who has taught you the Written and Oral Torah. This is Rabbi Meir's opinion. Rabbi Yehuda said: Whoever has taught you most of their wisdom. Rabbi Yossi said: Even if the person did no more than make your eyes light up from an explanation of a single selection from the Oral Torah - that person is still considered your teacher.

- *Babylonian Talmud, Baba Metzia, 33a*

Those who educate children well are more to be honored than they who produce them; for these only gave them life, those the art of living well.

- *Aristotle*

One who teaches a child, it is as if one had created that child.

- *Talmud, Masechet Sanhedrin, 19b*

Discussion Questions:

- Are there themes you see between the various texts?
- What from these texts did you find interesting or surprising?
- What can we learn from these texts about educational equity and inequity?
- What from these texts might we apply to the service we are doing?

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APPENDIX E TEXT STUDY: LEARNING FROM OUR STUDENTS

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Background Information:

The Talmud is an important collection of Jewish legal discussion, biblical commentary, and stories redacted around 500 CE

Abraham ben Moses ben Maimon (1186 – 1237) was a prominent Egyptian scholar of Jewish law, ethics, and mysticism. He was the son of Moses Maimonides, the Rambam.

Paulo Freire (September 19, 1921 – May 2, 1997) was a Brazilian educational philosopher known for his work on "critical pedagogy" an educational methodology with a strong focus on the justice implications of education.

Texts:

Rabbi Hanina said: Much have I learned from my teachers, and more from my colleagues than from my teachers, and from my students the most.

- *Babylonian Talmud, Masechet Taanit, 7a.*

Generosity with knowledge shows that one has confidence in the benefit of knowledge, and that one knows that teaching will not diminish one's knowledge but rather, add to it . . . Knowledge, when genuine and great, spurs its owner to share it with others.

- *Abraham son of the Rambam, The Guide to Serving God, Chapter 5*

The teacher is, of course, an artist, but being an artist does not mean that he or she can make the profile, can shape the students. What the educator does in teaching is to make it possible for the students to become themselves.

- *Paulo Freire, We Make the Road by Walking: Conversations on Education and Social Change*

Education must begin with the solution of the student-teacher contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers and students.

- *Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed*