

**Interactive Text Study and the Co-Construction of
Meaning: *Havruta* in the DeLeT *Beit Midrash***

A Dissertation

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Sharon Feiman-Nemser, Advisor

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

by

Orit Kent

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ABSTRACT

Interactive Text Study and the Co-Construction of Meaning: *Havruta* in the DeLeT *Beit Midrash*

A dissertation presented to the Faculty of the
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences of Brandeis
University, Waltham, Massachusetts

by Orit Kent

This dissertation systematically describes and analyzes how adult students in the DeLeT *Beit Midrash* (study house) make meaning of classical Jewish texts in *havruta* (pairs). DeLeT (Day School Leadership Through Teaching) is a pre-service, Jewish teacher education program, and the DeLeT *Beit Midrash* is a course where students study Jewish texts.

This dissertation offers rich images of *havruta* learning as it unfolds in real-time. It also provides a conceptualization of *havruta* learning, highlighting six central practices, providing a language for describing them and their interaction with one another, and exploring their use through particular cases. These practices -- listening and articulating, wondering and focusing, and supporting and challenging -- operate as pairs that work in dynamic relationship with one another. Finally, this dissertation offers a normative view of *havruta* learning, an idealized image of what *havruta* could look like in its fullest sense. Meeting this ideal is dependent in part on the degree and quality of enactment of the six core *havruta* practices.

I build on ideas that I began to explore in pilot research -- that *havruta* can be viewed as a Jewish interpretive social learning practice with visible features. My analysis illustrates and probes some of the ways in which *havruta*, as practiced by these particular students, has the potential to engage students in generative, textually grounded interpretive conversations of classical Jewish texts. It also explores missed opportunities.

My primary sources of data include video and audio recordings of the *havruta* interactions of nine pairs studying over a five-week period in fifty-one *havruta* sessions, totaling approximately forty hours of *havruta* study. I draw on grounded theory, practitioner inquiry and discourse analysis to conduct my data analysis and develop my conceptualization.

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Chapter 1: Beginning To Understand *Havruta*¹ Learning

Introduction

Picture a room with ten pairs of learners sitting together over a Jewish text. All of the learners are engaged in text study in *havruta*, which takes place in an intentionally designed learning environment, the *Beit Midrash*² for Teachers, literally the Study House for Teachers. The *havrutot* of women and men closely read the text in English or its original Hebrew or Aramaic and talk about its meaning, guided by carefully crafted study questions that support their interpretive work. Some pairs gesticulate wildly to one another as they converse excitedly, while others sit more quietly, lost in thought. Their ideas, questions, sighs, silence and laughter fill the room with the sounds of learning. They are on a shared voyage -- to make meaning of Jewish texts together, to become co-creators with their partners as they gain insight into the text and themselves and partake in a conversation across generations.

A *Beit Midrash* is a learning space shaped by the intensity and quality of the ongoing exchange of its students. The conversational nature of the *Yeshiva*³ as an institution of

¹ *Havruta* is an Aramaic term used to describe paired study of classical Jewish texts. In this dissertation, I use the term *havruta* to refer both to the pair of students studying together, as well as to the process of study in a pair. I sometimes use it in conjunction with the nouns, study or learning. In this case, it denotes “paired learning or study.” The plural of *havruta* is *havrutot*.

² *Beit midrash* literally means “study-house” and refers to a place where Jews, traditionally men, study classical Jewish texts, often in pairs or *havruta*. These days, the *beit midrash* often refers to the room itself where the study takes place, although it can also refer to a particular program in which people study Jewish texts. The DeLeT *Beit Midrash* is a modern *beit midrash* and is part of the summer program of DeLeT (Day School Leadership Through Teaching), a pre-service teacher education program for students studying to be elementary teachers in Jewish day schools.

³ A *yeshiva* is a Jewish institution for Torah study. Generally, there is a *beit midrash* located within a *yeshiva*. The plural of *yeshiva* is *yeshivot*.

study is captured in a very common term use to describe the practice of learning in Yiddish: “reden in lernen.” This term, which has no parallel in English, translates literally as “**talking in learning**.”⁴

I. Problem And Research Questions

The study of sacred texts is a central practice in Jewish education, and *havruta* study has been a form of Jewish study used in traditional *yeshivot* to study Talmud.⁵ Today, *havruta* is a form of study that has migrated from study halls of traditional *yeshivot* to diverse modern contexts, such as Jewish adult education programs, community day schools, Jewish leadership programs and teacher education programs.⁶

Despite its frequency, how students actually learn in *havruta* -- engage with and develop insights about the text and their study partner -- has gone largely unexamined. The **process** of text study in *havruta* is a black box in Jewish education. While its importance has been acknowledged,⁷ we do not have a robust description and conceptualization of the learning that takes place in these student pairs, and the opportunities and pitfalls that exist for students engaged in this process.

⁴ Emphasis is mine. Moshe Halbertal and Tova Hartman Halbertal, "The Yeshiva," in *Philosophers on Education: Historical Perspectives*, ed. Amelie Rorty (London: Routledge, 1998), 459.

⁵ For comments on its use in traditional *yeshivot*, see for example Shaul Stampfer, *The Lithuanian Yeshiva* (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History, 1995), 146-49; Norman Lamm, *Torah Lishmah* (Hoboken: Ktav Publishing House, 1989), 30; Yeshayahu Tishbi, "Hinukh: Yeshivot Lita," in *ha-Entsiklopedyah ha-Ivrit* (Jerusalem: Hevrah Lehotsaat Entsiklopedyot, 1970), 689. There is a debate about when and where *havruta* began to be regularly used. See discussion later in this chapter.

⁶ For example, *havruta* is being used at the Jewish Community Day School in Newton, at the Keshet program in Cambridge, at the Hadar *Beit Midrash* in Manhattan, at Wexner Graduate Fellowship Institutes, at the Pardes Teacher Educator Program and at the Hebrew College Educators *Beit Midrash* and Community Summer *Beit Midrash*,

⁷ For example, Moshe and Tova Halbertal describe *havruta*'s centrality in yeshiva life and even sociolinguist Courtney Cazden remarks on its potential, but neither goes farther. Halbertal and Halbertal, "The Yeshiva."; Courtney Cazden, *The Language of Teaching and Learning* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1988), 147.

In public education, the need to understand both the process and outcome of student learning, the ways in which tasks and environments shape learning and the teacher's role in student learning, has led to close up studies of both teaching and learning. For example, Magdalene Lampert's study of the practice of teaching⁸ and Reggio Emilia's studies of early childhood learning⁹ have helped scholars and practitioners unpack complex teaching and learning practices in public education. Lampert's work in particular demonstrates the benefits of taking a fine grained approach to studying actual teaching and learning practices as a means both to generate conceptual models and show how these models play out in the classroom.

The goal of my dissertation research is to learn more about *havruta* as it is practiced by participants in one particular context, the DeLeT *Beit Midrash* at Brandeis. Following the lead of research in public education, I have conducted a close up study of these interactions in order to develop an understanding of the nature and potential of *havruta*. In my research, I attend to the particulars of *havruta* as it is practiced in real time and develop "thick descriptions"¹⁰ of particular cases of people studying in *havruta*. Through this kind of close description and systematic analysis, I have been able to identify core practices of *havruta* study and build a theory¹¹ of what this kind of learning entails as it is enacted in the DeLeT *Beit Midrash*. In my use of "theory," I draw on Magdalene Lampert's discussion about developing "theories" of teaching and learning.

⁸ Magdalene Lampert, *Teaching Problems and the Problems of Teaching* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

⁹ Mara Krechevsky and Ben Mardell, "Four Features of Learning in Groups," in *Making Learning Visible, Children as Individual and Group Learners*, ed. C. Giudici, C. Rinaldi, and M. Krechevsky (Reggio Children, 2001).

¹⁰ Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture," in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

¹¹ Throughout this dissertation, I use the terms theory, conceptualization and framework interchangeably.

For Lampert, theory develops from studying the rich particulars of practice and creating language for understanding and talking about practice.¹²

To this end, my research addresses the following question: What can we learn about text study in *havruta* and students' meaning making processes¹³ through close examination of teacher candidates studying classical Jewish texts in the DeLeT *Beit Midrash*? Subcomponents of this question are: 1. What does *havruta* learning in this context look like and what are its core practices? 2. How do DeLeT students use these practices to engage in rich interpretive discussions with their *havrutot*? 3. What are the opportunities and pitfalls DeLeT students encounter as they engage in interpretive discussion with their *havruta* partners? 4. How do these *havruta* partners draw on their social and intellectual resources to develop textual interpretations? 5. How do particular tasks (and texts) scaffold *havruta* conversations? My dissertation will foreground questions one, two and three and will less explicitly address questions four and five.

In this study, I focus on *havruta* practices. I do not foreground in my analysis the nature of the text, the study task, the context in which the learning takes place, or the participants' backgrounds. I do not focus on the relationship between the two people in the *havruta* except as it pertains to their work together to make meaning of the text.

¹² Magdalene Lampert, "Knowing Teaching from the Inside Out: Implications of Inquiry in Practice for Teacher Education," in *The Education of Teachers, Ninety-Eighth Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education*, ed. Gary A. Griffin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999). For similar ideas see Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture," 25. "Theoretical formulations hover so low over the interpretations they govern that they don't make much sense or hold much interest apart from them." Robert Scholes explains the importance of theory to practice: "The role of theory is not to lay down laws but to force us to be aware of what we are doing and why we are doing it. Practice without theory is blind..." Robert Scholes, *Protocols of Reading* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 88. He and Lampert seem to share a similar understanding of this point.

¹³ I use the words "meaning making processes" to refer to the *havruta*'s processes of making sense of the text and each other's ideas. Meaning making thus refers to their learning processes. The meaning that they make is their developing understanding.

II. Foundational Orientation Toward Learning

Underlying this analysis are the following core ideas about learning, based in cognitive and sociocultural psychology: Learning is an ongoing, active and complex **process** in which we engage with others around meaningful content in particular contexts. Learning entails social, intellectual and affective domains and includes learning ideas but is not limited to this. Learning requires engagement with someone and/or something. And, learning requires us to build on pre-existing knowledge or schemas and to adapt those schemas to include new information and experiences and also requires self-regulation and monitoring of understanding.¹⁴

While the work of many scholars inform these ideas, I want to highlight two scholars whose work was particularly influential in my early thinking, Eleanor Duckworth and David Hawkins. While both write about children and their learning, their ideas are no less important to adults and their learning. In her teaching and writing, Duckworth highlights children's predisposition to be curious and to try to make sense of phenomena and the need to create learning environments rich in materials for children to think about. "My thesis...was that the development of intelligence is a matter of having wonderful ideas. In other words, it is a creative affair. When children are afforded occasions to be intellectually creative -- by being offered matter to be concerned about intellectually and by having their ideas accepted -- then not only do they learn about the

¹⁴ For a discussion of these issues, see John D. Bransford, Ann Brown, and Rodney Cocking, *How People Learn, Brain, Mind, Experience and School* (D.C.: National Academy Press, 2000). See also Ann Brown, "Communities of Learning and Thinking, or a Context by Any Other Name," in *Developmental Perspectives on Teaching and Learning Thinking Skills*, ed. D. Kuhn (New York: Karger, 1990); Jean Lave, "The Practice of Learning," in *Understanding Practice, Perspectives on Activity and Context*, ed. Seth Chalkin and Jean Lave (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993). Self-monitoring is a form of metacognition. For a fuller discussion of metacognition, see Chapter Six.

world, but as a happy side effect their general intellectual ability is stimulated as well.”¹⁵

Duckworth also highlights the important role of questions in the learning process. “(T)he right question at the right time can move children to peaks in their thinking that result in significant steps forward and real intellectual excitement.”¹⁶ These questions can be posed by teachers but can also be posed by peers and by the individual learner to him or herself.

David Hawkins, a philosopher of education, in his widely cited essay, “I, Thou and It,” points to the idea that there are three principle players involved in learning: an I, a thou and an it. The **I** is the learner, the **thou** is a teacher, who may be a formal teacher or even a peer and the **it** is the subject matter. As Hawkins writes, “No child, I wish to say, can gain competence and knowledge, or know himself as competent and as a knower, save through communication with others involved with him in his enterprises. Without a Thou, there is no I evolving. Without an It there is no content for the context, no figure and no heat, but only an affair of mirrors confronting each other.”¹⁷ For Hawkins, engagement with others -- an other person and a subject -- is key to learning. Like Duckworth, Hawkins too believes that learning stems from “engrossment” in subject matter, but he especially calls attention to the role of other people in helping us to become “engrossed.” Furthermore, he calls attention to the key role of respect in learning. “The more basic gift is not love but respect, respect for others as ends in

¹⁵ Eleanor Duckworth, *The Having of Wonderful Ideas* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1996), 12-13.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁷ David Hawkins, “I, Thou and It,” in *The Informed Vision: Essays in Learning and Human Nature* (New York: Agathon Press, 1974), 52.

themselves, as actual and potential artisans of their learnings and doings, of their own lives; and as thus uniquely contributing in turn, to the learnings and doings of others.”¹⁸

III. Significance of the Topic

This study stands to make a unique contribution to the field of Jewish education with implications for the larger field of education. Rather than speculating about how meaning emerges from *havruta* interactions, this study builds a conceptualization of *havruta* learning from the ground up, developing a theoretical language for describing what emerges from real life *havruta* interactions. The analysis identifies and probes some of the practices that enable *havruta* to function as a powerful Jewish learning practice. Within the field of Jewish education, there is no comparable research.

In addition to contributing toward our understanding of *havruta*, this dissertation will contribute to our understanding of how students study Jewish texts. By putting learners and learning of Jewish texts at the center of inquiry, this study begins to fill a hole in Jewish educational research, which has paid more attention to teachers and teaching. In order to create educative learning environments, scholars and practitioners need to understand both how teachers teach **and** how students learn.

Furthermore, in general education, there is significant literature on learning in small groups, but relatively few studies of learning in dyads. Much of the educational research that exists about dyads focuses on the tutoring relationship, in which an expert is responsible for teaching a novice.¹⁹ There is little research on peer dyads, in which neither person is the expert and in which both parties are responsible for teaching and

¹⁸ Ibid., 48.

¹⁹ For example, see Arthur Graesser, Natalie Person, and Joseph Magliano, "Collaborative Dialogue Patterns in Naturalistic One-to-One Tutoring," *Applied Cognitive Psychology* 9 (1995).

learning. How do we learn in and through direct encounters with a peer? How do we make each other a resource in learning and jointly construct knowledge?

A goal of this research is not to develop “best practices” or a “how to guide” but rather to provide a conceptualization of *havruta* which can be used to deepen educators’ understanding of this learning practice and make its use more educative.

IV. Normative Understanding of Good *Havruta*: *Havruta* as a Jewish Learning Practice in the DeLeT *Beit Midrash* for Teachers

Jerome Bruner writes in The Culture of Education that “education is a major embodiment of a culture’s way of life [and] not just preparation for it.”²⁰ *Havruta* learning in the DeLeT *Beit Midrash* carries with it important cultural messages.²¹ It inducts students into a “Jewish” mode of being and interacting with Jewish texts. **The message in the DeLeT *Beit Midrash* is that, ideally, learning should happen in partnership, through spirited engagement in which students take responsibility for one another, listen closely to each other and the text, and actively challenge one another and themselves.**²² This form of study highlights the cultural value of engagement with text and with colleagues, a value that is held in higher regard than “right answers.” It highlights the value of knowledge being something that is communally, as opposed to individually, constructed. It also highlights the value of looking for multiple

²⁰ Jerome Bruner, *The Culture of Education* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 13.

²¹ This argument is developed in my article, Orit Kent, "Interactive Text Study: A Case of *Hevruta* Learning," *Journal of Jewish Education* 72, no. 3 (2006).

²² For a related discussion of a normative understanding of *havruta*, see Elie Holzer, "What Connects 'Good' Teaching, Text Study and *Hevruta* Learning? A Conceptual Argument," *Journal of Jewish Education* 72, no. 3 (2006).

ways to understand one particular text and creating space for individual students to share their perspective and have a sense of ownership over the material and study process.

These messages directly challenge other prevalent ideas about learning.²³

- That learning occurs inside an individual's head
- That learning involves the passive reception of knowledge
- That the most important part of learning is the outcome and that the outcome is finding THE correct answer.

Instead, the outlook underlying *havruta* study in the DeLeT *Beit Midrash* is that learning is an ongoing sociocultural activity in which participants work together to actively construct knowledge.

The fundamental structure of the activity in *havruta* learning is two people engaging with each other and a text in order to interpret the text. In the normative understanding of good *havruta* in the DeLeT *Beit Midrash*, the two people involved in the *havruta* are responsible for their own learning and for each other's learning. They are not simply involved in *havruta* in order to stimulate their own thinking but are responsible for helping their partner learn as well. Their success is viewed as mutually interdependent. As I will discuss later in this dissertation, this mutual interdependence makes certain *havruta* practices, such as challenging and supporting, particularly important.

Furthermore, there are not two but three partners involved in *havruta* learning -- the two people and the text.²⁴ This idea is illustrated in the diagram of the equilateral

²³ For a discussion of these issues, see Bransford, Brown, and Cocking, *How People Learn*.

²⁴ This is connected to David Hawkins' discussion of the three principal players involved in learning and the important role of the subject matter in the learning process. Hawkins, "I, Thou and It." For a related discussion of the three horizons (those of the learners and the text) that interact during text study in *havruta*,

triangle below. The text is not a partner in the same way that people are, but this terminology emphasizes that *havrutot* cannot ignore the text in their conversations or just treat it as an object. It too has a life and a claim to make so even though *havrutot* construct their interpretations, they do this in partnership with the text and not just based on their own experiences. Just as partners can challenge and support one another, the text can challenge or support ideas. Just as partners can make claims on one another, the text can make claims on us. And just as partners have to listen to one another, *havrutot* have to listen to the text.

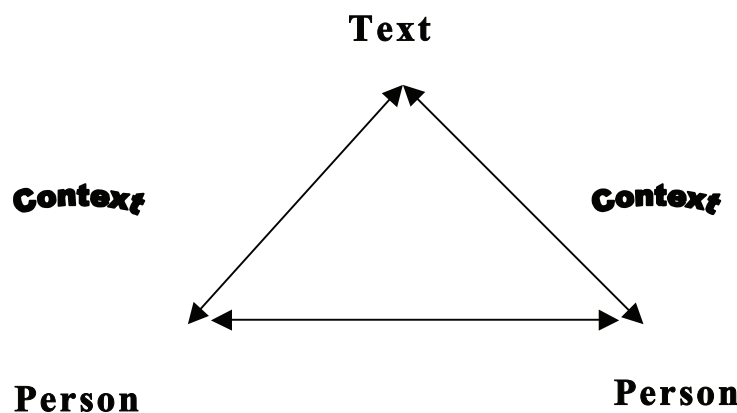


Figure 1.1: Three Partners of Havruta Learning²⁵

There are constant shifts during a *havruta* interaction as to who or what is in the foreground and who or what is in the background but, ultimately, all three partners must be listened to and spoken for, for the potential of the whole triangle to be realized. If we forget about the text, the discussion just becomes a personal monologue or dialogue and

see Holzer, "What Connects 'Good' Teaching, Text Study and *Havruta* Learning? A Conceptual Argument," 196.

²⁵ This diagram is a play on the instructional triangle, used by scholars to illustrate the key elements in teaching and learning: The teacher, the learner and the student in a particular context. For example, see Lampert, *Teaching Problems and the Problems of Teaching*, 33.

if we forget about the people working as partners, then it just becomes one person's interpretation, which is potentially more limited.

In this idealized form of *havruta* study, the *havruta* partners attempt to hold three voices on-line simultaneously -- the voice of the text, the voice of their partner and their own voice. For these voices to interact ideally requires that *havruta* partners spend time lingering over the text, listening to each other and building off of each other's ideas, asking each other and themselves questions and trying out different interpretations. Through this process of working together, they will be able to engage in a rich interpretive discussion that will not only hold their engagement but also ultimately lead them to view the text's multiple layers and see different ideas in it. As partners develop their abilities to pay attention to themselves, the text and each other, they can find this process to be personally and professionally transformative.

V. Intellectual Influences

The discussion which follows reviews the literature that has shaped my basic stance in my work. Since I review literature in each chapter as it bears on the subject of that chapter, this is not a full review of all of the literature on which I draw for my dissertation. Thus, in Chapter Two, I review literature that pertains to my approach to data analysis and in Chapters Three, Four and Five, I cite literature that pertains to my understanding of the core *havruta* practices. There is some overlap in the literatures cited in each of the chapters since I sometimes cite the same scholars for different purposes.

There is little empirical research analyzing students' experiences studying in *havruta*. Samuel Heilman's study of learning circles in The People Of the Book²⁶ takes a close look at people studying classical Jewish texts, but he does not specifically study *havruta* interactions. A growing body of research examines the teaching and learning of classical Jewish texts; however, these works do not analyze *havruta* study or students' moment to moment learning processes.²⁷ Aliza Segal's monograph²⁸ and Mitchel Malkus and Steve Brown's²⁹ article discuss possible connections between *havruta* study and cooperative learning but do not analyze actual *havruta* interactions.

Susan Tedmon's doctoral dissertation uses a variety of educational theories to analyze a *havruta* between two Orthodox teenage boys in a yeshiva high school. Drawing on interviews and two *havruta* recordings, her analysis highlights the ways in which students can complement each other's learning in a *havruta* interaction and the ways in which *havruta* learning in the yeshiva high school reflects and reinforces larger Orthodox values and beliefs.³⁰ Like Tedmon, I look closely at particular *havruta* interactions, bearing in mind what we know about cooperative learning and theories of reading, among other literatures. My analysis encompasses a larger body of data of

²⁶ Samuel C. Heilman, *The People of the Book, Drama, Fellowship, and Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

²⁷ For example, see the following conceptual works: Barry W. Holtz, *Textual Knowledge: Teaching the Bible in Theory and in Practice*, Jewish Education Series (New York: G & H Soho Inc., 2003). Michael Rosenak, *Roads to the Palace: Jewish Texts and Teaching* (Providence: Berghann Books, 1995). See also Renee Wohl, "Entering the Historical Conversation: Torah Teachers' Reading and Teaching of Text" (PhD diss., MSU, 2000), and Mari Sharon Blecher, "Sacred and Secular Texts: Interpretive Communities and the Teaching of Literature" (PhD diss., Stanford University, 1997).

²⁸ Aliza Segal, "*Havruta* Study: History, Benefits, and Enhancements," (Jerusalem: ATID, 2003).

²⁹ Steve Brown and Mitchel Malkus, "Hevruta as a Form of Cooperative Learning," *Journal of Jewish Education* 73, no. 3 (2007): 209-26.

³⁰ Susan Tedmon, "Collaborative Acts of Literacy in a Traditional Jewish Community" (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1991). Tedmon's interesting analysis of learning in *havruta* is based on two to three hours of audiotape of one pair and interviews with the students and their rabbi.

actual *havruta* sessions and moves beyond description to provide analysis and to develop a conceptual framework.

Given the dearth of scholarship specifically on *havruta* and on students' moment to moment learning processes of Jewish texts, I turned to a diverse range of scholars to inform my research. I have looked to scholarship on sociocultural theories of knowledge, group learning, studies of students studying literature, literary theory, and studies of classroom discourse to help inform my study of this phenomenon.

Sociocultural Theories of Knowledge

Underlying my work are assumptions drawn from sociocultural theories of knowledge based in Vygotsky's work. Vygotsky argues that social interaction and culture help form the mind. Knowledge is constructed through the use of tools, external objects, and then is internalized into signs, internalized concepts based on interpersonal interaction, which mediate and reorganize one's behavior and aid in the development of more complex thinking. Not only does social interaction create the conditions for the construction of knowledge but social support improves performance; children reveal their actual developmental level when they perform on their own and their potential level when they perform with others. This is known as the zone of proximal development (zpd). Vygotsky writes, "We propose that an essential feature of learning is that it creates the zone of proximal development; that is, learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with his peers. Once these processes are internalized, they become part of the child's independent developmental achievement."³¹

³¹ Lev S. Vygotsky, *Mind in Society, the Development of Higher Psychological Processes*, ed. Michael Cole, et al. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 90.

Thus, in a *spiral* motion, one slowly develops higher psychological processes, revisiting earlier actions but accomplishing them in a different way.

Building on Vygotsky's early work with children, sociocultural theorists emphasize that learning happens through co-participation, not in an individual's head, and that learning happens in practice, not by learning abstract knowledge out of context and then internalizing it.³² Learning is thus socially produced and socially situated and occurs through participation in practice. As Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger write, "(W)e emphasize the significance of shifting the analytic focus from the individual learner to **learning as participation** in the social world, and from the concept of cognitive processes to the more encompassing view of **social practice**."³³ Since learning is socially produced and situated, it becomes impossible to separate social (how we interact with people) from intellectual processes (how we make sense of particular subject matter). In fact, sociocultural theory leads us to understand that social and intellectual processes are not distinct but are inherently intertwined and together comprise the basis of human learning.

Furthermore, building on Vygotsky's idea of the zpd -- that with support, we can extend our repertoire of performance -- Barbara Rogoff and her colleagues highlight the importance of developing "a community of learners" in classroom contexts, in which young and old serve as resources to each other, with varying and shifting roles according to their differing and developing understandings.³⁴ Rogoff emphasizes that "learning is a

³² Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, *Situated Learning, Legitimate Peripheral Participation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), and Lave, "The Practice of Learning."

³³ Lave and Wenger, *Situated Learning*, 43. The bolded text is my emphasis.

³⁴ Barbara Rogoff, Eugene Matusov, and Cynthia White, "Models of Teaching and Learning: Participation in a Community of Learners," in *The Handbook of Education and Human Development*, ed. David R. Olson and Nancy Torrance (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1996), 397.

process of transformation of participation in which both adults and children contribute support and direction in shared endeavors.”³⁵

Sociocultural theory begins to provide an educational rationale for *havruta* by claiming that rich learning occurs when people, even people who are not experts, work together in practice. It also helps us understand that learning with others is not just a fun thing to do, but is an integral part of learning. When we work with others, we can draw on them as resources and do things we cannot do alone.

Peer and Group Learning

Literature on peer and group learning also informed my research. Many writers point to the cognitive and social benefits of learning with others. For example, Anne Brown specifically points to the enhancement of critical thinking skills. In her experiments setting up “communities of learners” in which fifth and sixth graders created science units and taught them to one another, Brown and her colleagues found an increase in use of critical thinking skills such as deep analogies, causal explanations, and the use of evidence to support explanations. Brown notes, “The collaborative setting forced the students to engage in reasoning activities overtly, so that many role models of thinking emerged... We argue that with repeated experience explaining and arguing, justifying claims with evidence, etc., students will eventually come to adopt these critical

³⁵ Ibid., 389. In other writings, Rogoff has pictured the process of learning as an apprenticeship, guided by someone with more experience, “involving active individuals participating with others in culturally organized activity that has as part of its purpose the development of mature participation in the activity . . .” Barbara Rogoff, “Observing Sociocultural Activity on Three Planes: Participatory Appropriation, Guided Participation, and Apprenticeship,” in *Sociocultural Studies of Mind*, ed. James Wertsch, Pablo Del Rio, and Amelia Alvarez (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 142. This is a bit different from the idea of a community of learners, which highlights the idea that people, young and old, bring different kinds of expertise and the need to draw on the cumulative expertise that exists.

thinking strategies as part of their personal repertoire of ways of knowing.”³⁶ Brown’s analysis points to the importance of peer talk in modeling different types of thinking for others and practicing different thinking strategies.

Ann Brown and Anne Marie Palinscar’s work and research on Reciprocal Teaching (RT) provides similar evidence.³⁷ In the reciprocal teaching approach, students meet in groups of four or five along with a teacher, and students take turns leading a discussion of a text. During the discussion, the teacher guides structured practice in four strategies: questioning, clarifying, summarizing and predicting, all of which are supposed to help students engage in rich conversation of the text’s meaning and increasingly self-monitor their own comprehension. These RT groups were shown to be quite successful, and, over time, teachers allowed for increased student leadership. *Havruta* study, in which students are asked to study texts in pairs after some instruction and modeling of how to do it, is not unlike reciprocal reading, and, as sociolinguist Courtney Cazden notes, may have a lot of potential for student learning³⁸

Elizabeth Cohen in an article, “Can Groups Learn?” makes clear that the performance of a group is not merely the sum total of what each individual brings to the table. Rather, “[t]hrough the creative exchange of ideas, groups can solve problems and construct knowledge beyond the capacity of any single member. Thus it is possible to talk about group learning that results from the interaction of group members and is not attributable to one well-informed person...or even a division of labor...”³⁹ In a

³⁶ Brown, "Communities of Learning and Thinking, or a Context by Any Other Name," 123. See also Ann Brown, "The Advancement of Learning," *Educational Researcher* 23, no. 8 (1994).

³⁷ Annemarie Sullivan Palinscar and Ann Brown, "Reciprocal Teaching of Comprehension - Fostering and Comprehension - Monitoring Activities " *Cognition and Instruction* I no. 2 (1984).

³⁸ Courtney Cazden, *Classroom Discourse, The Language of Teaching and Learning* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1988), 147.

³⁹ Elizabeth Cohen et al., "Can Groups Learn?," *Teachers College Record* 104, no. 6 (2002): 1046.

conceptual review, Cohen distinguishes between whether assignments are “true group tasks”⁴⁰ and whether assignments are open ended and conceptual or routine assignments with clear procedures and answers. Cohen proposes, “Given an ill structured problem and a group task,⁴¹ productivity will depend on interaction. More specifically: given a problem with no one right answer and a learning task that will require all students to exchange resources, achievement gains will depend on the frequency of task related interaction.”⁴² This is not the case for more conventional tasks, where measures of interaction are not predictors for achievement. Furthermore, given the positive relationship between open ended, conceptual tasks requiring reciprocal interdependence of participants and interactions among participants, it is necessary to consider how tasks either constrain or support a “full exchange from all participants in the group.”⁴³

Johnson and Johnson specifically distinguish between individualistic, competitive and cooperative learning and study the benefits of each of these types of learning in relationship to particular learning goals.⁴⁴ The Johnsons highlight “constructive controversy” as a powerful force in cooperative learning and as different from competition, in which the focus is winning versus constructive resolution. The Johnsons have developed and studied a method for achieving constructive controversy in cooperative learning groups and have found many positive results on student achievement. “When managed constructively, controversy promotes uncertainty about

⁴⁰ Elizabeth Cohen, "Restructuring the Classroom: Conditions for Productive Small Groups," *Review of Educational Research* 64, no. 1 (1994): 16.

⁴¹ A group task is set up to create “reciprocal interdependence” by requiring that everyone in the group play a role for the group to function and the task to be accomplished. Ibid., 13.

⁴² Ibid., 8.

⁴³ Ibid., 17.

⁴⁴ David Johnson and Roger Johnson, *Learning Together and Alone: Cooperation, Competition and Individualization* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1975); ———, *Learning Together and Alone, Cooperative, Competitive, and Individualistic Learning*, 5th Edition ed. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1999).

the correctness of one's conclusion, an active search for more information, a reconceptualization of one's knowledge and conclusions, and, consequently, greater mastery and retention of the material being discussed and a more frequent use of higher level reasoning strategies."⁴⁵ This is similar to ideas expressed in Reggio Emilia's studies of early childhood learning: "A focus on collective understanding -- requiring constant comparison, discussion, and modification of ideas -- makes possible learning that is not accessible to individuals working alone."⁴⁶

These ideas contribute to the educational rationale for *havruta* by pointing to the benefits of peer talk to learning. In many ways, the work of *havrutot* in this study resembles Cohen's "ill defined" problem solving tasks which underscore the value of maximal student interaction in order to enhance the quality of learning. Cohen's work provides empirical support for Peter Elbow's observation that learning requires interaction between people's ideas.⁴⁷ It also clarifies the ways in which learning tasks both support and constrain learning.

Studies of Students Studying Literature

Studies on reading literature also provided me with conceptualizations of the process of reading and interpreting texts and identified some of the factors that impact on these processes. Judith Langer⁴⁸ and Elisse Earthman's⁴⁹ work point to the interaction that occurs between the reader and the text and the reader's active role in the

⁴⁵ Johnson and Johnson, *Learning Together and Alone, Cooperative, Competitive, and Individualistic Learning*, 87-88.

⁴⁶ Krechevsky and Mardell, "Four Features of Learning in Groups," 292.

⁴⁷ Peter Elbow, *Embracing Contraries* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), especially Chapter 2.

⁴⁸ Judith A. Langer, "The Process of Understanding: Reading for Literary and Informative Purposes," *Research in the Teaching of English* 24, no. 3 (1990); ———, *Envisioning Literature, Literary Understanding and Literature Instruction* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1995).

⁴⁹ Elise Ann Earthman, "Creating the Virtual Work: Readers' Processes in Understanding Literary Texts," *Research in the Teaching of English* 26, no. 4 (1992).

interpretation process. Their work, together with Brown's, also highlights the fact that readers do many things while reading in order to make sense of a text such as asking questions, generating hypotheses, and looking for coherence. Langer specifically highlights readers' changing stances toward the text during the reading process, sometimes relating to it through immersion and sometimes keeping a more critical distance. While readers engage in these stances even when reading different kinds of texts, Langer also found that readers in her study have different assumptions about responding to literary and scientific texts and that those assumptions affect how they "orient themselves toward creating their momentary understandings as well as their views of the potential of each piece as a whole."⁵⁰ This finding raises questions about the differences we might find in the ways *havrutot* approach narrative texts and legal texts.⁵¹ Earthman highlights the fact that better readers fill in gaps in the text, adopt multiple perspectives and draw on the text's references to enrich their interpretations. Both of these scholars highlight the dynamic and complex process of interpretation, in which readers draw on multiple resources to make and remake meaning of the text.

Sophie Haroutunian-Gordon's research on high school students' interpretive discussions of Shakespeare is perhaps closest to my own and most useful for helping me think about the shape of my research.⁵² Her research takes place in a naturalistic environment; she is interested in making sense of how teachers teach and how students learn in real time. Her focus is on the conversational aspect of meaning making -- that

⁵⁰ Langer, "The Process of Understanding: Reading for Literary and Informative Purposes," 253.

⁵¹ This particular issue moves beyond the scope of my current study but it is worthy of future study. One could make a claim that reading different genres differently has as much to do with the reader's assumptions about different genres as it has to do with anything intrinsic to the text. Thus, if readers don't differentiate genres -- which is generally the case in the context in which my study takes place -- there might be no difference in meaning making approaches.

⁵² Sophie Haroutunian-Gordon, *Turning the Soul, Teaching through Conversations in the High School* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

students make meaning of these texts through conversation, specifically through interpretive discussions, and she goes about trying to identify central elements of rich conversations or interpretive discussion and factors that hinder it. Through her writing, she also allows the reader to listen in on students' full-length conversations and considers the meaning that students are actually making of the text. In my analysis and writing, I draw on the construct of interpretive discussion as a label for what *havrutot* do when they are working on figuring out the meaning of the text. The high school students in Haroutunian-Gordon's study provide textual evidence, listen carefully, respond to what has been said, and generate new ideas so that a real focus for the conversation can emerge. Students studying in *havruta* in my context also do these things as they generate textual interpretations.

Literary Theory

Literary theory added to my conceptual understanding of the *havruta* process. Wolfgang Iser's work highlights among other things the importance of gap filling in developing interpretations. Texts often are ambiguous and readers must make inferences or fill in the textual gaps in order to develop interpretations. According to Iser, the activity of gap filling is the engine that drives the interaction between the reader and the text forward. About the interpretive process Iser writes: "Communication in literature, then, is a process set in motion and regulated not by a given code but by a mutually restrictive and magnifying interaction between the explicit and the implicit, between revelation and concealment. What is concealed [in the text] spurs the reader into action, but this action is also controlled by what is revealed; the explicit in its turn is transformed

when the implicit has been brought to light.”⁵³ While this statement is made in reference to how we interpret text, it is no less relevant for how we think about two people communicating with each other in *havruta*, as they try to interpret a text. Just as there are elements in a text that are revealed and concealed, *havruta* partners reveal and conceal ideas as they study together. We can never fully understand what is in another person’s head and neither can we ever fully express what is in our own heads. During the study process, we as readers and listeners need to fill in gaps in what we hear in order to try and make sense of it and build an appropriate response. However, as opposed to working with a text, when working with live people, we can probe their thinking to clarify both the revealed and the concealed. Thus, questions and norms of interaction⁵⁴ play a particularly important role in helping *havruta* partner’s communicate their ideas about the text and move the interpretive process forward.

Louise Rosenblatt’s “transactional theory” highlights the idea that the relationship between reader and text is mutually constitutive. The reader’s role is in the “selection and organization of responses” which “to some degree hinge on the assumptions, the expectations, or sense of possible structures, that he brings out of the stream of his life.” As the reader reads, the text acts as both “stimulus” and “regulator.” It is the “stimulus that focuses the reader’s attention so that elements of past experience...are activated” and “as the reader seeks a hypothesis to guide the selecting, rejecting, and ordering of what is being called forth, the text helps to regulate what shall be held in the forefront of the

⁵³ Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading, a Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1978), 169.

⁵⁴ For a fuller discussion of the role of norms in *havruta* learning, see Kent, "Interactive Text Study: A Case of *Hevruta* Learning."

reader's attention."⁵⁵ Rosenblatt's ideas together with Iser's emphasis on gap filling help us understand the ways in which multiple interpretations that are grounded in the text can co-exist. Rosenblatt's writing, which places a degree of agency within the text, also helps explain how a text is a partner in *havruta*.

Studies of Classroom Discourse

Research on classroom discourse has also shaped my thinking.⁵⁶ Since I will talk about this literature in my methodology section, I will make my remarks here relatively brief and highlight one important book -- that I discovered relatively late in my research process -- that has influenced my thinking, Communication and Learning Revisited, Making Meaning Through Talk by Douglas Barnes and Frankie Todd. Barnes and Todd studied the talk of thirteen year olds in the United Kingdom engaged in group work based on a topic that was being taught in their classroom. They identify particular moves that develop and maintain collaboration in groups, as well as cognitive strategies that direct the purpose of peer talk. Through the course of their investigation, they found that students' "meaning is indeterminate and open to change, that it is dependent on context, and that it is spread over exchanges of utterances..."⁵⁷ Participants speak and hear and construct an ever changing account of what is going on. While they must operate as if they share meaning, they are constantly negotiating their relationship to the content and to one another. Barnes and Todd highlight the idea that the transformative potential of peer talk in the small groups in their study has to do with opportunities for "the

⁵⁵ Louise Rosenblatt, *The Reader, the Text, the Poem, the Transactional Theory of the Literary Work* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978), 11.

⁵⁶ While I don't cite from it directly in this section, I want to acknowledge Courtney Cazden's monumental work on classroom discourse-- Cazden, *Classroom Discourse, The Language of Teaching and Learning* -- which provided me with a comprehensive introduction to this field of study.

⁵⁷ Douglas Barnes and Frankie Todd, *Communication and Learning Revisited, Making Meaning Through Talk*, Revised edition (Portsmouth: Heinemann 1995), 141.

generation by learners of new ideas, new insights and more complex points of views.”⁵⁸

Peers do this through having an opportunity to talk and interrelate their ideas, thus generating “new and more inclusive understanding.”⁵⁹ They identify many ideas that I found in my *havruta* data: that peers make a variety of moves that enable the conversation to function, that participants are constantly negotiating meaning and that some students try to interrelate their ideas and thereby develop more “inclusive understanding.”

The literature reviewed in this section provides background ideas that have influenced my stance to learning in general and *havruta* learning in particular. It has helped shape my understanding of *havruta* as a Jewish interpretive social learning practice, which I will discuss in the next section.

VI. *Havruta* as a Jewish Interpretive Social Learning Practice

In my pilot study, which I discuss below, I call *havruta* a **Jewish interpretive social learning practice** and explain that it intertwines social and intellectual dimensions. I will explore each of these terms in order to call attention to key ideas that inform this dissertation.

Jewish

I want to highlight that *havruta* is a Jewish form of study and not merely an Aramaic term for cooperative learning. “Jewish” therefore comes first in the long string of adjectives. *Havruta* is Jewish in the way that other traditions are Jewish or Christian or Muslim, because it is currently constructed by many teachers and students as a Jewish

⁵⁸ Ibid., 144-47.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 148.

practice. As such, those who engage in it often attach more significance to it than they might attach to something they think of simply as a “learning strategy.”

This significance derives not only from the way that the practice is often currently constructed, but because *havruta* draws on a tradition of learning rooted in early *yeshivot* and rabbinic expressions of valuing a partner and dialectic. I will address each of these points in turn.⁶⁰

Havruta is Jewish because it draws on a historically Jewish practice. Documents suggest that *havruta* as a form of study practiced in *yeshivot* has its roots in the 16th century and is connected to the rise of *pilpul*.^{61,62} There is a debate among scholars about when *havruta* was introduced into *yeshivot* as normative practice, particularly revolving around whether *havruta* was practiced at the acclaimed Volozhin Yeshiva, founded in 1802 in Volozhin, Lithuania, which became a model for other advanced Eastern European *yeshivot*.⁶³

⁶⁰ I am not trying to engage in debates about what makes something authentically Jewish or to defend *havruta* as an “authentic” Jewish practice. Rather, I am pointing out that *havruta* often carries significance to many learners because it is constructed as a Jewish practice with roots in a tradition of learning based in early *yeshivot* and rabbinic expressions of the value of a partner. This does not mean that *havruta* as practiced in the DeLeT *Beit Midrash* or other *batai midrash* looks exactly the same as it did in the *yeshivot* from which it originated and that these early *havruta* participants used the same exact *havruta* practices that I uncover in use in the DeLeT *Beit Midrash*. Furthermore, my highlighting the Jewish roots of *havruta* should not be construed as a defense of the practice itself.

⁶¹ *Pilpul* is “a collective term denoting various methods of talmudic study and exposition, especially by the use of subtle legal, conceptual, and casuistic differentiation.” Mordechai Breuer, “*Pilpul*,” in *Encyclopedia Judaica*, ed. Fred Skolnik and Michael Berenbaum (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA in association with Keter Publishing House, 2007), 524.

⁶² Elijah Capsali, “Seder Eliyahu Zuta,” ed. Aryeh Shemuelevits, Shelomoh Simonson, and Meir Benayahu (Jerusalem: Mekhon Ben-Tsevi shel Yad Yitshak Ben-Tsevi v’ha-Universitah ha-Ivrit, 1975), 246. The text, originally written in 1523, talks both about *pilpul* and studying with a partner. David Stern brought this text to my attention in a public lecture and private discussion in January, 2008. He also explicitly made the connection between the rise of the use of *havruta* and *pilpul*.

⁶³ Shaul Stampfer suggests that while it was practiced in the early 19th century, it was certainly not the norm at the Volozhin Yeshiva. Stampfer claims that those who did study in *havruta* at Volozhin were the weaker students who needed a stronger student to help them. See Stampfer, *The Lithuanian Yeshiva*, 148. Stampfer’s argument is not always clear or compelling. He does not have conclusive proof of his claim but deduces it from a number of things such as the fact that people who studied in Volozhin do not talk about *havruta* in their memoirs. At the same time, he seems to undermine his argument by citing Baruch Epstein,

Despite the uncertainty about when exactly *havruta* became **the** widespread practice of *yeshivot*, the merits of studying with others seems to have more ancient precedents in Jewish tradition, reaching as far back as the Babylonian Talmud.⁶⁴ For example, there are a number of stories that call our attention to the importance of having a good study partner and the trauma that prevails when that study partner is no longer present.⁶⁵

We also have texts, which directly speak of the value of studying with another. For example, Taanit 7b reads: "R. Hama b. Hanina said: What is the meaning of the verse, 'As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the wit of his friend.' (Proverbs 27:17) Just as in the case of iron, one [piece] of iron sharpens another, so scholars sharpen each other in legal [debate]. Rabba bar bar Hama said: Why are words of Torah compared to fire...? To teach you: Just as fire does not ignite by itself, so words of Torah do not endure for [one who studies] by himself."

the Netziv's (one of the heads of the yeshiva) grandson, as saying that his grandfather preferred people to study in *havruta* but never forced anyone to and that his grandfather spoke about the benefits of studying with a partner. Yeshayahu Tishbi seems to support Stampfer's claim. He states that *havruta* became the normative practice in the latter part of the 19th century in the new Lithuanian *yeshivot*. See Tishbi, "Hinukh: Yeshivot Lita, 689." Others claim that it was instituted as a regular mode of study at Yeshivat Volozhin, as opposed to self-study which had previously been the norm. See Lamm, *Torah Lishmah*, 30. In general, there is little historical documentation about pedagogical practice in Jewish learning institutions throughout Jewish history. The literature discussing *havruta* tends to focus on Eastern European Jewish communities and contemporary communities and does not account for others

⁶⁴ For a fuller discussion of this, see Jeffrey Rubenstein, *The Culture of the Babylonian Talmud* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), Chapter 2. Rubenstein calls our attention to these texts in order to support his claim. Also, see Rubenstein's discussion of the Babylonian Academies and the value they placed on dialectics. Rubenstein notes that perhaps the value placed on partnered study is related to the value placed on dialectics.

⁶⁵ See for example the following stories highlighted by Rubenstein in the *Culture of the Babylonian Talmud*, p. 51: R. Yohanan is despondent when R. Lakish dies because his new study partner does not debate with him as did R. Lakish (Baba Metzia 84a). We are told of Levi who used to study with R. Efes. When R. Efes died, Levi had no one to study with and so left Palestine for Babylonia (Ketubot 103b). And there is the famous story of Honi who returns to the study house after sleeping for seventy years, only to find that no one believes he is Honi. He prays to die and does so. Rava then says, "Either companionship or death," stressing that without companionship, we are as good as dead (Taanit 32a). This last story is where we first find use of the actual term *havruta*. In this context, *havruta* seems to refer to more general companionship (in study), rather than to one particular study partner.

There is one more reason why *havruta* can be viewed as a Jewish practice. It may perhaps be viewed as a Jewish ritual in the way that it cultivates particular kinds of experiences with and attitudes toward texts and people, highlighting the value of the text, of ongoing learning in community and of dialectics. Samuel Heilman in *The People of the Book* makes a similar claim in discussing the enculturating process of learning Talmud in groups or what he calls “lernen.”⁶⁶ It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to explore exactly how it does this.

Interpretive [Learning]

Hevrutra is an interpretive activity. The task of *havruta* learners is not simply to read texts but to interpret them, to come to understand or make meaning of them.⁶⁷ Philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer calls our attention to the idea that human beings are naturally meaning seekers. They interpret the text through their horizons -- their understandings and experiences. The text also has its own horizon, which both “stimulates” and “regulates”⁶⁸ the interpreter’s interpretation and through the interaction between the interpreter’s and the text’s horizons, an interpretation is born. The result is not only an interpretation of the text but a transformation of our own horizons.⁶⁹ In this way, the process of interpretation is transformative.

⁶⁶ Heilman, *The People of the Book*. See 61-62 where he discusses “lernen” as “cultural performance.” While using different language, sociocultural theorists such as Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger support these ideas. For example, see Lave and Wenger, *Situated Learning*.

⁶⁷ Robert Scholes distinguishes between reading and interpreting. Robert Scholes, *Textual Power, Literary Theory and the Teaching of English* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 21-23.

⁶⁸ Rosenblatt, *The Reader, the Text, the Poem, the Transactional Theory of the Literary Work*, 11.

⁶⁹ For a discussion of horizons and understanding see Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald Marshall, Second Revised Edition (New York: Continuum, 1989), 302-07. Gadamer writes, “The horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point.” *Truth and Method*, 302. Further on he writes, “To acquire a horizon means that one learns to look beyond what is close at hand-not in order to look away from it but to see it better, within a larger whole and in truer proportion.” *Ibid.*, 305.

Interpretation and meaning making highlight engagement in discussions in which multiple potential meanings can be explored, negotiated and drawn on to develop compelling interpretations. Rather than simply being focused on outcomes, acts of interpretations and meaning making focus on both learning processes and outcomes and often the two bleed into each other. Thus, in writing about *havruta*, Moshe Halbertal and Tovah Hartman write, “In a *havruta* set-up, the processes of understanding and explaining become almost identical. While analyzing a text an isolated reader in the library might overlook inner contradictions or complexities, which would be raised in the presence of a *havruta*. The *Beit Midrash* set-up is thus conducive to the purpose of preserving and enlarging the Talmudic discourse. It is a training in acknowledging the existence of another point of view, presenting it, facing it and struggling with it.”⁷⁰

Interpretation and meaning making also require that we be in relationship to that which we interpret, that we pay close attention and stay open to its many meanings. Thus, Pat Carini reminds us that “Meaning arises through the relationship among things or persons: that mutual reciprocity that occurs in the act of truly ‘seeing’ something.”⁷¹

Carini also reminds us that we not only interpret text but people, too. Carini’s method for studying learners is based on closely observing learners and engaging in descriptive reviews, protocols for interpreting learners and their learning.⁷² Thus, the use of the word interpretive, while first drawing our attention to what we do with texts when we study in *havruta*, also highlights how we engage with our *havruta* partners.

⁷⁰ Halbertal and Halbertal, “The Yeshiva.”

⁷¹ Patricia Carini, *The Art of Seeing and the Visibility of the Person*, North Dakota Study Group on Evaluation (North Dakota: University of North Dakota Press, 1979), 15.

⁷² Margaret Himley and Patricia Carini, *From Another Angle, Children's Strengths and School Standards* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2000).

Social Learning

Social learning highlights the idea that *havruta* learning happens through social interaction. As *havruta* partners work on interpreting a text, their interactions affect their intellectual work. Do the partners respect one another and feel responsible for each other and is this reflected in their interaction? Do they try and understand one another or attain a degree of intersubjectivity?⁷³ Do they try to work collaboratively and enhance their individual capacities? Do they make space for each other's ideas and create a context for those ideas to impact on one another?⁷⁴ All of these issues matter when we accept the idea that *havruta* is a venture of social learning.

Viewing *havruta* through this lens calls our attention to the enhanced capacity that can be generated through *havruta* interactions. When two people work together, the end result of their work has the potential to be much greater than just a sum of their parts. This is in part due to the increased resources that two people bring to the table. In the words of a former student, Gail: "...so when I'm paired up with someone I come up with my previous knowledge and they come in with theirs and I come in with my analytical skills and they come in with theirs and we discover so much more than we could have on our own." The two people engage in joint work by drawing on the resources of all of the partners in order to build compelling interpretations. And it is in part due to the kind of work required when two people interact that creates new resources for learning. In the words of educational scholars, "A focus on collective understanding- requiring constant

⁷³ Rogoff defines "intersubjectivity" as "shared understanding based on common focus of attention and some shared presuppositions that form the ground for communication." Intersubjectivity is necessary for communication. Barbara Rogoff, *Apprenticeship in Thinking* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 71.

⁷⁴ See Elbow's metaphor of learning and growing being similar to cooking. He writes, "[C]ooking consists of the process of one piece of material (or one process) being transformed by interacting with another." Elbow, *Embracing Contraries*, 40-41.

comparison, discussion and modification of ideas -makes possible learning that is not accessible to individuals working alone.”⁷⁵ In generative *havruta*, people develop collective knowledge. One plus one equals three and not merely two.

This collaborative capacity is greatly enhanced through what I call a sense of “partnership.” *Havruta* as a partnership means that *havruta* partners respect one another and have a sense of responsibility for one another since they realize that they are involved in an endeavor in which they are mutually interdependent. *Havruta* as partnership also points to the idea that when we work in *havruta*, we are involved in something much greater than our individual selves and both the process of our work and the outcomes it generates are important and mutually reinforcing.

The social and interpretive aspects of *havruta* learning impact on each other on multiple levels. For example, when I ask my partner a question -- I am engaging in a social interaction -- but often my question will clarify my partner’s interpretation to me and even to my partner and thus is intrinsically connected to the interpretive process. On another level, when I provide evidence that strengthens my partner’s interpretation, I not only help us develop a more compelling interpretation but also indicate to my partner that I take her ideas seriously and will help her develop them further. This can contribute toward creating a sense of trust between my partner and myself and making us both more willing to engage in “risky” thinking.

[Learning] Practice

Finally, *havruta* is a learning practice. In using this term, I have been influenced by research on teaching which contrasts the practice of teaching with standardized

⁷⁵ Krechevsky and Mardell, "Four Features of Learning in Groups," 292-94.

technical work, which involves applying known solutions to formalized problems.⁷⁶

Havruta learning, like teaching, is complex, uncertain, and dynamic. As such, it cannot simply be reduced to a scripted series of prescribed steps. Rather, *havruta* partners make “speculative moves”⁷⁷ from moment to moment, probing the text with their partners and trying to develop the most compelling interpretation.

An element of the complexity and uncertainty of *havruta* is that we construct our knowledge of *havruta* through doing it. To get better at *havruta*, *havruta* participants make their actions a source of knowledge.⁷⁸ For example, a *havruta* partner works to understand what sense her partner is making of her words and the text. She offers an idea without knowing how her partner will understand the idea. Based on her partner’s response, she will gain some insight into what sense her partner is making. This information will then help her decide what to do next -- whether to ask a question, return to the text, repeat her words, offer an alternative idea, etc. It is in this way that we can get better at *havruta* through doing it, since the doing offers us multiple context-rich learning opportunities. This is learning in doing.

Finally, *havruta* is a Practice in the sense that it is something that participants do that is made up of other practices. In this dissertation, I distinguish between *havruta* as

⁷⁶ In highlighting the complex practice of teaching, Magdalene Lampert and Deborah Ball write, “Knowing in teaching depends fundamentally on being able to observe in the moment of classroom interaction, interpret the situation and act ‘deliberately.’ It depends on being able to use what one can learn from textbooks, experts, and colleagues as one makes reasoned judgments in the context of action. Acting in a context is a speculative move that is itself a source of new knowledge...When appreciation for this kind of deliberate action is absent, the connection between knowing and doing is truncated to the ‘application of theory to practice’ or the enactment of learned technical skills.” Magdalene Lampert and Deborah Loewenberg Ball, *Teaching, Multimedia, and Mathematics, Investigations of Real Practice* (New York Teachers College Press, 1998), 29. For further discussion of teaching as a complex and dynamic practice see Lampert, *Teaching Problems and the Problems of Teaching*.

⁷⁷ Lampert and Ball, *Teaching, Multimedia, and Mathematics, Investigations of Real Practice*, 29.

⁷⁸ For a discussion of “reflection in action” see Donald A. Schon, *Educating the Reflective Practitioner*, 1st ed., Higher Education Series (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1987).

Practice with a capital P and core practices in which *havruta* learners engage. I conceptualize *havruta* as a Practice made up of practices.

VII. Core Findings from Pilot Study

In 2004 and 2005, I conducted a pilot study in order to illuminate some of the rhythms and complexity of *havruta* study.⁷⁹ My final analysis focused on an in-depth look at one *havruta* interaction. I used this study to begin developing a language for talking about what happens in *havruta* interactions and to frame some issues worthy of further consideration.

In this study, I closely analyzed one *havruta* pair's session and identified that it entails phases (what I call "steps" in the study), moves, and norms. The *havruta* that I analyzed follows particular *phases* that organize the overall structure of their session. These phases fall into roughly three categories: 1. Getting started; 2. Engaging in interpretive discussion (s); and, 3. Working on the task. "Getting started" is often when they begin negotiating how they will work together. It often runs into their first reading of the text. These phases are recursive and can overlap.

Through the course of these phases, the *havruta* partners make many different *moves* in order to make meaning of the text in front of them. These moves help them interact with each other and the text, and highlight for us that to study in *havruta* requires students to engage both with another person and with a text, to see both as resources and draw on them in pursuit of their goal of interpreting the text.

⁷⁹ See Kent, "Interactive Text Study: A Case of *Hevruta* Learning." For more details about the particulars of how I conducted the study and analyzed the data, see Chapter 2.

Some of the *moves* that members of the *havruta* I studied make in relation to each other are: inviting each other to read, proposing ways to keep track of what each reads, checking for one's partner's understanding, explaining to the other person how one has arrived at an idea, questioning one's partner's interpretation, asking one's partner for help understanding something and building off of one's partner's ideas. Some of the *moves* that members of this *havruta* make in relation to the text are: reading the text, pointing to the text, paraphrasing the text, articulating an understanding of the text, citing evidence from the text, looking to see the entire length of the text and how the text is laid out, drawing diagrams of the text in order to help make sense of it, drawing on outside knowledge or experience to interpret the text, and connecting discrete parts of the text.

Furthermore, I illustrated some of the ways in which these moves follow explicit and implicit *norms*, with both social and intellectual dimensions. One set of behaviors such as planning how to learn together, explaining one's thinking out loud and taking on complementary roles fell under the larger norm of "Learning is collaborative." Another set of behaviors such as reading and re-reading the text, closely analyzing words in the text and citing evidence in the text illustrated the larger norm of "Interpretations are grounded in the text."

In addition, I uncovered two different modes of interpretive discussion. In one mode, *interpreting through opposition*, the *havruta* partners work interactively but their stance toward one another is one of opposition. They challenge each other's ideas and each continues to refine her own interpretation with the help of the other's questions. The end result of such an interpretive discussion is often two separate but more fully worked out interpretations. In the second mode, which I call *co-building*, the *havruta*

partners work together to develop an interpretation, building off of each other's ideas.

The end result of this mode of interpretive discussion is generally an interpretation that is an amalgam of both of their ideas.

Finally, I showed that engagement in *havruta* gave these learners an opportunity to practice critical thinking skills, such as looking for textual evidence, to engage in metacognitive awareness of their interpretive processes, and to draw on the dispositions of deep listening and working to understand others. These skills and dispositions are not just important in Jewish education, but lie at the core of a liberal arts education.⁸⁰

VIII. Moving Toward a Conceptualization of *Havruta* Learning

My dissertation takes this work a step further. I continue to study people's words, their talk, as they work together to unravel classical Jewish texts. And, I continue to analyze the potential for learning that arise in *havruta*. I also continue to argue that, as opposed to those who propose that *havruta* learning is easier than working on one's own, learning in *havruta* is actually very hard work and requires a great deal from participants. As I have conducted my analysis of moves, I began to realize that certain actions, like reading the text, were one grain size, and that others, like listening, were a larger grain size. Thus, in my dissertation, I have shifted from simply developing language for understanding and talking about what emerges from real life *havruta* interactions to developing a conceptualization of *havruta* learning in my context of study.

My analysis of the data, informed by a normative understanding of good *havruta* study, has led me to identify core practices in which *havruta* learners engage: listening

⁸⁰ For a discussion of the importance of metacognition see, for example, David Perkins, *Smart Schools, Better Thinking and Learning for Every Child* (New York: Free Press, 1992), and Bransford, Brown, and Cocking, *How People Learn*.

and articulating, wondering and focusing and supporting and challenging. When one looks at *havruta* as a set of learning practices, one can begin to uncover some of the resources that enable rich *havruta* discussions and also when and how things go awry.

These practices interact in dynamic ways. Sometimes, they are in tension with one another and they are not easy to do well. Inspired by Peter Elbow's belief that deep learning requires us to "embrace contraries," I think of *havruta* learning as made up of key dynamics combined in a delicate balance with one another.⁸¹ The tension between "competing" practices makes *havruta* work incredibly complex but also ripe for learning opportunities.

IX. An Outline of this Dissertation

In what follows, I define, illustrate and analyze these practices and their dynamics and use them as a lens to analyze four different *havruta* sessions. In Chapter Two, I describe the context of my study. I also explain the methodologies that guided my research and how I analyzed and interpreted my data. In Chapters Three, Four and Five -- my data based chapters -- I define each of the *havruta* practices and explain how they operate as pairs that work in dynamic relationship with one another. I provide examples of two *havruta* sessions in each chapter. Both of these examples will illustrate the practices in use, highlighting the ways in which they enable *havrutot* to engage in rich interpretive discussions and also highlighting missed opportunities that arise when the practices are not in balance with one another. Finally, in Chapter Six, I conclude with a review of some of the key insights about the practices and their implications, consider the

⁸¹ See Elbow's collection of essays in his book *Embracing Contraries*.

scholarly and practical contributions of this dissertation and also consider the question:
“why study in *havruta*?”

Chapter 1: Beginning To Understand <i>Havruta</i> Learning
Chapter 2: The Context and Design of the Study
Chapter 3: The Practices of Listening and Articulating
Chapter 4: The Practices of Wondering and Focusing
Chapter 5: The Practices of Supporting and Challenging
Chapter 6: Conclusion

Table 1.1: Outline of Dissertation Chapters

Chapter 2: The Context and Design of the Study

Introduction

In this chapter, I describe the context of my research, including the DeLeT Program at Brandeis and the *Beit Midrash* for Teachers. I situate my dissertation research in the *Beit Midrash* Research Project and review my data sources and my data gathering procedures. I then explain my research methodologies and the phases of my data analysis and interpretation and highlight the secondary literature that has been suggestive in developing my approaches to data analysis. I conclude with a brief discussion of the issue of generalizability as it pertains to my work.

I. Situating My Research⁸²

The DeLeT Program at Brandeis: A Teacher Education Program

My study takes place in a *Beit Midrash* for Teachers located in a teacher education program, DeLeT (Day School Leadership through Teaching), at Brandeis University. Brandeis University is a small liberal arts university in Greater Boston, located in Waltham, a Boston suburb. Brandeis is home to a number of research centers in the sciences and humanities, including the Mandel Center for Studies in Jewish Education, which sponsors the DeLeT program at Brandeis.

⁸² For a related discussion of the place of the *Beit Midrash* for Teachers in the DeLeT program, see Sharon Feiman-Nemser, "Beit Midrash for Teachers: An Experiment in Teacher Preparation," *Journal of Jewish Education* 72, no. 3 (2006). Feiman-Nemser's article focuses on the ways in which the *Beit Midrash* for Teachers serves as an important forum for teacher learning. While this is an important subject of discussion, it is not the focus of my dissertation. In this chapter, I provide details about DeLeT and the *Beit Midrash* for Teachers in order to give the reader a clearer idea of the context of the study and the framework in which students in the study were engaged in learning.

DeLeT is a preservice teacher education program focused on preparing teachers for elementary education in Jewish day schools and leading to state certification.⁸³ The DeLeT students take courses in general and Jewish studies during a 13-month period, which includes two summers. They also spend an entire school year interning in a classroom with a mentor teacher. Students in the program take courses on teaching reading, math, science, Bible, Jewish prayer and holidays, as well as courses on child development and special education. Students spend time exploring their own Jewish identities. Lastly, students spend extensive time developing their conceptions of teaching and their skills as teachers through a teaching seminar that runs through the entire duration of the program. The combination of course work and in-class teaching makes DeLeT intensive but also gives students an opportunity to reflect on their teaching experiences as they occur in real time. During the two summers, students take classes full time and also have an opportunity for organized socializing to help students develop a professional learning community.

In addition to helping students acquire subject matter knowledge for teaching, the DeLeT program helps students develop particular dispositions and skills for good teaching. For example, students spend a significant amount of time developing and honing their skills of observation and reflection. They observe and reflect on their own teaching and that of their colleagues, as well as on their students' learning. Sharon Feiman- Nemser and Margaret Buchmann highlight the importance of learning these skills. They write, "'Student teaching is teacher education when intending teachers are moved toward a practical understanding of the central tasks of teaching; when their

⁸³ DeLeT recently became a concentration in the Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) at Brandeis, making it a joint program of the Education Program and the Mandel Center for Studies in Jewish Education.

dispositions and skills to extend and probe student learning are strengthened; when they learn to question what they see, believe and do; when they see the limits of justifying their decisions and actions in terms of 'neat ideas' or classroom control; and when they see experience as a beginning rather than a culminating point in their learning."⁸⁴ As part of learning to observe and reflect, students are taught and encouraged to practice non-judgmental listening and looking closely and to develop a questioning stance toward their work as teachers.

*The Beit Midrash for Teachers*⁸⁵

From the start of the DeLeT program, DeLeT leadership has been committed to carving out time in the packed DeLeT schedule for students to study Jewish texts about teaching and learning in a *beit midrash* learning environment. This kind of learning is viewed as a central activity for professional development of teachers in Jewish education. Out of this vision, the *Beit Midrash* for Teachers was born.

The *Beit Midrash* for Teachers takes place each summer. It is the only formal course where both beginning and exiting cohorts learn together. It takes place two afternoons a week in three hours sessions across the entire five week summer period.

The *Beit Midrash* for Teachers has appropriated the model of *beit midrash* for a modern academic context. As such, the *Beit Midrash* for Teachers has elements that are similar to and quite different from a traditional *beit midrash*.⁸⁶ The chart below gives some examples of these similarities and differences. Given the unique character of the

⁸⁴ Sharon Feiman-Nemser and Margaret Buchmann, "When Is Student Teaching Teacher Education?," *Teaching and Teacher Education* 3, no. 4 (1987): 272.

⁸⁵ For a similar description of the *Beit Midrash* for Teachers, its setting, students and content, see Feiman-Nemser, "Beit Midrash for Teachers: An Experiment in Teacher Preparation."

⁸⁶ For descriptions of more traditional learning environments see William Helmreich, *The World of the Yeshiva, An Intimate Portrait of Orthodox Jewry* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1982), and Halbertal and Halbertal, "The Yeshiva."

DeLeT *Beit Midrash*, I will spend some time describing it so that the reader will better understand the context in which my study takes place.

<i>Beit Midrash for Teachers</i>	<i>Traditional Beit Midrash</i> ⁸⁷
Male and Female students from variety of backgrounds	Male students generally from traditional Jewish backgrounds
Intense study of traditional Jewish texts in English or Hebrew/Aramaic for 4-6 hours/week	Intense study of traditional Jewish texts in original language for 10 + hours/day
Study with <i>havruta</i>	Study with <i>havruta</i>
Study guides	No study guides. Students left to their own devices to decipher the texts.
Teachers as facilitators of student learning.	Teachers as subject matter experts who give <i>shiurim</i> /lectures a few times a week.
Classroom used as a <i>beit midrash</i> on a temporary basis	Designated permanent <i>beit midrash</i> space with many books available as resources

Table 2.1: Features of the *Beit Midrash* for Teachers and a Traditional *Beit Midrash*

The Setting

The *Beit Midrash* for Teachers takes place in a classroom at Brandeis. The classroom is a comfortable size to accommodate the approximately twenty students in the *Beit Midrash* but is not a permanent *beit midrash* space. Consequently, there is something a bit sterile about the environment. It does not have rows and rows of books as one might see in a more permanent *beit midrash*. At the start of the summer, the walls are often bare, although as the summer goes on, flip chart sheets with handwritten notes by teachers and students adorn the walls of the classroom. Grey office tables and chairs fill the room, which is equipped with state of the art technology for viewing *havruta* video tapes and projecting teacher notes and student comments. Because the *Beit*

⁸⁷ There is no monolithic “traditional *beit midrash*.” The chart gives examples of some common features.

Midrash for Teachers is a research site, there is often video equipment in the room to video teachers and students.

At the same time, the classroom has an intimate feel, perhaps brought about by the carpeting on the floor and the dimming of the lights. The tables in the classroom are formed into an oval shape. Students -- men and women -- sit around them for large group discussions and teacher mini lessons. The oval shape allows students to see each other and converse with one another and their teachers. During *havruta* time, the chairs and tables are easily moved around so that the two people in each *havruta* can sit across from one another at an individual table. During the time when the *Beit Midrash* meets, the tables are covered in books and photocopied pages of the texts being studied. Two teachers sit at the front of the classroom, and behind the teachers are two sets of flip charts for presenting ideas and recording student comments.

The Students

Men and women of various ages and backgrounds study in this *Beit Midrash*. Most of the students in the DeLeT program are women but there are also some men. Most of the students are in their twenties, recent college graduates and academically accomplished. Some students are older and on a second career. The students' Hebrew fluency varies. They also have a range of experiences studying Jewish texts, some having studied few traditional texts, others having studied some Biblical texts and texts from the *siddur* and others having studied a broader range of Jewish texts and even having studied in a *beit midrash*. What these students share is a commitment to being Jewish educators and a high degree of motivation to learn how to be successful teachers.

The table below presents some information about the 14 students specifically involved in my dissertation study.⁸⁸

Student	Age	Denominational affiliation	College Major	Formal Jewish education in K-12	Year in DeLeT
Lisa	25	Modern Orthodox	Biology	K-8 Day school and Hebrew high school	2nd summer
Judy	26	Conservative	Drama	K-6 Day school	2nd summer
Susan	23	Conservative	Mathematics	Hebrew school through bat-mitzvah	2 nd summer
Cindy	24	Reform	Social work	Hebrew school through bat-mitzvah and Hebrew high school	2 nd summer
Joseph	27	Zionist	Political science	7 years Hebrew School	1 st & 2nd summer
Liora	24	Conservative	Jewish philosophy and religion	Private study	1 st & 2 nd summer
Michelle	21	Conservative	Jewish studies	12 years Hebrew school	2 nd summer
Shulamit	22	Modern Orthodox	Math	K-12 Day school	1 st summer
Amy	24	Reform/ Conservative	Psychology	Day school from elementary through high school	1st summer
Sally	22	Conservative	Jewish studies	Hebrew school through bat mitzvah and Hebrew high school	1st summer
Laurie	24	Conservative	English	K-8 Day School; Hebrew high school	1st summer
Debbie	22	Modern Orthodox	Jewish studies	Hebrew school through bat mitzvah and Hebrew high school	2nd summer
Jim	24	Conservative	Business administration	Information not available	1 st summer
Lance	39	Reconstructionist	English/Psychology	Hebrew school through Confirmation	1 st & 2 nd summer
Miriam	52	Reform	English and Sociology	Hebrew school through bat mitzvah and Hebrew high school	1st summer
Robin	36	Reform	Professional music	7 years of Jewish school and private lessons	1 st summer

Table 2.2: Background Information on Students in Dissertation Study

⁸⁸ All of the students named in this study have been given pseudonyms in order to conceal their identities. Students appearing in bold are those that are highlighted in the cases in my dissertation.

The Teachers

There are two teachers in the program, Elie Holzer, a professor of education at Bar Ilan University, and myself. Elie and I have both taught in a range of settings over the course of our careers. While we have learning goals for our students and give mini lectures or more traditional *shiurim* (lecture) in the *Beit Midrash*, we very much view our roles as facilitators of student learning. We try to create the conditions in the *Beit Midrash* for students to learn from and with each other and the texts, without always needing their teacher as the direct guide. To this end, we work very hard to make sure that the texts are linguistically accessible to students, and we construct very specific study guides to help students work with each other in *havruta* to interpret the texts.

After five years of leading the *Beit Midrash* for Teachers, we still have questions about our particular roles during *havruta* -- should we circulate among the different *havrutot*, sit with different *havrutot* each time or sit with one another and study the same texts as our students. We have experimented with these alternatives, since each has certain benefits and drawbacks.⁸⁹

The Curriculum

The curriculum of the *Beit Midrash* is quite ambitious. It is focused on exposing students to three content areas: Jewish texts related to teaching and learning, *havruta*

⁸⁹ By circulating, we are able to make sure *havrutot* are not getting stuck and gain a better sense of what is going on and how we might need to shift our own more direct teaching after *havruta* time is over. At the same time, by circulating, we impose ourselves on the private space of the *havruta*, sometimes interrupting them at crucial points in their conversation and even unintentionally setting them off course. By sitting with different *havrutot* each time, we have an opportunity to help model for the *havruta* certain moves that they can use in their learning together to help make it more successful. In some ways, if we sit with a *havruta* for the entire *havruta* time, we are less likely to interrupt the flow of the conversation. At the same time, having a teacher sit with a *havruta* dramatically changes the dynamics of that *havruta* and can make it hard for the pair to feel comfortable. By studying on our own in the *beit midrash*, we send the message to our students that everyone is a learner. We also sit near them so that they can easily find us and ask us questions. However, many students are shy to interrupt their teachers, and others do not realize that they need help until asked

learning and text study. Each summer, students study a new set of Jewish texts that relate to the overall theme of teaching and learning and come from Biblical, rabbinic, medieval and modern Jewish sources. Study of these texts provides students with an opportunity to become familiar with and reflect on views about teaching and learning in Jewish sources, as part of their own process of developing a personal teaching stance. In addition to the textual content, students learn about *havruta* study. In the DeLeT *Beit Midrash*, *havruta* is not just a means towards an ends; it is an ends in itself since it is through *havruta* learning that students can develop as “critical colleagues,”⁹⁰ as they practice observing and reflecting on their own and their *havruta*’s teaching and learning. In many ways, *havruta* is a mini apprenticeship in intentional teaching and learning, since students must take responsibility for themselves and their partner’s learning. In the *Beit Midrash*, students engage in particular exercises and assignments to help them be better *havruta* partners and reflect on their own learning and teaching in the *havruta* experience. Finally, students also learn about the process of text study. Students practice explaining the text and finding big ideas in the text. They learn to draw on evidence and pay attention to the particulars of the text in order to develop compelling interpretations. And students learn about the ways their preconceptions help them fill in gaps in the text that allow them to interpret it, while sometimes also leading them to read the text in ways not supported by the text.

The Sequence of the Day

Students enter the *Beit Midrash* to the sound of guitar playing. In order to help set the Beit Midrash apart from a "regular" course, students and teachers begin their time

⁹⁰ For a discussion of this idea see Feiman-Nemser, "*Beit Midrash* for Teachers: An Experiment in Teacher Preparation," 176-77.

in the *Beit Midrash* by singing a song about the value of Torah study which sets the tone for the rest of their time together.

On the first day of the *Beit Midrash*, students receive a notebook with photocopies in Hebrew and English of the texts that will be studied in the *Beit Midrash* during the summer. Students are also asked to bring a *Tanakh*⁹¹ to class and other books that might assist them in their study process (such as a dictionary for those students interested in working on their language skills).

Then, teachers generally give a mini lesson, teaching about a particular idea and/or framing the particular texts to be studied that day. Students have time to ask questions and clarify ideas. Teachers also use this time to explain the study guide, which accompanies the texts to be studied that day. Students then spend time studying in *havruta*.⁹² Teachers encourage *havrutot* to begin their time together by reading the text out loud. The buzz in the room slowly grows as the *havrutot* get settled into their study together. Students generally spend thirty minutes to an hour studying in *havruta*. As *havrutot* study together, the buzz waxes and wanes; students shift between reading the text, engaging in discussion, thinking quietly to themselves and writing. Some students get up to ask other students or their teacher questions. Tables get reconfigured as different pairs talk to one another and then return to their original *havruta* of two. After studying in *havruta*, students generally gather together, either as one large group or in two smaller groups to discuss their ideas. Tables and chairs get reconfigured again, as

⁹¹ This is a Bible containing the *Torah* (Five Books of Moses), *Neviim* (the Prophets) and *Ketuvim* (Writings)

⁹² The *havrutot* are set up by the teachers ahead of time. For a discussion of how this is done, see the Appendix.

students gather together to be challenged by the questions raised by their teachers and peers and learn from one another's different insights.

II. Genesis of the Research Project

The *Beit Midrash* Research Project developed along with the *Beit Midrash* for Teachers. Its focus is on studying the pedagogy and learning that occurs in the *Beit Midrash* for Teachers. My dissertation research sits within this larger project. Elie Holzer and I co-direct this project and Sharon Feiman-Nemser participates as part of the research team. The research project was inspired by the idea of a "design experiment," as discussed by Anne Brown.⁹³ Thus, the design and implementation of the *Beit Midrash* for teachers was informed by both theoretical and practical knowledge and modified based on ongoing data gathering and analysis.

The *Beit Midrash* for Teachers is a generative site for my study because the program's use of *havruta* reflects a contemporary trend of *havruta* study in American Jewish educational settings. It is also an intentionally designed learning environment. As described above, the instructors match pairs, provide scaffolding in the form of study guides, and help students think about how to work with their study partners and interpret the texts, in the hope that these design features will enhance the educative potential of learning in *havruta*.

⁹³ Ann Brown, "Design Experiments: Theoretical and Methodological Challenges in Creating Complex Interventions in Classroom Settings," *The Journal of the Learning Sciences* 2, no. 2 (1992).

III. Data Gathering

Participants in the *Beit Midrash* for Teachers were asked to sign “informed consent” forms in which they acknowledged their consent to be part of this larger research project. I oversaw the data gathering. All classes in the summers of 2003, 2004 and 2005 were videotaped. Two particular classes were videotaped in 2006. In 2004 and 2005, a classroom observer took field notes of what occurred in the larger class. The field notes in 2005 included notes on *havruta* pairs. In addition, each year, focal *havruta* pairs were selected to be audiotaped and videotaped. The pairs were chosen to try and include people of different genders and experience levels. In addition, one pair was asked to continue a second summer in order to try to track learning over time.⁹⁴

Over the course of four summers, I collected video and/or audio data of nine *havruta* pairs in 51 *havruta* sessions, totaling approximately 40 hours of *havruta* study. The audio and videotapes were transcribed by a transcriber and myself, and I further edited each transcript. The transcription process was lengthy, and I rewatched the tapes many times because of the challenges of capturing clear audio and deciphering the informal speech of the participants. These transcriptions, along with the audio and videos, serve as the primary data for my study. See the table below for a list of the primary data.

Pairs	Audio/Video	Hours
Lisa & Judy, '03	Audio of 4 <i>havruta</i> sessions (1); video excerpts of these sessions	2.25
Joseph & Liora, '03	Audio of 4 <i>havruta</i> sessions (2); video excerpts of these sessions	2.5

⁹⁴ Unfortunately, one of the members of the pair that was asked to continue a second summer proved to be unreliable the second summer in terms of attendance, making it hard to do this kind of comparison. Furthermore, the changing nature of the texts and tasks also made this kind of comparison difficult.

Susan & Cindy, '03	Audio of 4 <i>havruta</i> sessions; video excerpts of these sessions	2.75
Joseph and Liora, '04	Video of 6 <i>havruta</i> sessions and audio of 8 <i>havruta</i> sessions (3)	6
Michelle and Shulamit, '04	Audio of 8 <i>havruta</i> sessions and video of one of those sessions (4)	6
Amy & Sally '04	Audio and video of 8 <i>havruta</i> sessions	6
Laurie & Debbie, '04	Video and audio of 5 <i>havruta</i> sessions	4.5
Jim & Lance, '04	Video and audio of 6 <i>havruta</i> sessions	5.5
Lance & Robin, '06	Video of 2 <i>havruta</i> sessions	2
Laurie & Miriam, '06	Video of 2 <i>havruta</i> sessions	2
	Total sessions: 51	Total hours: 40

Table 2.3: Primary Data Sources

(1 & 2) audio of one of the sessions cuts out after a few minutes

(3) Michelle missed class one time so one session was with Nancy and Shulamit

(4) Liora missed class two times, so two of the *havruta* sessions were with Joseph and Linda. Michelle also was late for a 3rd class. During another session, a third person joined them for part of their *havruta*.

During the first summer of data collection, I did not video the full *havruta* session of any one pair but rather had one camera move from pair to pair. After reviewing the data from that summer, I realized how useful it was to have accompanying video in order to capture not only what the *havruta* said but did, and also to better interpret the meaning of their words. In the ensuing summers, two focal pairs were videotaped each summer.⁹⁵

Besides collecting audio and videotapes of the focal *havruta* pairs, I wrote analytic memos about particular pieces of data and about cross-cutting themes and

⁹⁵ In 2004, there were three focal pairs but only two cameras. Hence, only two pairs were videotaped. Because of our camera and videographer limitations, I chose to select two focal pairs in 2005 and 2006.

questions. These memos helped me keep track of my thinking about what I was learning from my data and secondary reading. I began these memos in 2003 and continued to write them through 2007. They have been a crucial forum for my thinking and helping me move from the particulars of close-up analysis to developing conceptualizations.

I also gathered a variety of other data including teaching planning notes, lessons, assignments and reflections and student work which included in-class assignments from each summer, a final assignment from 2004 and a pre-course, midterm and final assignment from 2005 and 2006.

For the purposes of my dissertation, I read through teacher planning notes, lessons and assignments and field notes. I generated a list of what was taught during each session, what texts were used, and what kind of tasks students were asked to engage in. I also looked at student work to get a general sense of students' responses to classroom tasks and the kinds of issues they chose to highlight when reflecting on their *havruta* experiences.

Once I chose the pairs on which I would focus my analysis and the particular *havruta* sessions, I looked more closely at the accompanying documents for those pairs and sessions. I also collected biographical information from the participants in the focal pairs from their applications to the DeLeT program. Some participants also filled out a questionnaire, which I supplied.

- | |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher lessons, planning notes and reflections • Field notes from 2004 and 2005 • Student work • Biographical background of participants |
|--|

Table 2.4: Secondary Data Sources

For the most part, this data served a secondary role in my analysis. It was not the focus of systematic analysis but helped me contextualize the work of the *havruta* pairs. The student work of the particular pairs helped me get inside their thinking about *havruta* work in general and their own work in particular and thus helped inform my emerging pictures of the work done by the focal pairs, as well as my larger conceptualization of *havruta*. For example, the pairs in 2005 and 2006 filled out a pre-course assignment in which they wrote about what they perceived to be their areas of potential strength and weakness in their *havruta* work. The pairs in 2006 filled out written reflections about their experiences being “challengers” and “supporters” of their *havrutot*.

Data collection posed many challenges. Because this is a naturalistic study and not a laboratory study, I could not control for disruptions in class, student absences and malaise, changes in classroom venue and scheduling changes. I also faced many technological challenges. Figuring out how to collect data with good sound and picture quality took a number of summers. The data from 2005 and 2006 are much clearer than earlier data. Because of the challenges of capturing clear audio, the focal pairs were asked to move to an adjacent room during *havruta* time. I made this concession despite my preference to collect data in a completely naturalistic setting because otherwise, the *havruta* conversations would have been drowned out by surrounding voices. When the focal pairs switched rooms, the cameras followed them. This created some chaos, especially in the beginning of each summer as everyone got used to the logistics.

IV. Research Methodologies

My dissertation sits within a number of research traditions: practitioner inquiry, grounded theory and discourse analysis. I will describe each in turn and its relationship to my research. The literature reviewed here has been suggestive in developing my approaches to data analysis.

Practitioner Inquiry

My work is situated within the realm of practitioner inquiry or research, a tradition of research which mobilizes practitioners in the study of their own practice. Marilyn Cochran-Smith and Susan Lytle define practitioner inquiry as the “systematic, intentional inquiry by teachers about their own school and classroom work.”⁹⁶ In contrast to grounded theory which uses specified analytic strategies, such as open coding, practitioner research does not have a predetermined series of methodological processes. Rather, practitioners systematically analyze an array of documents, such as teacher journals, videotapes of classroom teaching and learning, and records of student work. Their inquiry is rooted in questions which arise from classroom practice.⁹⁷ Practitioner inquiry is generally interpretive research and its strength lies in practitioners’ ability to capture the richness and complexity of classroom life based on their years of knowledge and years of experience in ongoing classroom life. It relies on teachers as “observant participants”⁹⁸ in classrooms.

My research was undertaken in a classroom in which I am a co-teacher and designer of the curriculum, lessons and study guides. While I do not directly study my

⁹⁶ Marilyn Cochran-Smith and Susan Lytle eds., *Inside/Outside, Teacher Research and Knowledge* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1993), 23-24.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 12-20.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 58. (citing Flurio-Ruane and Walsh, 1980)

own teaching practice, I am studying the learning of my students as they engage with each other in tasks that I have designed for them. Driving my research is a desire to develop a conceptual understanding of *havruta* for its own sake and to better understand my students' learning experiences when they study in *havruta* so that I can make future students' learning experiences as educative as possible.

My work has been influenced by the work of four scholars whose research falls under the heading of “practitioner research:” Pat Carini, Eleanor Duckworth, Sophie Haroutunian-Gordon and Magdalene Lampert.⁹⁹ Carini and Duckworth have spent their lives closely studying their students and their students' learning. Carini has developed such inquiry into a systematic approach. Teachers working under Carini's leadership “developed the phenomenologically-driven methods for disciplined description that are now known collectively as the Prospect processes. Grounded in the particulars of actual children and real classrooms, these processes animate, open up and move forward the thinking of teachers and parents about children, classroom activities and curricular choices and the larger challenges facing public education.”¹⁰⁰ While Carini's descriptive review process does not map easily onto the study of *havruta* interactions, her categories helped me pay better attention to the different dimensions of my students' learning as I analyzed *havruta* videos and transcripts. Even more than the particular categories, I kept

⁹⁹ While I place Lampert here, she herself notes that she does not use the term “teacher research” since she thinks “being a teacher involves the study of- and communication about- practice.” Lampert, “Knowing Teaching from the Inside Out: Implications of Inquiry in Practice for Teacher Education.”

¹⁰⁰ Margaret Himley, “Descriptive Inquiry: Language as a Made Thing,” in *From Another Angle, Children's Strengths and School Standards* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2000), 127. Carini herself writes most specifically about her inquiry approach in two monographs: Patricia Carini, *Observation and Description: An Alternative Methodology for the Investigation of Human Phenomena*, ed. North Dakota Study Group on Evaluation (North Dakota: University of North Dakota Press, 1975). And, Carini, *The Art of Seeing and the Visibility of the Person*. She explains in *Observation and Description*, “Before it is possible, let alone desirable, to abstract and isolate the elements of a phenomenon according to the principles of logic, we must first conduct an inquiry that brings us closer to the phenomenon- if you will, into the phenomenon –in all its complexity,” 5.

Carini's ideal of the descriptive process in mind as I set about my work of making meaning of *havruta* interactions. As Carini writes in "Meditation: On Description," "Describing, I pause, and pausing, attend. Describing requires that I stand back and consider. Describing requires that I not rush to judgment or conclude before I have looked. Describing makes room for something to be fully present. Describing is slow, particular work. I have to set aside familiar categories for classifying or generalizing. I have to stay with the subject of my attention. I have to give it time to speak, to show itself."¹⁰¹

As a teacher in this *Beit Midrash* and others, I bring certain knowledge about studying in *havruta*. I know that, contrary to some "romantic notions" of *havruta*, not all *havruta* study is successful learning. Partly because of my role as teacher, my research interests are guided by educational goals and a desire to understand the quality of my students' learning. For this reason, I became interested in developing an understanding of "generative *havruta* discussions." In this regard, I have been most influenced by the work of Sophie Haroutunian-Gordon who in studying both her teaching and another teacher's practice, explicated aspects of "good" interpretive discussion and provided classroom examples. Connected to my interest in understanding what makes for a generative *havruta* discussion has been my research interest in tracing learning trajectories in order to understand how good ideas -- and not such good ideas -- develop.

As a practitioner conducting inquiry in my classroom, I have deep knowledge accumulated over time about the nature of the learning that takes place in my classroom. This strengthens my ability to analyze my data and develop a conceptualization of

¹⁰¹ Patricia Carini, *Starting Strong, a Different Look at Children, Schools, and Standards*, ed. Marilyn Cochran-Smith and Susan Lytle The Practitioner Inquiry Series (New York: Teachers College Press, 2001), 163.

havruta. At the same time, in the words of Magdalene Lampert, “I [am] also constrained by the limitations of any medium to express the multiplicity of what I know.”¹⁰² Lampert eloquently writes about the complexity of communicating what one knows when engaged in practitioner inquiry. One’s unique vantage point as an insider gives one access to increased levels of insight but this greater insight can make it harder to communicate to an audience the overlapping complexities of teaching and learning. I have keenly felt this challenge in my writing and have looked to Lampert for guidance.

As a practitioner in my research site, I also bring certain biases about the strengths and weaknesses of my design and of my students. It has been important for me to realize my own biases about particular students and the relative merits of particular tasks and to revisit data and consider it through multiple methodological and disciplinary lenses.¹⁰³

Grounded Theory

My research bears a family resemblance to grounded theory. Like practitioner research, grounded theory emphasizes immersion in one’s data in order to generate a larger framework.

According to Glaser and Strauss, the key to grounded theory is that all aspects of analysis are carried out in relation to one’s data. This means that as one develops hypotheses and concepts out of the data, one returns to analyze the data with those very same hypotheses and concepts in mind. And even when one develops ideas from outside of one’s data by, for example, drawing on secondary literature, those ideas must be then used in relation to the data. As they explain: “Generating a theory from data means that most hypotheses and concepts not only come from the data, but are systematically

¹⁰² Lampert, "Knowing Teaching from the Inside Out: Implications of Inquiry in Practice for Teacher Education," 175.

¹⁰³ See the section on Validity below for more discussion of these points.

worked out in relation to the data during the course of the research....the source of certain ideas...can come from sources other than the data...But the generation of theory from such insights must then be brought into relation with the data...”¹⁰⁴ The ongoing interrelating of one’s emerging theory to one’s data helps the grounded theory researcher discover an “integrating scheme within his data.”¹⁰⁵ Grounded theory is thus an iterative process moving between data and theory generation and back to data.

To do this effectively, the researcher engages in coding and memo writing. Coding leads to the identification of categories that also raise questions and hypotheses.¹⁰⁶ So for example, in my analysis of *havruta* data, I identified the category of “moves” made in relation to the text. This category served to unite a whole list of other codes and also raised questions about the ways that *havrutot* worked with the text such as whether and how they drew on outside knowledge, the text’s internal resources (such as the Hebrew, various proof texts¹⁰⁷, or other referents), and the kinds of questions they brought to bear.

As the process continues, the researcher engages in more selective coding, deciding which categories are central to the project and linking subcategories to core categories. By zooming in on central categories and relating them to subcategories, the researcher puts ideas from the data into relationship. As Glaser and Strauss write, “In the beginning, one’s hypotheses may seem unrelated, but as categories and properties emerge, develop in abstraction and become related, their accumulating interrelations form

¹⁰⁴ Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1967), 6.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 41.

¹⁰⁶ Anselm Strauss, *Qualitative Analysis for Social Scientists* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

¹⁰⁷ A proof text is a text from the Bible, brought as proof for a particular idea expressed in the Talmud.

an integrated central theoretical framework- the core of the emerging theory.”¹⁰⁸ All of this moves the researcher toward integrating the analysis and in the words of Glaser and Strauss “yields conceptual density.”¹⁰⁹

I chose to draw on grounded theory in the early phase of my research because of the lack of research on *havruta*. There are no larger theories about *havruta* learning and, with the exception of Susan Tedmon’s doctoral dissertation and unpublished research by Israeli professor, Baruch Schwartz, *havruta* has not been subjected to empirical study. I had few theoretical constructs to bring to bear on my data. Therefore, my research was not undertaken to prove the validity of a particular theory but to learn about a particular phenomena -- *havruta* in the DeLeT *Beit Midrash* -- based on what I saw in my data and to generate an original theory. I wanted an approach that would immerse me in my data and allow me to look at it with open eyes, but not leave me merely in the realm of description. I had read descriptive studies of student learning that looked closely at student learning in particular contexts and described how the learning occurred. As a student of education with a keen interest in learning, I was drawn to these studies. The rich and textured picture they painted of how people learned gave me insights into learning and raised important questions in my mind. But I also found some of this research hard to follow because of the lack of a conceptual frame to hold together the dense description. I knew that in addition to describing *havruta*, I wanted to analyze the process and develop my analysis into a coherent framework. Grounded theory, with its focus on systematically building theory from data, seemed like a particularly useful approach. And even as I increasingly situated my work within the realm of discourse

¹⁰⁸ Glaser and Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*, 40.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 55.

analysis, the idea of developing frameworks through close analysis of my data continued to drive my study.

There is discussion in the grounded theory literature about the role of secondary literature. Some might posit that one should read one's data without being influenced by outside ideas in order to clearly see what is in the data. However, as we know from philosophical hermeneutics, this is an impossibility. Based on a review of grounded theory literature, John Cutcliffe suggests a middle road approach. First, he acknowledges that no researcher is merely an empty vessel. Second, he suggests that in cases where no theory exists, it is helpful to conduct a literature review in order to clarify the concepts "and thus provide firm conceptual clarity and an understanding upon which the rest of the emergent theory can be built."¹¹⁰ I came to my data analysis having read literature on cooperative learning as well as literature on teaching and learning reading and literature. Thus, I had some ideas about what might occur when two people studied in a *havruta*. For example, I thought that in order to interpret the text, they might draw on outside knowledge, personal experience and features in the text itself. I also wondered whether questions would play a significant role in the interactions. While these ideas were in my head as I analyzed my data, they did not take the form of a complete theory and they were supplemented by many other ideas that emerged through my close analysis.

Discourse Analysis

My research has also been informed by discourse analysis, on both the conceptual and analytic level.

¹¹⁰ John Cutcliffe, "Methodological Issues in Grounded Theory," *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 31, no. 6 (2000): 1481.

Given the large field of discourse analysis, I cannot give a full account of it or even discuss all of the ways that I have been influenced by the disparate literature. Rather, I will discuss a number of ideas that played a particularly significant role in my approach to data analysis from the larger field of discourse analysis. In some ways, my approach to my data is most closely aligned with conversation analysis, although conversation analysis takes many shapes and forms as well.

Discourse analysis makes clear that language is multivocal and therefore the meaning of any particular utterance is context based and negotiable. As James Gee writes, "Language...always simultaneously reflects and constructs the situation or context in which it is used."¹¹¹ It thus becomes crucial to study language in context and not as isolated words or sentences. For my purposes, Gee's insights directed me to consider ideas expressed through speech as being part of an ongoing creative process, which led me to consider the trajectories of idea development.

Related to this is the idea that "all language use are social activities and therefore, are inherently dialogic."¹¹² Charles Goodwin, in writing about a particular school of discourse analysis called conversation analysis, makes a similar point, highlighting the fact that hearers are "co-participants" in speech.¹¹³ Thus, even a nod or gaze from a

¹¹¹ James Paul Gee, *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis, Theory and Method* (New York & London: Routledge, 2005), 97. While ideas from Gee inform my work, his larger purpose for using discourse analysis is very different from my own. He is interested in uncovering ideologies that are reflected in Discourse with a big D (which includes far more than simply speech) and has developed a particular process for doing this. I am interested in understanding how a particular kind of interaction "works."

¹¹² James Paul Gee, Sarah Michaels, and Mary Catherine O'Connor, "Discourse Analysis," in *Handbook of Qualitative Research in Education*, ed. Margaret LeCompte, Wendy Millroy, and Judith Preissle (1992), 235.

¹¹³ Charles Goodwin, "Conversation Analysis," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 19 (1990): 294. Conversation analysts are particularly interested in the organization of conversation. Conversation analysts study among other things, the sequence of talk, turn-taking and participant roles.

hearer can “shape or reshape a narrator’s narrative.”¹¹⁴ Given the ongoing dialogic nature of speech, it becomes important to examine the interactional processes involved in the production of particular ideas. As Charles Goodwin writes, “What an action, utterance, or sentence eventually comes to be is best examined as the outcome of processes that are significantly interactional, rather than as the product of the psychological intent of an isolated speaker.”¹¹⁵ When we shift from thinking about speech as merely a representation of internal mental states but rather a social activity, we begin to consider what speech is being used to do.¹¹⁶ Thus, in my analysis, I consider what speech accomplishes.

Discourse analysts also assume that discourse is “rule governed” and “internally structured.”¹¹⁷ While the patterns are more malleable in informal speech -- and in many ways, the discourse of *havruta* in the *Beit Midrash* for Teachers is more akin to informal speech than to formal speech, such as what we would see in a Catholic mass -- there are still patterns. Thus, in my work with my data, I considered the “discourse organization”-- what Gee calls the “macrostructure of the text” as well as the “thematic organization.”¹¹⁸ The discourse organization fell into a three-part pattern. The thematic organization varied from *havruta* session to *havruta* session and through dividing transcripts based on themes, I was able to trace the development of particular ideas and interpretations within a *havruta* session.

¹¹⁴ Gee, Michaels, and O'Connor, "Discourse Analysis," 235.

¹¹⁵ Goodwin, "Conversation Analysis," 294.

¹¹⁶ For a discussion of the idea of "speech acts" see John Langshaw Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, ed. J.O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975).

¹¹⁷ Gee, Michaels, and O'Connor, "Discourse Analysis," 228.

¹¹⁸ Gee, *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis, Theory and Method*, 281.

Finally, James Gee posits that language is used to build things. He highlights seven things in particular, three of which are particularly relevant to my research: significance, relationships and connections. Thus, the discourse analyst will ask the following questions: “How is this piece of language being used to make certain things significant or not and in what ways?” “What sort of relationship is this piece of language seeking to enact with others (present or not)?” And, “How does this piece of language connect things or disconnect things; how does it make one thing relevant or irrelevant to another.”¹¹⁹

The uses of discourse analysis in educational settings also helped frame my study and guide my data analysis. This literature is quite far ranging in scope and purpose.¹²⁰ For my analysis of *havruta* learning, the work of three sets of researchers has been particularly useful analytically: Judith Little’s work on teacher learning in communities of practice; Anna Sfard’s work on understanding the discourse of mathematical thinking; and, Mary Catherine O’Connor and Sarah Michael’s analysis of the roles people play in classroom discourse.

Judith Little analyzes particular episodes of teacher talk to understand the ways in which participant roles and practices create and close down opportunities for professional learning. Similar to my goal of developing a framework for understanding generative *havruta*, Little is interested in a conceptual model that “specifies the nature of robust, public pedagogical reasoning, together with the cognitive, social, material, organizational

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 11-13.

¹²⁰ For a review of many studies that focus on talk in the classroom see Courtney Cazden, *Classroom Discourse, The Language of Teaching and Learning*, 2nd edition ed. (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2001). For a broad overview of the ways in which discourse analysis has been used to address questions in the field of education see Carolyn Temple Adger, "Discourse in Educational Settings," in *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis*, ed. Deborah Schiffrin, Deborah Tannen, and Heidi Hamilton (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2004).

and normative resources that enable it.”¹²¹ Central to Little’s analysis is the notion of “affordance” which “calls attention to multiple possibilities made available in and through talk, gesture and material artifacts.”¹²² Thus, her analysis is focused on what opportunities are made available or “afforded” through different kinds of talk. I draw on this idea in trying to identify generative *havruta* moments and missed opportunities.

Anna Sfard studies the discourse of people involved in mathematical problem solving in order to understand the nature of mathematical thinking.¹²³ Sfard’s analytic approach is inspired by Vygotsky, Wittgenstein and modern semiotics.¹²⁴ She develops what she calls “interaction flowcharts” to trace the focus of talk (“object” or “meta level” utterances) and the interaction of the participants (are comments directed to peers or self-directed and who is proactively proposing an idea and does that idea get reacted to?). By tracking the development of students’ ideas and linking this to the progression of their interaction, Sfard gains insight into how their interactions shape their developing ideas. Sfard’s emphasis on tracking the development of ideas and connecting this to students’ interactions has significantly influenced my conceptualization and analysis.

Like Little and Sfard, O’Connor and Michael engage in fine-grained analysis, looking at participant roles and interactions to understand the ways in which classroom discourse

¹²¹ Judith Warren Little and Ilana Horn, “Normalizing Problems of Practice: Converting Routine Conversations into a Resource for Learning in Professional Communities,” in *Professional Learning Communities: Divergence, Detail and Difficulties*. ed. L. Stoll and K. S. Louis. (Maidenhead, England: Open University Press, 2007) 91.

¹²² Judith Little, “Inside Teacher Community: Representations of Classroom Practice,” *Teachers College Record* 105, no. 6 (2003): 6.

¹²³ See, for example, Anna Sfard, “Steering (Dis)Course between Metaphors and Rigor: Using Focal Analysis to Investigate an Emergence of Mathematical Objects” *Journal for Research in Mathematics Education* 31, no. 3 (2000), and ———, “There Is More to Discourse Than Meets the Ears: Looking at Thinking as Communicating to Learn More About Mathematical Learning,” in *Learning Discourse, Discursive Approaches to Research in Mathematics Education*, ed. Ellice Forman and Anna Sfard (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002).

¹²⁴ Anna Sfard communicated this to me in a personal correspondence.

socializes students into thinking practices. They trace the interaction between the “principal,” the originator of an utterance, and the “animator,” the person who takes up the utterance, and specifically highlight the notion of “revoicing.” Revoicing is a “particular kind of reuttering (oral and written) of a student’s contribution- by another participant in the discussion.”¹²⁵ Analyzing “revoicing” in my own data helped me consider the ways in which *havrutot* build ideas together.

Ideas about Language and Discourse from <u>General Discourse Literature</u>	Impact on My Research
Language as multivocal and context based	Study language in context; Need to move between analyzing the details and the whole conversation to understand meaning
Dialogic nature of speech	Study interactional processes
Language as a “speech act”	Attend to what speech is doing
Discourse as rule governed and internally structured	Analyze “macro structure” and thematic organization
Language used to build things	Consider how language builds significance, relationships and connections
Ideas about Language and Discourse from <u>Educational Research</u>	Impact on My Research
Affordances	What kind of possibilities and limitations does “talk” enable? What does generative <i>havruta</i> look like?
Interaction flowchart	What is the flow of the interaction? What are the different ideas proposed and how do they develop over time? How does the flow of the interaction impact on idea development?
Participant roles, esp. revoicing	What is the role of revoicing in <i>havrutot</i> ? How does it help <i>havrutot</i> build ideas?

Table 2.5: Summary of Core Ideas from Discourse Analysis and Their Influence on My Work

¹²⁵ Mary Catherine O'Connor and Sarah Michaels, "Shifting Participant Frameworks: Orchestrating Thinking Practices in Group Discussion," in *Discourse, Learning and Schooling*, ed. Deborah Hicks (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 71.

V. Phases of Data Analysis and Interpretation

In what follows, I provide a narrative description of the phases through which my work proceeded. I illustrate implicitly some of the ways the ideas discussed in my methodology section impacted the course of my work and shaped my approach to data analysis. I describe some of the fits and starts, highlighting some of the breakthroughs that served as stepping-stones toward developing my emerging conceptualization. In many ways, this mirrors what I present in my *havruta* analysis: the messy and multi-layered history of how ideas develop.

Phase One: First Steps

My dissertation grows out of research that I began as co-director of the *Beit Midrash* Research Project. Prior to becoming involved in this research project, I ran two very small studies on *havruta* learning as part of my Masters work at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. I also conducted an interview study with DeLeT's first cohort, part of which focused on their attitudes toward studying in *havruta*. Taken together, these studies suggested to me that *havruta* work is complex and interesting and that it would be useful to tape record students engaged in *havruta* in order to understand it better. Thus, when we formed the *Beit Midrash* Research Project in the early summer of 2003, I suggested that we tape record a number of focal pairs to see what we could learn. I proposed one possible line of research apropos the *havruta* pairs as follows:

“We hope to analyze how students’ conversations unfold: how they develop new ideas and insights into the material, how they engage with and learn from one another in the process and how they develop ideas about their relationship to the texts.”¹²⁶

¹²⁶ Memo from Spring, 2003

At the time, I had read scholarship about cooperative learning and learning theory, but had no real sense of what might be entailed in trying to research all of the issues raised in the memo.

Phase Two: Discovering Phases, Moves and Modes of Havruta

In 2004, I began what would become my pilot study. I read through the transcripts from the summer of 2003 with the following questions in mind: What do the interactions of students studying in *havruta* look like? What does the interpretive process of *havruta* learning look like? And, what kind of meaning are students making of the content of the text?

I closely analyzed six transcripts for patterns and themes. I had some ideas from research on teaching and learning reading and literature about factors that enabled “successful” reading and interpretation (such as looking for evidence in the text, making inferences, etc.) and also had some ideas from the research on cooperative learning about the multiple factors that impacted group interactions (such as issues of roles and status, motivation of students, etc.). I thought these ideas would help me begin to make sense of the transcripts. However, I found the *havruta* transcripts unwieldy in their raw form.

Following the lead of Sharon Feiman-Nemser’s work on co-planning¹²⁷ and others’ work using discourse analysis,¹²⁸ I decided to do a structural analysis of my data. I began to divide the transcripts into segments in order to examine the different foci of the sessions and follow the development of interpretations. By segmenting the data, I was more easily able to follow the flow of the conversation and analyze its content in relation

¹²⁷ Sharon Feiman-Nemser and Katherine Beasley, "Mentoring as Assisted Performance: A Case of Co-Planning," in *Constructivist Teacher Education*, ed. Virginia Richardson (Washington, D.C.: Falmer Press, 1997).

¹²⁸ For example, Gee, *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis, Theory and Method*. Also, Deborah Tannen, *Conversational Style, Analyzing Talk among Friends* (Norwood: Ablex Publishing Corporation, 1984).

to my three initial questions. This resulted in my writing memos about how the three pairs working on the same task worked together and generated different ideas.

Through this process of analysis and memo writing, I noticed that there were three general phases¹²⁹ to the work of these *havrutot*. I also noticed that the *havrutot* developed different interpretive ideas during the course of one session, that some of those ideas were linked and that some carried through the course of the *havruta*, while others fizzled. I tried to describe how each *havruta* worked with her partner and the text, to develop a “history” of the ideas that were generated and to compare all of this to the final outcome of the *havruta*. I also coded for “process comments,” “views *havrutot* expressed about the text,” and “ways *havrutot* connected the text to their own lives.” In the end, I showed that the three different *havrutot* set up different interpretive problems and that this strongly impacted on the course of the each *havruta*.

The second step toward my pilot study involved coding for students’ “moves”¹³⁰ that seemed to contribute to their process of working together. I wanted to understand what they were **doing** through their talk. I focused this analysis on another three transcripts of three pairs engaged in the same task. The coding was open ended and the purpose was to determine what key activities *havruta* partners engaged in in order to interpret the text. I was hoping that certain patterns might emerge. As I generated a list of moves from one transcript, I brought the categories to bear on the next transcript in

¹²⁹ Strauss and Corbin point out that processes (in my case, the process of learning) are often described as “stages or phases.” Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research, Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1998), 166.

¹³⁰ In my context, moves are actions taken by a study partner in relation to either her partner or the task of interpreting the text, such as asking a question, looking at the text, proposing a new idea, etc. Moves is a term used when discussing people learning together and what they do in relation to one another. For example, Barnes and Todd in *Communication and Learning Revisited, Making Meaning Through Talk*, highlight four moves central to collaboration: initiating, eliciting, extending and qualifying. And Heilman in *The People of the Book* highlights four moves central to learning circles: recitation, translation, explanation, and discussion.

order to see if the moves were similar or dissimilar across pairs. I began to notice that “moves” fell into two general categories: moves made in relationship to one another and moves made in relationship to the text.

Drawing on my analysis of particular questions and moves, I decided to undertake a more thorough analysis of one *havruta* session, which seemed to provide a particularly rich example of *havruta* learning and highlighted some of the issues I was beginning to notice. In addition to analyzing the transcript, I analyzed the video footage from their interaction in order to note the physical presence of the learners and begin to link some of the visual data to the verbal data.

During subsequent readings and viewings of the transcript and the partial video, I conducted a close analysis of the following: moves the *havruta* made, ideas in the content that the *havruta* found interesting and challenging, and how the *havruta* went about developing ideas. I also coded for different kinds of utterances (e.g. questions, paraphrase, etc.) and the focus of their talk.

Through the course of conducting and writing up my pilot study, I reframed my research question to: What are the features of *havruta* interactions in this context? As I continued my work on my pilot study, the focus of my analysis sharpened to focus on identifying: norms that ground a *havruta*, phases through which *havrutot* move, moves *havrutot* make in relation to each other and the text, and modes of engaging, specifically co-building or interpreting through opposition. Drawing together these ideas, I began to identify *havruta* as a Jewish interpretive social learning practice.

Analyzed transcripts from 2003
Conducted fine-grained analysis of transcripts of three <i>havrutot</i> studying a biblical text. Analysis focused on how <i>havrutot</i> develop ideas.
Conducted fine-grained analysis of transcripts of same three <i>havrutot</i> studying a text by Maimonides. Analysis focused on moves <i>havrutot</i> made
Wrote up case of one <i>havruta</i> session from the second analysis, drawing on video data to enrich the audio analysis.
Highlights of the analysis: phases of <i>havruta</i> work, different kinds of moves made by <i>havrutot</i> and different modes of engaging with one's partner

Table 2.6: Steps in Phase Two

During this phase of my analysis, I learned some important lessons for how to approach future data analysis: 1. Video data provides a richer data source than audio data. As a result of this, I privileged video data over audio data in ensuing analysis. 2. Immersion in all of the data is a key step for noticing patterns and generating questions and ideas. Fine-grained analysis should be reserved for smaller segments of data.¹³¹ 3. The first step in a more fine-grained analysis of any *havruta* session needs to be a structural analysis in order to follow the flow of the conversation and see what phases the *havruta* moves through and what themes it addresses.¹³²

¹³¹ For a similar description of the process of pairing down data for fine-grained analysis see Frederick Erickson, "Ethnographic Microanalysis of Interaction," in *The Handbook of Qualitative Research in Education*, ed. Margaret LeCompte, Wendy Millroy, and Judith Preissle (New York: Academic Press, Inc., 1992).

¹³² For a discussion on macro and thematic structures see Gee, *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis, Theory and Method*.

Phase Three: Havruta as a Practice of practices

Organizing and Analyzing the Body of Data

I revisited all of my data, listening to audiotapes and watching videotapes. I took detailed notes on all of it, trying to pay attention to the occurrence or lack of occurrence of themes from my pilot study. For example, I analyzed a number of additional transcripts using the list of moves that I generated from my pilot study. I found many of the moves similar, with some additions and some subtractions. I also noted the phases that *havrutot* went through and saw that a basic three part pattern existed, with the majority of time being spent on interpretive discussion. And I tried to apply the modes of interpretive discussion to other *havruta* sessions, further refining their definitions and expanding on them to include other modes, specifically, accommodation and debate. I wrote many memos during this phase about what I was seeing in my data, questions that were emerging and possible patterns and relationships. I became aware of the frequency of “revoicing” in the *havruta* discussions and wondered about the role that it played in helping the *havrutot* build both their ideas and their relationship. As I became clearer about the fact that my research focused on the learning processes of *havruta* participants, I struggled to figure out how to conceptualize this process, which includes both interactional aspects and interpretive moves. Inspired by Anna Sfard’s work, I continued to chart out how the ideas took different shape during a *havruta* and the moves that the *havrutot* made that affected these shifts.

Shifting the Unit of Analysis

As I sifted through the data, listening and re-listening to videotapes and reading and re-reading transcripts, I began to articulate the moves that seemed to make some *havrutot* more generative than others, in part inspired by Sophie Haroutunian-Gordon's and Judith Little's work. I began to write a case based on one session that could exemplify some of these moves. This case was based around the *havruta* of Debbie and Laurie, whose *havruta* session carries through each of my data chapters. Some of these moves had to do with how often the *havruta* looked and relooked at the text, the extent to which the *havruta* explained their thinking out-loud and built on ideas on the table and the extent to which the *havruta* was willing to slow down and question the text and their ideas. These moves produce a kind of talk that draws attention to the text and the interpretive ideas it generates and enables them to be probed and developed.

At the same time, I began to wonder about particular moves that seemed to be of a larger grain size than others. For example, listening to one another was something that *havrutot* did but it did not fit into the same category as "asking one's partner to read the text." I wrote many memos, trying to construct the relationship between moves of different "sizes" and identify important facets of generative *havruta*.

Over the course of a number of months, this process led me to identify six central practices which seemed to be particularly important in *havruta* work. These practices encompassed both the interactional and intellectual work of the *havruta*. As I read transcripts and watched videos with these practices in mind, I began to pay closer attention to the relationship between these practices. I noticed that sometimes *havrutot*

engaged in some of these practices more readily than others and wondered why this was so.

I also thought a lot about Peter Elbow's argument that thinking includes contrary processes, that instead of avoiding or ignoring this tension, we must "embrace [these] contraries." In writing about the strengths and weaknesses of "careless and careful thinking," and the necessity to engage in both types, Elbow writes, "Thinking in contraries usually holds us back because it so often leads us to stalemates or warfare; yet, if well managed, it is the very source of progress."¹³³ In his essays, Elbow convincingly shows how this is true. I began to wonder about these ideas with respect to *havruta* learning. I realized that each of the six practices I had identified could be paired with another practice which made the work of *havruta* a complex navigational process, in which participants had to figure out how to balance the dynamics in order to fruitfully work together.

Developing and Illustrating a Conceptualization through Particular Cases

I revisited six *havruta* pairs with these practices in mind in order to see what I could learn by using them as a conceptual lens. I began to consider which pairs and sessions might provide the richest narratives to illustrate these practices and the ways in which they enable *havruta* to function as a powerful Jewish learning Practice. I looked for sessions that would show rich "images of the possible,"¹³⁴ as well as examples of

¹³³ Elbow, *Embracing Contraries*, 54.

¹³⁴ Lee Shulman, "Visions of the Possible: Models for Campus Support of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning," in *Teaching as Community Property, Essays on Higher Education*, ed. Pat Hutchings (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2004).

missed opportunities. I also looked for sessions that represented the more typical work of each pair.¹³⁵

I chose four sessions for more fine-grained analysis. Each session represented the work of a different pair. As I analyzed and re-analyzed each session, I learned more about the particulars of each of the *havruta* practices and their dynamics.

As I began to develop narratives of these sessions, I kept Magdalene Lampert in mind. She writes, “[N]arrative enables me to represent something that I think is universally important about teaching while maintaining the special qualities of knowledge created in the context of practice. The story serves as a medium for communicating about strategies invented in the moment without judging them to be ultimately correct. The stories raise universal questions ... but they do not supply universal answers.”¹³⁶

In many ways, my analysis and writing is modeled after Lampert. In my case, rather than exploring the practice of teaching, I am exploring the practice of learning, specifically *havruta* learning. I have chosen to focus on particular *havruta* sessions and put them in relationship with one another in order to create stories about how *havrutot* make meaning together through a complex interplay between different practices. Through probing these stories and the six practices, I try to represent the multiple levels at which

¹³⁵ I tried to provide cases that represented the range of students in the study in terms of age, gender, Jewish educational background and experience in DeLeT. I therefore tried very hard to provide one case that included men. However, in the end, the richest examples did not come from the *havrutot* that included men. This had nothing to do with gender, but with a variety of other factors.

¹³⁶ Lampert, "Knowing Teaching from the Inside Out: Implications of Inquiry in Practice for Teacher Education," 75.

the *havrutot* operate in order provide a more “comprehensive representation”¹³⁷ of *havruta* learning and its practices in my particular context.

My conceptualization which has emerged from this process is both empirical and normative. There are aspects that arise from my description and analysis of my data and other aspects that arise from my normative conception of “good *havruta* study.”

Organize and analyze data
Write case of “good” <i>havruta</i>
Shift unit of analysis from moves and modes of discourse to practices and develop conceptualization of six <i>havruta</i> practices in dynamic relationship
Fine grained analysis of particular cases to illustrate and probe use of practices

Table 2.7: Steps in Phase Three

VI. Validity

Given that my data is on video and audiotapes that I can re-watch multiple times, I do not have to worry about inaccuracies in the descriptions of what I saw. The bigger validity threat is posed by my interpretations of the data: do I simply impose my own meaning on participants and do I pay enough attention to “discrepant data?”¹³⁸

I start with the assumption that there are many interpretations possible of a *havruta* interaction, and thus that every interpretation is partial and influenced by the lenses through which we make meaning. I come with the bias that the *havruta* interactions are meaningful, in the sense that they really are full of meaning and that that

¹³⁷ ———, *Teaching Problems and the Problems of Teaching*, 30.

¹³⁸ Joseph Maxwell, *Qualitative Research Design, an Interactive Approach*, vol. 41, Applied Social Research Methods (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1996), 90.

meaning is the product of the interaction between three partners, two people and a text. In providing interpretations of these rich and multifaceted conversations, I have tried to flesh out interpretation of my data in as much detail as possible and in the words of James Gee, to “err on the side of overinterpretation.”¹³⁹ I have provided rich data in the form of verbatim transcript excerpts to provide evidence in support of the particular interpretations that I offer.¹⁴⁰

Furthermore, I triangulated, or echoing the words of Laurel Richardson, I crystallized my findings. Richardson is critical of the use of the term “triangulation,” as if there were a “‘fixed point’ or ‘object’ that can be triangulated.”¹⁴¹ Instead, Richardson prefers the metaphor of crystallization. Richardson writes, “Crystals are prisms that reflect externalities and refract within themselves, creating different colors, patterns, arrays, casting off in different directions. What we see depends upon our angle of repose... crystallization provides us with a deepened, complex, thoroughly partial, understanding of our topic. Paradoxically, we know more and doubt what we know.”¹⁴²

I did this in a number of different ways: I consulted other people to see if their interpretations matched mine or if they agreed with my reading. I did not conduct a traditional member check, which would not have worked in the context of my design in which much of the analysis occurred long after the course was over and students had

¹³⁹ “In our view, people’s texts are not trivial outcomes of communicative needs. Rather, they function at many levels and are the product of a person’s entire set of sociocultural, political, and psychological conditions and identities. Humans are constant creators of complex and multifaceted meanings. Therefore, particularly in educational research, we feel that to err on the side of overinterpretation is wiser.” Gee, Michaels, and O’Connor, “Discourse Analysis,” 233.

¹⁴⁰ On the use of rich data in dealing with validity see Maxwell, *Qualitative Research Design, An Interactive Approach*, 95. See also the discussion of thick description making thick interpretation possible in Valerie Janesick, “The Dance of Qualitative Research Design, Metaphor, Methodology and Meaning,” in *The Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln (Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 1994).

¹⁴¹ Laurel Richardson, “Writing: A Method of Inquiry,” in *The Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 1994), 522.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 522. Thank you to Tom Shapiro for calling this idea and essay to my attention.

moved on from thinking about the particulars of their learning. However, I presented my data in various forums. I convened a group of teachers two times to analyze data from Judy and Lisa, Laurie and Debbie and Jim and Lance's *havrutot*; they reached similar conclusions to my own. I presented my framework of *havruta* practices and analysis to teachers and researchers at two conferences, who confirmed that what I presented rang true to the data they saw and to what they saw in their own classrooms. I also presented some of my data and emerging theory for corroboration to my colleagues in the *Beit Midrash* Project. And, I consulted field notes as another check on my interpretations, when these were available on particular *havruta* interactions.

In addition, I used different theoretical lenses such as cooperative learning theory and literary theory to interpret my data and still found my framework and interpretations to stand. Valerie Janesick highlights this approach and calls it "interdisciplinary triangulation."¹⁴³ This means, that one uses different disciplines to inform the research process. Using different disciplines forces the researcher to look at the data in different ways and thereby not get stuck in any one way of seeing things.

Furthermore, I took my emerging theory and tested it against raw data. A common practice in grounded theory,¹⁴⁴ it served to insure that my theory was congruent with the data.

Finally, a note on generalizability. This is a study based on *havruta* learning in a particular context -- a summer *Beit Midrash* for Teachers in a teacher education program. This is a modern *beit midrash* built around goals related to teacher education. In this way, the *Beit Midrash* is different from many other *batai midrash* and therefore, one

¹⁴³ Janesick, "The Dance of Qualitative Research Design, Metaphor, Methodolatry and Meaning," 215.

¹⁴⁴ Strauss and Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research, Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*.

might assume that the way *havruta* is practiced in this *beit midrash* is also different. Given the specific context in which this study takes place, the primary purpose of this study is not to generalize “findings” about the nature of *havruta* learning to other populations, but to engage in theory building, following the lead of scholars like Magdalene Lampert. Through detailed “insider” studies of her own teaching of mathematics, Lampert has developed interpretive frameworks for understanding and talking about the practice of teaching.¹⁴⁵ Lampert does not try to prove the validity of her theory but to present a framework that represents her teaching that can be used by other scholars and teachers as a way to surface important issues in the practice of teaching. Likewise, I am not claiming that one can simply take the theory that I develop and use it to explain all *havruta* learning in any context. Like Lampert, my theory of *havruta* and the cases that I present provide language for scholars and practitioners to talk about *havruta* learning and provide a framework that may help surface important aspects of *havruta* learning.

On the other hand, Maxwell notes that the fact that qualitative studies are not generally designed for external generalizability does not mean that they are never generalizable beyond the setting being studied. Maxwell highlights a number of factors that may enable generalizability such as “face generalizability” (there is no obvious reason not to believe the results could apply more generally) and “the similarity of dynamics and constraints to other situations.”¹⁴⁶ Given these two criteria, one might

¹⁴⁵ Lampert, *Teaching Problems and the Problems of Teaching*. Patricia Carini’s work analyzing children’s learning and teacher’s discussions of children also represents this approach. See Himley and Carini, *From Another Angle, Children’s Strengths and School Standards*. Eleanor Duckworth has taken a similar approach in her work on student learning, although her analysis is less systematic than Lampert’s or Carini’s. See Duckworth, *The Having of Wonderful Ideas*.

¹⁴⁶ Maxwell, *Qualitative Research Design, An Interactive Approach*, 97.

assume that the theory that I develop in this context may be applicable in other contexts such as modern *batai midrash* which share some features with the *Beit Midrash* for Teachers and/or other *batai midrash* geared toward teacher education. Further study would be required in other contexts in order to test out this hypothesis.

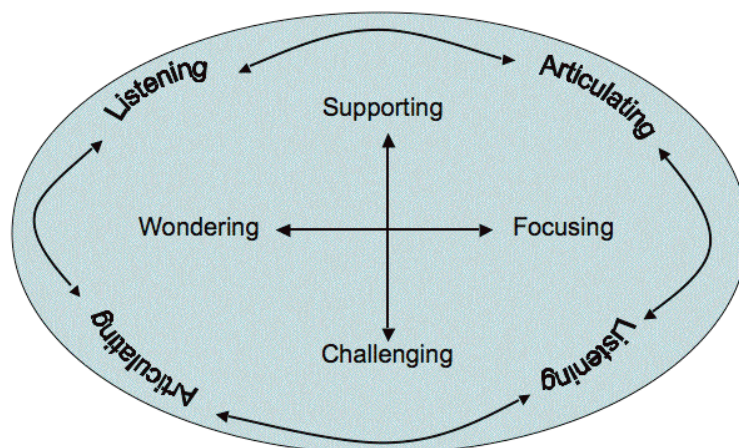
Ultimately, given the nature of qualitative research, readers of this research must determine the applicability and usefulness of these findings for other settings.¹⁴⁷

VII. Overview of the Theory and Its Illustration in the Dissertation

The theory that I have developed is built around six practices and their dynamic relationship in action.

Note that the practices not only pertain to the interaction between the *havruta* partners but also pertain to the interaction between *havruta* partners and the text.

**Figure
2.1:
Six
Havruta
Practices**



¹⁴⁷ Jack Fraenkel and Norman Wallen, *How to Design and Evaluate Research in Education*, 5th ed. (New York: McGraw Hill, 2003), 441.

Each of the next three chapters explores a pair of the practices through analyzing two different cases. Chapter Three, which explores the practices of listening and articulating, features Laurie and Debbie and Laurie and Miriam's cases. Chapter Four, which explores the practices of wondering and focusing, returns to Laurie and Debbie's case and introduces Sally and Amy's case. Finally, Chapter Five, which explores the practices of supporting and challenging, takes a final look at Laurie and Debbie's case and contrasts it to Lisa and Judy's case. I deliberately chose to carry one case across three chapters to illustrate how all six practices are enacted in a havruta session. I also bring additional cases in order to explore variations in how these practices play out.

<i>Havruta Pair</i>	Chapter 3: The Practices of Listening & Articulating	Chapter 4: The Practices of Wondering & Focusing	Chapter 5: The Practices of Supporting & Challenging
Case 1: Laurie & Debbie	X	X	X
Case 2: Laurie and Miriam	X		
Case 3: Amy and Sally		X	
Case 4: Lisa and Judy			X

Table 2.8: Havruta Pairs and Practices Featured in Each Chapter

Chapter 3: The Practices of Listening and Articulating

"Without listening, the dialogue could not transpire. Group discussions in which participants work together to identify and pursue the resolution of points of doubt, or questions, make little progress if participants do not listen to one another."¹⁴⁸

"The distinction between actually listening to others to grasp what they say and merely using their remarks as a vehicle for entering the conversation is an important one. Only when the first occurs do discussants have a real conversation."¹⁴⁹

"Talk is flexible: in talk they can try out new ways of thinking and reshaping an idea in mid-sentence, respond immediately to the hints and doubts of others, and collaborate in shaping meanings they could not hope to reach alone."¹⁵⁰

Introduction

At their most basic level, *havruta* interactions are a dance¹⁵¹ of listening and articulating. Sometimes one practice is in the foreground and the other is in the background. Sometimes both are present simultaneously. Sometimes they take on a ritualistic and observable pattern and other times, they may appear random, their exact shape unfolding moment to moment. But whatever their relationship at any given time, listening and articulating are interconnected and their push and pull enable the *havruta* to move forward. By looking at *havruta* in this way, one can begin to uncover some of the

¹⁴⁸ Sophie Haroutunian-Gordon, "Listening in a Democratic Society," in *Philosophy of Education Yearbook* (2003), 4, <http://www.ed.uiuc.edu/EPS/PES-Yearbook/2003/h-gordon.pdf>.

¹⁴⁹ Haroutunian-Gordon, *Turning the Soul*, 199, footnote 7.

¹⁵⁰ Barnes and Todd, *Communication and Learning Revisited, Making Meaning Through Talk*, 15.

¹⁵¹ I use this metaphor at different points in my dissertation to help represent the dynamic between the pairs of *havruta* practices. In using this metaphor, I have in mind dance that follows improvisational rules rather than explicit dance forms. In such a dance, the dancers relate to one another in different ways depending on the context. Sometimes, one dancer is in the foreground while others are in the background but all are organized by an underlying cadence or rhythm that holds them together and allows their dance to take shape.

“rules” of the dance -- what kinds of listening and articulating occur, how these practices work to make *havruta* interaction generative and when and how things go awry.

Listening and articulating are central practices that drive a *havruta* interaction. They are the engine of the *havruta*; without them, there would simply not be a *havruta* interaction. When people take turns listening and articulating to each other, they bring each other into their thinking and this increases the possibility that their ideas will interact, that one idea will lead to another or change another and lead to something even better. This kind of “interaction” or “atomic fishion”¹⁵² in the words of Peter Elbow, is at the heart of the meaning making process. In this uncontrollable and dynamic space, wonderful new insights can emerge.

Note that the practices of listening and articulating not only pertain to the interaction between the *havruta* partners but also to the interaction between *havruta* partners and the text.

In section I of this chapter, I explicate the practices of listening and articulating, defining their use in *havruta* interactions. I also discuss secondary literature connected to these practices, spending more time doing so than in other chapters in order to draw attention to the complexity of listening and articulating despite their elemental nature. In sections II, I describe and analyze a case that allows us to see these practices at work. This is a case which exemplifies generative use of listening and articulating and provides an opportunity to probe these practices and their dynamic. Despite the skill with which the discussants engage in these practices, this case also illustrates some of the pitfalls of these practices. In section III, I analyze a second *havruta* case in which the discussants

¹⁵² Elbow, *Embracing Contraries*, 40.

consciously work to listen to the text. Through this case we will explore what it means to listen to the text as well as some of the challenges entailed in doing so.

I. Defining Listening and Articulating and Their Interplay in *Havruta*

Listening

Listening is rarely studied in educational literature. One important exception is Katherine Schultz's book, *Listening: A Framework for Teaching Across Difference*, about the role of listening in the classroom and both how we listen, as well as what we listen for. In her study, Schultz looks at how teachers listen to individuals, the classroom as a group, the broader social context of students' lives and to student silence. Schultz writes that by focusing on listening, she is highlighting the centrality of relationships in teaching. "[T]he act of listening is based on interaction rather than simply reception...Listening is fundamentally about being in relationship to another and through this relationship supporting change or transformation. By listening to others, the listener is called on to respond."¹⁵³ For Schultz, listening is an active and relational process in which the listener participates in the conversation. We will see examples of this in the cases below.

Sophie Haroutunian-Gordon, a teacher educator and philosopher of education, has also written about listening. Haroutunian-Gordon is interested in how listening can bring the hearer to identify and examine beliefs by taking the view of another. In exploring this question, Haroutunian-Gordon identifies three kinds of listening with distinct purposes: listening to "follow or comprehend" what is said; "listening so as to resolve a question"

¹⁵³ Katherine Schultz, *Listening, a Framework for Teaching across Difference* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2003), 9.

that arises when one hears something one does not understand; and, “listening so as to fashion a solution to a quandary” or what Haroutunian-Gordon calls a “genuine question.” Haroutunian-Gordon concludes that the desire to hear another perspective comes out when one is trying to resolve a genuine question, since genuine questions do not have easy answers and require us to explore earlier assumptions and consider different possibilities.¹⁵⁴ In her study of high school students discussing Shakespeare, Haroutunian-Gordon identifies listening and responding to what has been said as criteria of good interpretive discussion. When discussants do this, they are “‘building’ upon each others’ ideas, as opposed to merely “picking out a word or a remark that someone makes and, taking it out of context, using it to go on to make a point that one already wanted to bring up...”¹⁵⁵ For Haroutunian-Gordon, listening in discussion is tied to articulating a response and to generating ideas grounded in group conversation.

In her exploration of listening, Haroutunian-Gordon also notes that studying listening is challenging since we do not really know what the other person has heard or how the person feels. This is not only the case for researchers, but for all of us involved in communicating with one another. And just as we all make inferences in order to converse with one another,¹⁵⁶ researchers studying listening will do the same.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁴ Haroutunian-Gordon, "Listening in a Democratic Society," 9-10, 12.

¹⁵⁵ ———, *Turning the Soul*, 64.

¹⁵⁶ Iser also writes about the role of gap filling in making inferences in order to communicate: "[I]n all our interpersonal relationships we build upon this ‘no-thing’, for we react as if we knew how our partners experienced us; we continually form views of their views and then act as if our views of their views were realities. Contact, therefore, depends upon our continually filling in a central gap in our experiences.” Iser, *The Act of Reading*, 165.

¹⁵⁷ Haroutunian-Gordon, "Listening in a Democratic Society," 5-6. I concur with Haroutunian-Gordon that one reason that listening has gotten such little attention is that it is very difficult to provide evidence that someone is listening. How do we as observers know when someone listens? And even if we can figure out that someone is listening, how do we know what they are listening to? While these questions are quite real, they should not hinder our attempt to study listening. In my research, I rely on context specific evidence and what I know about each pairs’ dynamics over various *havruta* sessions: 1. I rely on whether articulations build on what has been said previously and thereby read listening backwards. 2. I rely on

In the context of my research, I define listening as nonverbal paying attention to.¹⁵⁸ Following Haroutunian-Gordon's lead of identifying kinds of listening through their directed purposes, I identified four kinds of listening: 1. following along, 2. understanding the other, 3. getting ideas from the other and 4. figuring something out. Following along is different from understanding the other. When we follow along, we treat the other as an object distanced from ourselves and focus on hearing the other's words. In essence, we want to keep up and not lose our place and so we use our ears to keep pace. When we try to understand the other's ideas, we move the other from an object of our attention to a subject in his or her own right, and we try to get inside his/her head. We also listen for the practical purpose of gaining new ideas and insights. And finally, we listen when we have a question and we are trying to figure something out. We have an unstated hope that through listening, whether to our own ideas, our partner's ideas or the text, we will be able to resolve our question or confusion. For my analysis of listening, I consider the context in which the interaction is taking place in order to ascertain the purpose of the listening and the kind of listening being enacted at any one moment.

Sometimes, the different kinds of listening are interrelated in a nested relationship. This occurs when the overall goal of the *havruta* is to engage in the joint work of building interpretations together, which requires paying close attention to the other's person's ideas *and* trying to understand them. For example, if I want to listen to

nonverbal listening cues such as facial expressions indicating focus and interest and direct looking at one's partner and the text. 3. I rely on verbal listening cues from one's partner such as "yes," "hmm," etc. that seem to indicate that at very least there is listening at the following along level and sometimes indicate other kinds of listening too. 4. And, finally, I rely on my overall knowledge of how the pairs work together, how they attend to one another and the text generally from one *havruta* session to the next.

¹⁵⁸ In this study, I discuss the practice of listening. For a discussion of the importance of the disposition of attentive listening for text study in *havruta*, see Holzer, "What Connects 'Good' Teaching, Text Study and *Havruta* Learning? A Conceptual Argument," 199.

understand what you are saying, I will also listen to follow your articulations in order to contextualize your words and help me more accurately figure out what you are trying to say. Or, if I want to listen to get an idea, I will first listen to follow what you are saying and understand it, since only when I pay close attention to your words and understand them, will I be able to develop insights connected to your thinking.

The different types of listening are not always nested. This is often the case when the *havruta* partners prioritize a focus on their own ideas to the exclusion of others. I might listen to get an idea from you but not try to follow along closely or understand your point. In this case, I am only interested in your ideas to the extent that they will help me build up my own ideas and therefore am satisfied with general impressions, rather than paying close attention and gaining real insight.

Joint work requires *havrutot* to take each other's ideas seriously by paying close attention to them and trying to understand them as well as drawing on each other as resources.¹⁵⁹ For *havrutot* to engage in the joint work of building interpretations together, it is helpful to use all four types of listening. It is useful to name these different types of listening in order to make sure they are all occurring since no type of listening, when practiced alone, is inherently helpful to the pair's work as a pair. Sometimes, *havruta* partners may think they are listening well to each other and drawing on each other but, in fact, they might just be listening to follow along. In such a case, the partners might find that they are not really benefiting from their *havruta* interaction since by simply listening to follow along, they are not creating space for insight into each other's

¹⁵⁹ Engaging in joint work is not the same as co-building. In the latter, the *havruta* partners work together on one interpretation. In the former, this is not necessarily the case. *Havrutot* engage in joint work when they work together to develop interpretations.

articulations, making it difficult for their ideas to interact with each other in a meaningful way.

As is already apparent from this brief discussion, listening can have different objects of our attention. We can listen to different people and ideas and often have to do this simultaneously. I will show an example of this later in this chapter.

Articulating

Articulating, as opposed to listening, is something that often gets mentioned in educational literature. In studies of classroom discourse, articulating is an assumed component of students' meaning making process. Students talk to work through their ideas. In this sense, articulating is a form of thinking. As Douglas Barnes and Frankie Todd write, "[W]e see small group discussion as affording a means for construction and reconstruction by learners of new views of the world. In other words, engaging in dialogue with others, communicating one's viewpoint, and considering what others in turn have to say can clarify a learner's existing understandings and help develop new ones."¹⁶⁰ Scholars call attention to talk as both practice for thinking on one's own and as necessary in and of itself.¹⁶¹

Barnes and Todd specifically call our attention to "exploratory talk"¹⁶² in which students explore and reconstruct ideas and the important role it can serve in helping students work through difficult ideas. They contrast exploratory talk with the "presentation of certainties" and find that exploratory talk is more likely to occur when students talk with their peers. Carolyn Kieran highlights the importance of articulating

¹⁶⁰ Barnes and Todd, *Communication and Learning Revisited, Making Meaning Through Talk*, 21.

¹⁶¹ Lucy Calkins, *The Art of Teaching Reading* (New York: Longman 2001), 226. And, Barnes and Todd, *Communication and Learning Revisited, Making Meaning Through Talk*.

¹⁶² Barnes and Todd, *Communication and Learning Revisited, Making Meaning Through Talk*, 15.

even our exploratory thoughts to our co-learners so that we can make our thinking available to them to respond to. She also underscores the difficulty inherent in doing this. In her research, she sees examples of under-elaborated talk and fragments, not because students are holding back ideas from one another but because they themselves are in the process of generating the thoughts, and it can be hard to simultaneously generate and articulate thoughts.¹⁶³

Many of the goals of teaching students to read texts revolve around helping them make particular kinds of articulations. For example, literature on teaching reading emphasizes the importance of students being able to summarize the text and provide interpretations of it. Lucy Calkins highlights the idea that we must help students use talk not to simply report on ideas that they already have but to develop their ideas further.¹⁶⁴ Articulating in order to work with another and to develop more complete interpretations requires attention and effort.

Articulations, as mentioned in Chapter Two, sometimes take the form of revoicing. This occurs when one person repeats what someone else has said. This can take many forms and serve multiple purposes. Revoicing can include extending what someone has said, rebroadcasting it, and reframing it or juxtaposing it with another idea.¹⁶⁵ In all of these cases, revoicing indicates that the revoicer has listened to the words of the originator of the utterance. Thus, revoiced articulations in particular help *havruta* partners build on each other's ideas and thereby work together.

¹⁶³ Carolyn Kieran, "The Mathematical Discourse of 13-Year Old Partnered Problem Solving and Its Relation to the Mathematics That Emerges," in *Learning Discourse, Discursive Approaches to Research in Mathematics Education*, ed. Carolyn Kieran, Ellice Forman, and Anna Sfard (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002).

¹⁶⁴ Calkins, *The Art of Teaching Reading*, 233-35.

¹⁶⁵ For their discussion of revoicing see O'Connor and Michaels, "Shifting Participant Frameworks: Orchestrating Thinking Practices in Group Discussion."

In the context of this research, I define articulating as expressing one's ideas out loud. Articulations serve multiple purposes in *havruta*: They are a means for making sense of the text and exploring ways to understand it. They are also a means for engaging in joint work by making one's thinking available to one's partner and together honing ideas. And, they are means to indicate to one's partner that one is listening, thus building a spirit of collaboration and trust.

I have identified two main kinds of articulations that take place in *havruta* interactions.¹⁶⁶ The first kind of articulating is thinking out loud or a stream of consciousness of ideas. This kind of articulating has more false starts and stops, does not express a complete idea and often goes in many different directions. Sometimes, it almost seems that this talk is not even directed at one's partner but is just a mechanism for one to work through one's own ideas. The second kind of articulating is stating an interpretive idea. This type of articulating presents a developed idea that may be about a particular point or may be about the text as a whole. Generally, this kind of articulating occurs after someone has taken some time to think out loud, although sometimes a person will come to a text with a previously developed idea that they will state without thinking it through further with their partner. Both types of articulations are important to the work of the *havruta* since the pair needs to be able to develop working hypotheses and conclusions to get somewhere but at the same time, must be able to articulate inchoate ideas, thinking them through and honing them further.

At the same time, listeners respond to articulators based in part on what kind of articulation they think is being made. This itself is never completely clear to the listener since it has to do with both the form of the articulation and the intention of the articulator,

¹⁶⁶ Revoicing can be a part of either of these kinds of articulations.

the latter of which must be inferred. For example, a listener who thinks the articulator is thinking out loud may listen silently for a while. If the listener thinks that the articulator is stating an interpretive idea, the listener may ask a lot of questions or step back to critically examine the idea. Neither of these responses may be what the articulator most needs or wants. Someone who is thinking out loud may need a more active listener who interjects with questions and ideas. And someone who is stating an interpretive idea, may need silent space to fully state the idea and clarify it's main points.

Furthermore, sometimes articulators, knowingly or unknowingly, invite a response and create space for this to occur. In the example above, the articulator says, "Here's my idea. What do you think about it?" Other times, articulators shut down any kind of response from their partners.

Since there are two kinds of articulations that function in distinctly useful ways, a *havruta* committed to engaging in joint work will benefit from engaging in both. Furthermore, some kinds of articulations create more responsive space relative to others. This space is crucial for enabling partners to interact, reflect on what has been said and help each other. A *havruta* will also benefit from considering how its members can create responsive space through their articulations.

II. Case One

Debbie and Laurie's *Havruta*: Key Elements of Listening and Articulating in Practice

Background

The Students

The pair in the *havruta* session is comprised of two students studying in the DeLeT *Beit Midrash* for Teachers at Brandeis. This is the fourth time they are studying together in *havruta*. Debbie, and Laurie are young women in their twenties. Debbie is entering her second summer of the program, having spent the past year working in a first grade classroom. Laurie just started the program two weeks earlier. Both women come to the *Beit Midrash* with experience studying Jewish text -- Debbie attended Hebrew schools and Hebrew high school, majored in Jewish studies in college and attended seminary in Israel for 3 months before entering the DeLeT program, and Laurie attended Jewish day school through the eighth grade and took Jewish studies courses in college -- although neither has spent significant time studying Talmudic texts in their original or studying in *havruta*.

The Text and the Assignment

The text that Debbie and Laurie are studying is from the Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Taanit 9b and is a very short narrative about two rabbis. They have been given the text typed up line-by-line in the original Aramaic, with English translation. The English of the text¹⁶⁷ hand-out reads as follows:¹⁶⁸

1. R. Shimi b. Ashi used to attend (the lessons) of R. Papa and used to ask him many questions
2. One day he observed that R. Papa fell on his face [in prayer] and he heard him saying:
3. May God preserve me from the insolence of Shimi
4. The latter thereupon vowed silence and questioned him no more

¹⁶⁷ This is based on the Soncino Talmud translation. I. Epstein ed., *The Babylonian Talmud* (London: Soncino Press, 1967)

¹⁶⁸ The text was given to the students divided into these lines, with a column in English and Aramaic for each line.

Their assignment reads: “a. Together with your *havruta*, study this text very carefully, while practicing some of the activities of good text study, which we have discussed earlier. b. Offer a compelling interpretation of the story of Shimi and R. Papa. Then insert **2 sentences (not more!)** to help a potential reader better understand your interpretation of the story. This interpretation needs to be an outcome of your Havruta study. You may offer a second interpretation on a separate sheet. c. Please write, as *specifically as possible*, what brought you to write these sentences (e.g. something written in the text; something implied in the text; some previous knowledge; something that happened during your Havruta learning; some previous experience and/or view of similar life situations, etc.)” This assignment has been crafted to help students articulate their interpretation of the narrative. They have 45 minutes to work on this in *havruta*.

Overview of Debbie and Laurie’s Havruta

Debbie and Laurie’s *havruta* provides many examples of generative discussion. Their case, based around one specific *havruta* interaction, will be featured in Chapters Three, Four and Five.

Debbie and Laurie spend the first phase of their *havruta* -- roughly seven minutes -- in a start-up period. They agree on a process for reading the text and read the text in order to clarify the basic plot of the narrative. They then engage in an interpretive discussion about the text. They spend the first part of their interpretive discussion -- about thirteen minutes -- considering the motivations of the characters in the text. They articulate interpretations and ask a lot of questions of the text and each other. In the second part of their interpretive discussion they take six minutes to step back to clarify their overall theory about what the narrative is about and what its message is. And

finally, in the third phase of their *havruta*, they work on their assigned task for fourteen minutes. The analysis of their *havruta* in this and subsequent chapters will focus on the highlighted portions of their *havruta* (see Table 3.1) when they are engaged in interpretive discussions.

Phase	Topic	Details
#1: Start-up		
#2: Interpretive Discussion Part A	What are the motivations of the characters?	- Debbie and Laurie wonder about the connection between insolence and questions. - Debbie wonders about R. Shimi's intentions. She plays out a classroom scenario in which a student tries to make a stir and overhears a teacher saying, "May God preserve me from the insolence of this student." She concludes that no ill meaning student would just stop after overhearing his teacher. By extension, R. Shimi could not have been ill meaning. - Laurie is left to wonder how R. Papa could have acted the way he did. - Debbie picks up on Laurie's question about whether the teacher is overreacting and says, "yes, he was." She reads the story as one about a student who asked a lot of questions because he was very inquisitive and a teacher who overreacted in response. - Laurie continues to try to make sense of R. Papa's apparent overreaction, wondering why Papa didn't go directly to R. Shimi. She wonders if R. Papa was seeking strength in God and also whether R. Shimi was perhaps challenging R. Papa as a person and that's what led to R. Papa's response.
#2: Interpretive Discussion Part B	What is their overall theory about the meaning of the narrative?	- Debbie wants to start the task. Laurie asks if they can first clarify their overall theory. - Debbie suggests that their theory is that any discouragement a student gets can really shut them off and that R. Papa didn't mean to be overheard. - Laurie agrees and adds that the lesson is that we must be careful because we never know who will overhear us. - Laurie wonders why R. Shimi didn't just go to R. Papa to ask him why he said what he said. - Debbie concludes that R. Shimi didn't take action because he wasn't supposed to have heard R. Papa. The lesson of the story is to remind us of the impact of our words. - Laurie clarifies their interpretation: Is it that R. Shimi was "innocently asking all these questions, like he was right and R. Papa overreacted?" Debbie responds that she no longer feels that there's a right or wrong character here.
#3: Work on assignment		

Table 3.1: Overview of Laurie and Debbie's *Havruta*

Engaging in Different Kinds of Listening and Articulating

Below is an excerpt of Debbie and Laurie's discussion from the second phase of their *havruta* when they begin to engage in rich interpretive discussion. Debbie and Laurie have read the text a number of times and are now trying to make sense of the narrative. In this excerpt, Debbie and Laurie are grappling with why R. Papa considers R. Shimi insolent and what the connection might be between insolence and R. Shimi's question asking. This excerpt provides many examples of their skilful use of the practices of listening and articulating.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁹ I have formatted this transcript differently than other excerpts. I have numbered the lines to make it easier for the reader to follow my analysis. For this reason, it appears on separate pages from the rest of the text. For transcript notations, please see Appendix A.

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Table 3.2: Transcript Excerpt

DEBBIE: What do you think this is about?

LAURIE: Oh, my gosh. Well, okay, so it seems, I mean the first thing that stands out the most is this insolence thing.

DEBBIE: Hmhm

LAURIE: Because there's something that Rabbi Papa really, really doesn't like about the fact that he's asking him so many questions, or I think, at least I'm connecting the rudeness with the question asking. It doesn't say that specifically.

DEBBIE: Hmhm

LAURIE: But do you think, what do you think? What connection would you make between-

DEBBIE: the rudeness-

LAURIE: rudeness and what's already happened?

DEBBIE: Well, it's funny because I, I do think there's a connection, but the connection is so ambiguous and it's weird because you would think asking questions is a positive thing we want students to do.

LAURIE: Ya.

DEBBIE: So it must have been, the insolence must have been in the kinds of questions.

LAURIE: Hm.

DEBBIE: I'm guessing.

LAURIE: Hm.

DEBBIE: Maybe he was asking questions that were either not appropriate or or maybe of ways to make, maybe, the teacher look bad-

LAURIE: Hm. Ya.

DEBBIE: or that were condescending, or something that was inappropriate so that Rabbi Papa would say "may God preserve me" from taking action on this student, beating him into the ground. ((Both laugh.)) But it seems to seem like it has something to do with definitely the questions.

LAURIE: Ya.

DEBBIE: And then what's funny is something, an action has to happen right here-

LAURIE: Hmhm.

DEBBIE: for Shimi the student, well, actually, not the action because Shimi did see [him

LAURIE: Ya.]

DEBBIE: observed him, so then Shimi learned his lesson, ["lesson,"

57
58 **LAURIE:** Ya.]
59
60 **DEBBIE:** and decided not to question him no more.
61
62 **LAURIE:** Ya. So I wonder if there's some kind of internal thing maybe going on with Shimi here,
63 like he feels something. He's, maybe he's embarrassed or maybe he's ashamed or he-
64
65 **DEBBIE:** What do you mean from that, by that?
66
67 **LAURIE:** Well, no, because I liked what you were saying about how there's an action that takes
68 place-
69
70 **DEBBIE:** Hmhm.
71
72 **LAURIE:** here or something-
73
74 **DEBBIE:** Hmhm.
75
76 **LAURIE:** or then you said oh, no, wait, he did see him, so he knew what he said. I think that's
77 what you were-
78
79 **DEBBIE:** Hmhm.
80
81 **LAURIE:** That's how I heard it.
82
83 **DEBBIE:** Right.
84
85 **LAURIE:** But I agree with you that there's still some kind of, like, transition that occurs here
86 where he changes his attitude and he vows silence.
87
88 **DEBBIE:** Hmhm.
89
90 **LAURIE:** So there's just some, the way I see it, there's some, like, internal change or something.
91
92 **DEBBIE:** Hmhm.
93
94 **LAURIE:** Like he's no longer inquisitive. He's silent for whatever reason, whether, and I'm
95 curious what you think, like whether, I mean maybe there's not a person who's right and wrong-
96
97 **DEBBIE:** (Hm.)
98
99 **LAURIE:** But is it, was he really asking rude questions or was he just, or was the teacher just
100 overreacting and he's, he's now silenced his student, who is just curious and is trying to inquire.
101 So I don't know.
102
103 **DEBBIE:** Hm.
104
105 **LAURIE:** Maybe we can talk about that in a minute, but.

This excerpt provides examples of Debbie and Laurie engaging in the different kinds of listening and articulating discussed earlier. Debbie begins by listening to follow along, as indicated when she fills in Laurie's sentence with the word "rudeness" (line 19) and by her many "hnhms." Then, Debbie responds to Laurie's question about the connection between questions and rudeness, indicating that she has been listening to understand Laurie and that she is also listening to figure out this larger question (lines 23-25). Laurie too listens to follow along, as indicated by her many "ya's," attentive demeanor and head shaking. She specifically makes reference to Debbie's previous statement and checks in to make sure she heard it correctly by stating that this is how she heard Debbie's words and giving Debbie space to correct her (lines 67-83). Laurie is trying to listen to understand. Laurie then goes on to paraphrase Debbie's earlier statement (lines 85-101) -- she has listened to get an idea -- and takes it in a different direction, as she too wrestles with the question of the connection between questions and rudeness. By engaging in all of these types of listening, they are not only listening to develop ideas but they are listening to develop ideas together.

Because it is not always clear to one partner that the other partner may be listening to her, Laurie and Debbie provide each other with many cues to indicate listening and their interest in hearing each other's articulations. They look at each other and the text a lot, they nod their head as the other one is speaking, they say "yes" over and over again in response to what the other one says and they invite the other to speak by saying: "what do you think?" or stating an interpretive idea as a question. They also paraphrase or "revoice" the other's words. All of these cues indicate that each partner

takes the other person's ideas seriously and listens to them, encouraging further articulations. The listening and articulating dance thus continues.

Debbie and Laurie's articulations are also a mixture of the different types of articulating discussed earlier. Initially, both Debbie and Laurie make articulations that are thinking out loud. Laurie thinks out loud about the sense of the text in lines 6-13 and very clearly tries to elicit a response from Debbie. She specifically asks Debbie, "What do you think?" Later in the conversation, Laurie states an interpretive idea to indicate her agreement with Debbie that some transition occurs when Shimi vows silence (85-86). Laurie then thinks out loud about what exactly happened to Shimi (lines 90-101), again asking for Debbie's response. At first Debbie articulates to think out loud, suggesting different ways that the questions may have been insolent (lines 37-43). As she articulates these different alternatives to how the questions may have been rude, she concludes by stating an idea and claiming that there's "definitely" a connection between the questions and "insolence" (line 44). Laurie listens to Debbie's articulations with encouraging 'ya's,' allowing her to spin out her idea and become clearer about it.

By engaging in these different modes of articulating, Laurie and Debbie are able to use the context of their *havruta* to think through ideas on their own and to engage each other in working on ideas together. Sometimes, as one partner articulates, the other partner acts as a sounding board, doing no more than providing a safe space for the other person to talk out loud. Other times, the other partner responds with her own articulation and together they try to figure out the text.

Balancing Listening and Articulating Between Partners (see Table 3.2 above)

Ultimately, for *havruta* not to be a monologue in which one person uses the other to bounce off ideas but to be an interpretive discussion which draws on the collective wisdom of all parties, each partner must have time to articulate and listen. In this way, it is a partnership with all parties being treated as subjects and not just objects to be acted upon. Debbie and Laurie engage in this kind of turn taking.

By taking turns listening and articulating, Debbie and Laurie avoid getting stuck on only one reading or on one or two details and examine multiple dimensions and multiple readings of the text. In the excerpt above, Laurie says there's something R. Papa really does not like about the questions, and Debbie takes some time to build on that idea. Debbie claims that R. Shimi is asking rude questions and this is why R. Papa considers him insolent. She thinks out loud about the ways in which the questions were rude. She then goes on to say that "an action has to happen right here" for Shimi to become silent, and both she and Laurie relook at the text. Debbie resolves the implied question in her articulation by noticing that the action is that R. Shimi overhears R. Papa and becomes silent. If they had just stopped with Debbie's long articulation, the idea of whether the questions actually were insolent (or R. Shimi's and R. Papa's motivations) would have gone unexplored. However, as Debbie has been honing her interpretation, Laurie has been listening to understand Debbie and to figure out the connection between questions and rudeness and R. Shimi and R. Papa's motivations for their actions. Laurie picks up on the latter part of Debbie's articulation and develops it further, wondering if Shimi perhaps feels "embarrassed" or "ashamed" and this is why he becomes silent. This leads Laurie to reexamine the idea that the questions were insolent -- since if Shimi is

embarrassed, perhaps his intentions were not negative -- and to pose an alternative reading.

LAURIE: “[T]here’s something R. Papa really, really doesn’t like about the fact that he’s asking him so many questions...”
DEBBIE: “So... the insolence must have been in the kinds of questions... Maybe he was asking questions that were either not appropriate or maybe made the teacher look bad...or something that was inappropriate...Shimi... observed him [R. Papa praying], so then Shimi learned his lesson and decided not to question him any more.”
LAURIE: “I wonder if there’s some kind of internal thing going on with Shimi...maybe he’s embarrassed or maybe he’s ashamed...maybe there’s not a person who’s right and wrong...was he really asking rude questions...or was the teacher just overreacting?”

Table 3.3: Exploring Multiple Dimensions of the Text Through Listening and Articulating

We see that through their back and forth between listening and articulating, Laurie and Debbie increase their “interactivity”¹⁷⁰ and in the space of interactivity -- a space in which ideas get bounced about and rubbed up against one another -- there is the potential for fresh insights. Because they not only articulate but also listen in various ways, they are able to co-build ideas,¹⁷¹ incorporating pieces of each other’s ideas and developing them further. In this way, they draw on their collective thinking potential.

¹⁷⁰ Elbow talks about ideas interacting in this way in *Embracing Contraries*. I use the term “interactivity” to highlight the activity that is occurring and being further spawned through interaction between partners and the sharing of ideas. As we saw in Chapter 1, Elizabeth Cohen’s research on group work also highlights the importance of increased interaction between group members and their ideas. Cohen, “Restructuring the Classroom: Conditions for Productive Small Groups.”

¹⁷¹ Co-building, as discussed in Chapter One, is when *havruta* partners work together to develop an interpretation by building on each other’s ideas. The end result of this mode of interpretive discussion is generally an interpretation that is an amalgam of both of their ideas.

Also, notice that the third partner -- the text -- is also very present and demands to be listened to. Debbie and Laurie are focused on trying to figure out how the text connects insolence with questions. We see them looking and relooking at the text, sometimes staring at it intently and constantly pointing to the text with their pens and fingers to indicate what it is “saying.” At one point, Debbie and Laurie both use the phrase: “an action happens here,” and when they say “here”, they point at the text as if there is something happening there. The text is present to the pair in a rich and full way.

Partner #2				
Partner #1		Listen	Articulate	Listen and Articulate
	Listen	No one's ideas are articulated clearly enough to work with them	Partner #2's ideas take center stage	
	Articulate	Partner #1's ideas take center stage	Ideas are verbalized but there is no space to reflect on them together	
	Listen and Articulate			The partners take turns listening and articulating.

Table 3.4: Listening and Articulating in Relationship

The chart above maps out different listening and articulating relationships between people in a *havruta*. Debbie and Laurie generally both listen and articulate and are therefore in the bottom/far right quadrant. However, there are times when Debbie does more articulating and Laurie more listening and their relationship is more characteristic of the middle/left quadrant. In those moments, my analysis suggests that their *havruta* will be more generative if Debbie asks Laurie questions to draw her out and if Laurie is proactive about inserting her ideas into the conversation.

How Well Can One Person Both Listen and Articulate at the Same Time?

An ongoing challenge of engaging in these practices is that *havruta* partners often need to listen and articulate almost simultaneously. When partners try to work together, their articulations build off of what they have listened to their partner say -- thus combining listening and articulating. However, it is difficult to fully listen to one's partner, while also trying to process one's own thoughts and articulate them.

The excerpt below provides an example of how this plays out. In it, Debbie is trying to listen to Laurie but fails to do so and instead reframes Laurie's idea in the direction of Debbie's own thinking. Despite Debbie and Laurie's skillful use of listening as described in earlier examples, the excerpt below provides an example of when they fail to listen and gives us an opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of such occasions.

LAURIE: ...was he [Shimi] really asking rude questions or was he just, or was the teacher just overreacting and he's he's now silenced his student, who is just curious and is trying to inquire. So I don't know.

DEBBIE: Hm.

LAURIE: Maybe we can talk about that in a minute, but.

DEBBIE: I was just going to ask a question about what you said.

LAURIE: Sorry, that was kind of a long ramble. ((She laughs.))

DEBBIE: No, no, not at all. You were saying. ((She taps pen multiple times.)) Oh, gosh, maybe it will come back. I had this question in my head. One of the things that I think you also touched upon is what is the nature of this kid.-

LAURIE: Ya.

DEBBIE: Like is this kid doing something that is, you know, not appropriate or is, it's like, is the teacher overreacting

LAURIE: Ya.

DEBBIE: or is the child-

LAURIE: Ya.

DEBBIE: you know.

LAURIE: Because there are definitely kids who are like “teacher, teacher,” all the time, but-

DEBBIE: Right. But what is the intention. I think what's important is the intention behind that-

LAURIE: Ya.

DEBBIE: Because what's interesting is I would think if let's say there were only three lines-

LAURIE: Hmhm.

DEBBIE: I would say oh, wow, so Shimi must have been asking questions that were inappropriate and this and that, but think about a kid in the classroom who specifically wants to make a stir-

LAURIE: Hmhm.

DEBBIE: Just by hearing that, like the teacher saying, you know, "May God preserve me from the insolence of" the student, I don't think necessarily that child would make a change if their intent was to be mischievous in their questions-

LAURIE: Hm.

DEBBIE: but it seems that Shimi, it's almost as if maybe he was asking, maybe he over-asked questions and stuff, but maybe his intention was positive because that was such a change. I mean hearing those words made such an effect and I would say a negative effect-

LAURIE: Ya.

DEBBIE: because he's vowing, he's making this big, you know, this big decision to stay silent and not question him anymore.-

LAURIE: Ya.

DEBBIE: So, in my head, it seems like this shows that his student's intention actually was good, that he maybe was very inquisitive but teacher wanted, like, move on versus wanting to get off topic purposely-

LAURIE: Ya, or be rude

DEBBIE: =or be rude.

In this excerpt, Laurie raises an important question: "Was Shimi really asking rude questions or was he just, or was the teacher just overreacting and he's now silenced his student, who is just curious and is trying to inquire?" Debbie is listening but it is hard, and she loses her train of thought when she tries to ask Laurie a question about her idea. There is some failure of listening.

Failures of listening are an ongoing part of the *havruta* process. Often, they are not even commented upon. In this particular case, Debbie's inability to recall what Laurie has said indicates her failure of listening. When there is a failure of listening, it is easy for ideas -- even important ones -- to get lost. It is also a time of potential crisis in the *havruta*, since failures of listening provide opportunities for miscommunications to arise and for partners to feel disrespected.

If Debbie were more consciously aware of the practices of listening and articulating, she may at this point have stopped talking and more consciously acknowledged her failure of listening. She could then ask Laurie to restate what she just said so that Laurie's idea could be a full part of their discussion. Or, Laurie could have said, "You are not listening." Neither makes these moves.

Instead, Debbie reframes Laurie's question to focus solely on Shimi and asks: What is the nature and what is the intention of this kid? Her reframing indicates that she has not completely failed to listen to Laurie since she builds off of Laurie's question

about whether the student was really asking rude questions or whether the teacher was overreacting. However, her reframing changes Laurie's focus from both student and teacher to just student and turns Shimi into a kid. Debbie then goes on to state her own idea, "[B]ut it seems that Shimi, it's almost as if maybe he was asking, maybe he over-asked questions and stuff, but maybe his intention was positive because that was such a change [in him]."

The conversation continues as follows:

LAURIE: Ya, that's really cool. So that's a really neat way of getting into what he could be like as a person, and his intentions and what his point was for asking so many questions.

DEBBIE: Hmhm.

LAURIE: And what the kinds of questions were. I think you were talking about that too.

DEBBIE: Ya.

LAURIE: So do you think then kind of like if you go with that, what do you think that says about the teacher? Is he doing the right thing by, if [he

DEBBIE: Ya.]

LAURIE: if Shimi only had good intentions and wasn't trying to just be mischievous, then what does this say about the teacher? Is he misinterpreting his student, is he just, I don't know.

DEBBIE: That's interesting. I'm going to write that down. ((She writes as she says the following words.)) Is he [misinterpreting

LAURIE: (Hm)]

DEBBIE: his student? Hm. Because it almost seems like one has to be the [good guy

LAURIE: Good, right.]

DEBBIE: bad guy even though that's not necessarily correct-

LAURIE: Ya.

DEBBIE: But is the teacher the one overreacting and the student is the one that's just inquisitive or is it the teacher who is, is not overreacting and the student is being mischievous or inappropriate in some way?

LAURIE: Ya.

In this particular case, Laurie is able to correct the failure of listening by shifting the focus from Shimi to Papa -- “Is he misinterpreting his student?” She is making sure that the idea that Papa may have overreacted does not get lost. Interestingly, she frames her articulations as an extension of what Debbie has said, “-if Shimi only had good intentions and wasn't trying to just be mischievous [which is what Debbie has just said], then what does this say about the teacher? Is he misinterpreting his student...” When Laurie frames her idea in this way, Debbie finally hears Laurie’s question. She says it is interesting, and she writes it down.

LAURIE: Was he really asking rude questions or was...the teacher just overreacting and he’s now silenced his student, who is just curious and is trying to inquire? ((articulation))
--

DEBBIE: You were saying – oh, gosh, maybe it will come back. ((failure of listening)) I had this question in my head. One of the things that I think you also touched upon is what is the nature of this kid...So, in my head, it seems like this shows that his student’s intention actually was good, that he maybe was very inquisitive...((articulation))

LAURIE: So...if you go with that, what do you think that says about the teacher? Is he doing the right thing...Is he misinterpreting his student...((repairing failure of listening by reframing and thereby connecting earlier and later comments))
--

DEBBIE: That's interesting. I'm going to write that down.

Table 3.5: Failures of Listening and Repairs

Listening to All Three Partners Simultaneously

In addition to the tensions inherent in figuring out how both to listen and articulate and how to take turns in these roles, *havruta* partners need to be able to listen to multiple things at the same time: to the text, their partner's ideas and their own ideas.

LAURIE: Just want it, right? ((Partner)) Because it's hard to grapple with this teacher who would be completely- Because the other thing I was thinking ((Self))...just to go back to the text carefully, is that this says he used to ask him many questions ((Text)). So to me I think of ((Self))... as you were saying before, what does that mean and this and that and just nagging him ((Self/Partner))... and this down here says, "He vowed silence and questioned him no more," ((Text)) and I know it's really slight but I feel when you use the expression when you're questioning someone, you're almost questioning them as a person or their beliefs...((Self))

In the excerpt above, Laurie is trying to keep all three subjects on-line. She is working hard to think about her own idea and not lose sight of either Debbie's idea or the text. This is complex work and creates its own sense of tension in terms of where to focus. Laurie starts out agreeing with Debbie's idea and then comes back to a main question that has been nagging at her: how to make sense of this teacher's actions. As she starts to state her understanding, she stops and then returns to the text and points to the fact that the text says that Shimi used to ask many questions. She then begins to again try to articulate her idea but instead brings up Debbie's idea that Shimi must have been nagging Papa with questions and then looks at the end of the text. Finally, she states her idea that Shimi perhaps was questioning Papa as a person and not merely asking questions. She seems to get to this point by paying attention to the text and also her own thinking about what kind of teacher R. Papa could have been. Her speech is

filled with many stops and starts and is a bit hard to follow. It has the quality of someone who is straining to not stumble. She is clearly working hard to consider all three partners, even though at the end of this turn, she discards Debbie's idea instead of trying to incorporate it into her own understanding.

While the ideal is that the focus should be on all three partners, in practice, it is more normal for people studying in havruta to focus on two out of three, with one element falling a bit into the background. It is a challenge to hold three voices on-line at the same time. The *havruta* case below will explore this idea in more detail, particularly illustrating why it is so hard to listen to the text.

III. Case Two

Laurie and Miriam's *Havruta*: Delving Deeper into Listening to the Text

Why is it so Hard to Listen to the Text?

One of the challenges of listening to the text is that it requires us to have some awareness of our own biases so that we do not simply read the text as a reflection of our own ideas but actually listen to what the text is trying to say. The case below illustrates the difficulties inherent in trying to listen to the text and be attentive to its different ideas and not merely using the text as a jumping off point to articulate our own beliefs. The case will also provide an example of how study guidelines can support “deeper” listening and articulating.

We make meaning of texts based on a combination of what we read in the text itself and the schema (preconceptions, experiences, etc.), which we bring to the reading. We construct the meaning of the text as we read it through the lens of our experience.

Sophie Haroutunian-Gordon explains, ““The meaning events acquire depends on that aspect of one’s understanding to which they are related.”¹⁷² In fact, one strategy for helping students understand complex texts is to have students think about experiences that might be related to what is going on in the text and that way have a frame of reference for making sense of the text.¹⁷³ Ultimately, one goal of reading literature or religious texts is to learn from the texts in order to help illuminate our experiences.¹⁷⁴ The challenge is to make sure that when we read the text, we are fully attentive to it and do not see the text as a mere reflection of our experiences and beliefs and engage in a simple “affair of mirrors.”¹⁷⁵

Balancing the voice of the text with our own voice is delicate work, and it would seem that for this to be possible, we have to at very least be aware of our own beliefs and how they impact what we think of the text and see this as different from what we think the text is trying to say. In fact, educators and scholars have often posited that an important step in seeing beyond our own beliefs is to become aware of those beliefs and how they might impact our sense making.¹⁷⁶ The question is to what extent is it really possible in our listening to distinguish between our voice and the text’s and, if we are able to do this to some extent, what difference if any does it make on our articulations and understanding of both the text and ourselves.

¹⁷² Haroutunian-Gordon, *Turning the Soul*, 6-7.

¹⁷³ For example see chapter 2 of Ellin Oliver Keene and Susan Zimmermann, *Mosaic of Thought* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1997).

¹⁷⁴ See Haroutunian-Gordon, *Turning the Soul*. For her, this is the core goal of reading literature.

¹⁷⁵ Hawkins, “I, Thou and It,” 52.

¹⁷⁶ See for example Robert Kegan and Lisa Lahey’s approach to helping people become aware of their underlying beliefs in order to not get stuck in them. Robert Kegan and Lisa Lahey, *Seven Languages for Transformation, How the Way We Talk Can Change the Way We Work* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001). Gadamer writes, “The important thing is to be aware of one’s own bias, so that the text can present itself in all of its otherness and thus assert its own truth against one’s own fore-meanings.” Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 269. The importance of becoming aware of our own biases is another rationale for working with others who can help us become aware of those biases by exposing us to different ways of thinking.

Background

The Students

The second pair includes Laurie, from our first case but now in her second and final summer of the DeLeT program, and Miriam, a new student in DeLeT. Laurie has formal Jewish text study experience from her years in day school and Miriam has some experience studying classical texts from Hebrew school, but neither of them has significant experience studying Talmudic texts. Both women are moderately fluent in Hebrew. Miriam and Laurie are three weeks into studying together. The excerpts from the session below are based on their sixth *havruta* session. They have both enjoyed their *havruta*, according to their self-reports and appear to genuinely enjoy the relationship they have forged. There is always the danger that if the pair gets along too well, they will focus their energies on each other and ignore the text. While enjoying their time together, Laurie and Miriam also focus on the text. They are a listener-articulator pair -- each creating space for the other person and taking time to both listen and articulate. Through this back and forth, they often co-build by extending each other's ideas and developing more fully worked out interpretations. There is a tendency at times for Miriam to do more articulating and Laurie to do more listening. In particular, Laurie asks many more questions than Miriam in order to understand Miriam's ideas and help Miriam articulate them further. Miriam does not do this to the same extent with Laurie so that a number of Laurie's comments go unexplored.

The Text and the Assignment

In this particular *havruta* session, they are studying a short narrative from the Babylonian Talmud that reads as follows:

When Rabbi Hanina and Rabbi Hiyya would quarrel, Rabbi Hanina said to Rabbi Hiyya, “Do you quarrel with me”? If God forbid, the Torah were to be forgotten in Israel, I would bring it back with my argumentation.” Rabbi Hiyya said to Rabbi Hanina, “Do you quarrel with me, who has labored for the Torah that it not be forgotten in Israel”? What do I do? I go and sow flax and I weave nets [from it] and I catch deer and I give their meat to orphans. And I prepare scrolls and write the Five Books of the Torah. And I go into town and teach five children the Five Books [of the Torah], and I teach six children the six orders [of the Mishna]. And I say to them, “Until I come back, teach each other Torah and teach other Mishna.” And [thus], I labor for the Torah that it is not forgotten in Israel.¹⁷⁷

They have been given a very specific task to help them “listen to the text” and develop and articulate interpretations of it. The assignment appears as follows:

Beit Midrash for Teachers; DeLeT @ Brandeis 2006

Session 6: listening to a text and offering compelling text interpretations

A. Background (See also the notes on the Sages on the page of your text)

Rabbi Hanina

Middle of 3rd Century. Left Babylon to come to live in Israel.

Well known for his knowledge and his skills as a teacher in Aggadah (homiletics).

Lived an extremely long life. It is told that at the age of 80, he used to stand on one foot while putting on the shoe on his other foot.

It is told that people from his own town did not like him because he used to rebuke them.

Rabbi Hiyya

Middle of 3rd Century.

Left Babylon to come to live in Israel.

Very much involved in community life in various places, e.g. taught his students in the street despite the fact that the leader of his generation (Rabbi Yehuda Hanassi) was against this.

¹⁷⁷ Baba Metzia, 85b based on the Steinsaltz translation. The students have been given photocopies of the text from the Steinsaltz Talmud, which includes the original text, a translation into English and an English commentary. Adin Steinsaltz, ed., *The Talmud: The Steinsaltz Edition* (New York: Random House, 1989).

B. Study this text with your *Havruta* partner. Please make sure to attend to each of the following stages, as they are all meant to engage you in a thorough interpretative process.

Please write your responses to 3,4,5 and 6. During the second part of our session you might be asked to share your interpretation. As members of the same learning community we will work together to help you make your interpretation even more compelling.

1. Read the text carefully while listening carefully to what it is trying to say.
2. Account for its various parts and details.
3. Write what you understand this story to be about (please note that this is different then *paraphrasing* the story).
4. Revisit the text and its different parts and details in the light of what you understand the story to be about.
5. Articulate what *you* have to say about what you claim that the text is saying. (e.g this story is about XX and it says YY. My personal take on XX and on YY is that ...)
6. Revisit the text again. Has this “conversation” with the text *changed* or *reinforced* something about your own view on the topic that is at stake? Explain how.

Figure 3.1: Miriam and Laurie's Havruta Task

What was the Task Designed to Help Them Do?

The title of the task already frames the task: “*listening to a text and offering compelling text interpretations.*” This framing identifies listening to the text as something that is central and also links listening to being able to offer compelling interpretations.¹⁷⁸ The framing also makes the point that listening is different from interpreting and that we must try to listen before we can venture an interpretation.

The first part of the study guide -- which is not our central focus of analysis -- provides the *havruta* with background information about the two central characters in the text. It is often assumed that background information will help students contextualize the people in the text and better understand what they say and do. Thus, it is very possible

¹⁷⁸ The term “compelling interpretations” had previously been introduced to students as a goal of good text study in *havruta*.

that the information in this study guide played a part in shaping Laurie and Miriam's reading of the text since even seemingly neutral information is never neutral.

Steps	Task
Step #1	Listen to the text's meaning by reading it.
Step #2	Figure out the meaning of the various details in the text so as to listen to the whole text better.
Step #3	Articulate what the text is about.
Step #4	Move back to the text and listen to it again, making sure that your articulation of its meaning is consonant with what is written in the text.
Step #5	Listen to what the text is about and to your own view of the topic of the text about and articulate the latter.
Step #6	Move back to the text and listen to it again in order to consider if and how it impacts your own view of the topic.

Table 3.6: Task Steps

The table above briefly lays out the design of the task in the second part of the study guide. In short, the task is set up to help students move back and forth between listening and articulating and help them separate different processes to help them slow down and become more careful readers. The task helps students listen by having them read the text at least three times, consider all of the details of the text and check their interpretation against the text itself. It helps them articulate an interpretation by first carefully listening to the text and then considering how their different ideas and the different details in the text can be synthesized to respond to the question: what is this story about? The task also differentiates between listening to the text and listening to our own views of the text and has students articulate both in separate steps. Students are asked to articulate their views only after they have carefully studied the text. In this way,

they have an opportunity to listen to the text's voice and allow it to inform their developing understanding of the text and not merely read the text as an extension of their views. The idea behind this is to help students see how their personal views and the text itself both contribute to their developing interpretations and not to simply conflate the two, as many readers often do. The ultimate goal of this task is to help students articulate a well-developed interpretation of the text and also treat the text as a partner in their study, listening to its voice and allowing it to impact on their understandings.

What Do Laurie and Miriam Actually Do?

When Laurie and Miriam sit down in their *havruta*, they read the study guide out loud. After reading the study guidelines, they read the text, first reading the English word-for-word translation and then reading the translation with Steinsaltz commentary. They spend twenty-two minutes, almost half of their *havruta* time, on steps 1 and 2, working to listen to the text and develop their initial interpretations of it. During this time, they read and reread the text and think out loud about the meaning of its different parts.¹⁷⁹

From the outset, both Laurie and Miriam respond positively to what R. Hiyya says and negatively to Hanina's statement. Each lays out her understanding of what R. Hanina and R. Hiyya say. According to Miriam, R. Hiyya's approach is a "very creative way to get a lot of knowledge to people." R. Hanina's words, on the other hand, indicate a "very self-centered approach to how skilled he is. It's very self-important."

Laurie relooks at the text after Miriam finishes her articulation and offers an interpretation based on the form of the Talmudic text itself. She notices that the portion

¹⁷⁹ Given the multi-step nature of the task and that students were asked to go through each step separately, the three general *havruta* phases play out differently than in the previous case. Here, the *havruta* has a brief start up and then alternates between engaging in interpretive discussion and working on the task.

of the text about R. Hanina is very short. “For him, it’s boom. It’s all about me. It’s one step and that’s it...The first one is all verbal and in your mind.” The portion about R. Hiyya is much longer and goes through various steps. According to Laurie, “It shows that it’s a process. It takes work...” She and Miriam both agree that R. Hanina’s approach has a lot of labor and physical steps and only eventually does it “move to the text and the knowledge and intellect...”

The emphasis in the task on listening to the text and also differentiating between one’s own views about the text and the text itself seems to frame much of their *havruta* conversation. They comment on their personal perspective throughout the course of the *havruta*. Miriam notes at the beginning of the *havruta*, “This is where I go back to what we were learning before because my inclination is to just think that Rabbi Hanina is a bunch of hot air ((both laugh)), but that’s got to do with me. I’m not ready for this step yet. I have to try to understand what he’s saying and what the other Rabbi is saying before I just say, you know, on the basis of personality-” Laurie nods knowingly and responds, “Yes. That’s a really good point. I guess that’s what they want us to do.” Later in their *havruta*, Laurie reiterates her bias for R. Hiyya, making clear the reasoning behind it. “It goes somewhere. We’re inspired...And it almost, I don’t know, I liked how you said he’s the lawyer and, and maybe Rabbi Hiyya is the teacher...one is like the professor, stays at the front and lectures and the other is out there and, maybe that resonates more for us because that’s what we’re going to be doing.” Miriam concurs and adds, “Yes, and also how we sort of selected this way to go.” This is a pair that is very aware of their leanings and is able to articulate why they have those leanings.

Due to this awareness, they consciously make efforts to challenge their thinking by making counterarguments that enable them to further listen to the text and not simply end their interpretive discussion based on their first reading of text. For example, Laurie tries to see a downside to R. Hiyya's approach. "... he's empowering these children and he's like, you know, letting them teach each other and it feels very good and I'm [wondering] what can be the draw back? And I was trying to think, because, you know, if we're saying that both of these have some benefits and some, or they can both be useful. So why would this not be good? What occurred to me is maybe it's, it seems very unrelated at first. I mean he's starting by planting, sowing flax. If his, let's say [his] goal is Torah, teaching Torah, so Rabbi Hanina starts right away, just does it, jumps right in, and the other guy comes from a round about way where you don't, he's sowing flax. Sorry. This is just how I'm thinking of it. And you're [wondering] what is he doing and you might not give him any credit right away, because you don't see the product and it takes time. And then eventually you know, and he builds this whole wonderful process. So it's just, I don't know, just thinking in terms of teaching methods, maybe they're both, we're saying, they're both good. And I was just thinking when would this appear to be not be good and I think it might be that, you know, when you, I'm sure we've all had teachers that ... they're round about and free flowing and eventually they get to their point, but it took a while."

It becomes clearer towards the end of the *havruta* that this counterargument is not mere game playing on Laurie's part. She herself prefers a more direct method of teaching and learning and might have considered R. Hiyya's approach a waste of time. "I really

like that idea a lot because it's about connection for him [R. Hiyya]...so he doesn't see it as a waste of time I guess, where I would be [saying] give me the Torah, I want to make it..." She seems through the course of the *havruta* to reconsider her preference and recognize that building connections between people and also between ideas takes time and we can't always see the whole picture up front.

Miriam takes the lead in trying to further consider R. Hanina's approach. She suggests that R. Hanina is similar to a public figure, while R. Hiyya is a more private figure. "You know what I just got an image of is, someone who's a performer and say a singer and brings beauty to a lot of people in a big way, public way, as compared to somebody who goes around and does good things all the time in a little whispery way. They both have a big impact... It's interesting to think about because the public figure says, using that analogy, he would, Hanina would potentially do wonderful work, memorable work..." Miriam concludes as follows, "They're actually both modes of influence I guess. I just relate more to the teacher one." Here she has listened to the text and articulated a positive understanding of R. Hanina, while still making clear her personal view.

As they go through each of the steps in the task, they continue to develop their ideas about R. Hiyya and make links to what R. Hiyya is doing and the way they learn in the DeLeT program. They continue to try to consider what the text tells them about R. Hanina, but ultimately, keep returning to R. Hiyya and their preference for his approach. The steps laid out in the task -- articulating what the story is about, revisiting the text and considering their own perspective on the text -- give them an opportunity to further

deepen their understanding of the text about R. Hiyya and refine their interpretation of it. Going through these steps also provides them the opportunity to at least acknowledge the value of R. Hanina's approach, despite the fact that they do not agree with it.

What is the Ultimate Result of All of This on Their Interpretive Discussion?

By the end of their *havruta*, they have developed a deeper interpretation of R. Hiyya's approach. They have gotten here by taking turns listening and articulating, working hard to listen to each other, the text and their own voice and distinguishing between the latter two. They have developed their interpretation of R. Hiyya's approach by bringing together their ideas with the ideas expressed in the text. They have also tried to consider R. Hanina's approach in a positive light and not merely dismiss it out of hand, acknowledging over and over again that while R. Hanina's approach may be good, they personally relate more to R. Hiyya's approach. All of this is very positive.

The task helped them get this far. But despite the task and their hard work, their interpretive discussion falls short because they are not attentive enough to the text in its entirety. While they revisit the text multiple times and look at some of the details in the text, they do not probe the particular significance of all of the details in it, including the details of R. Hanina's statement and the early details in R. Hiyya's statement. Thirteen minutes into their *havruta*, Laurie asks Miriam if they have discussed all of the details and Miriam says no. But neither of them follows up on this point. They briefly notice that both rabbis bring up their responsibility to carry the Torah onward and then Laurie begins to talk about the form of the text. An outcome of this is that they do not try to imagine in any detail what R. Hanina's approach actually looked like. In general, Miriam compares him and his approach to a public figure or a rock star, and she and Laurie talk

about R. Hanina's personality -- he's "conceited," "it's all about me" or more favorably "he's confident" and "he's responsible." But they do not ask what he means that he would bring Torah back through his argumentation or try to imagine how this might work then or now. On the other hand, they do develop a scenario for how R. Hiyya's approach might have worked, giving different children in-depth looks at different parts of Torah and then having them teach each other and create a learning community that then teaches others -- "that is kind of the way ideas go around." Given that they only spin out one approach and do not really explore the alternative approach in the text, they do not have a substantive basis for comparing approaches. This makes it much easier to write off R. Hanina and build up R. Hiyya.

Furthermore, even when they do spin out R. Hiyya's approach, they do this by only looking at some of the details, those details which most resonate with them about him teaching different books to different children and then having those children teach each other. As Laurie comments about this part of the text, '(H)e's empowering these children and he's letting them teach each other.' They flatten R. Hiyya's approach by only focusing on those details which most resonate for them. They do not discuss in detail the full list of actions that R. Hiyya says he takes such as sowing flax, weaving nets, catching deer, giving meat to orphans and preparing and writing the Five Books of the Torah. By only focusing on the later details in R. Hiyya's approach, they are easily able to conclude that R. Hiyya's approach is the same as their modern educational ideals - - lifelong learning, student empowerment, community building. It is no wonder that they embrace his approach.

Step	Ideas about R. Hiyya	Ideas about R. Hanina
1	Teaching different students different books was a “creative way to get a lot of knowledge to people” and a way to teach each book more deeply. It’s a “way influence goes around.”	He’s “conceited and abrupt.” “It’s just a very self centered presentation of how skilled he is.”
2	The approach is “step by step,” a “process,” “physical” and “laborsome” and “eventually moves to the text and knowledge and intellect.” The approach is “empowering students.” The text’s longer form reflects the idea that this is a process. R. Hiyya is the teacher “who puts his hands out and gives and teaches.” Miriam and Laurie question whether it’s an “unrealistic” approach and also whether it’s too roundabout.	“Text wise how short it is reflects...[a] short process...For him it’s boom. It’s all about me...the first one is all verbal and in your mind. I’ll pass on Torah through my argumentation and my intelligence and brilliance.” He’s a “rock star who may “produce wonderful things that makes waves in the universe.”
3	“Bigger isn’t necessarily better;” it’s the “daily doing that makes an impact.” “It’s a process...and it takes time to be cultivated and built up and turned into what it’s going to be and at the end you empower the students.” He’s “taking the time and effort to make relationships so his words will be meaningful.” It’s a “dramatic statement about teaching.” "Teaching and learning is a process" with many steps. He's "creating community" among students. All of this is similar to DeLeT experience where it’s about taking the time to teach your students.	“The first rabbi has such a big ego.” He’s "confident" and has "a sense of responsibility." He’s saying, “I need to save the Jewish people.”
4	Miriam and Laurie read a few lines earlier in the Talmud text, although it is unclear how this impacts their ideas. Hiyya is the “teacher who is out there” and not just staying in the lecture hall.	Hanina is the "professor (who) stays at the front and lectures."
5	“He’s intensively involved.” He gives students responsibility to teach and makes them responsible for their own learning so they can be “life long learners.” He “teaches people to fish instead of just giving them food.”	
6	Laurie wonders why R. Hiyya had to take all of the steps and Miriam responds: “He believes in intimately relating to everything...” and that, though pieces might not seem connected, they are part of a larger picture that has to do with connections.	

Table 3.7: Main Ideas Discussed At Each Step Of The Task

Their conversation at step #5 is illuminating and very honest:

Miriam: Now what do we have to say about the claim? ((She's looking at the study guide.)) But, see, when I think about something and talk about it, I –

Laurie: Automatically –

Miriam: automatically-

Laurie: Yah.

Miriam: put, you know I don't, I really have no objectivity. ((Both laugh.)) You know?

Laurie: It's hard.

Miriam: () said.

Laurie: Yah. Well, do you think, so (7), so I guess what we think the big idea is that this method is, we describe what the method is and we sort of say that the Talmud is saying that this is a good, is applauding this. So do we think this is good or what? Do we disagree with this method? Are there drawbacks? Do we think it's a good way to spread Torah or to teach or to interact with students? (5) Or would you make any changes to it? Do you think he should have done, I don't know. I'm just trying to think of how, because I agree. I think we both automatically kind of bring our own –

Miriam: Just for our personalities.

Laurie: =Yes.

Miriam: More understanding of the second Rabbi

Laurie: =And it's hard not to interpret and analyze the text without, yourself-

Miriam: Hmhm.

Laurie: without saying what you already. I don't know. But I, I think you did, I think you did really well with saying, okay, well, let's not just totally write off Rabbi Hanina because he also has, [he might also have a good point

Miriam. Yes. I'm trying. ((She laughs.))]

Laurie: I wouldn't have thought about it, because, I was like ["oh

Miriam: Yah

Laurie: what a] jerk," you know. So that was good that you said that.

Miriam: So my personal take is that Rabbi Hiyya's way of making the world better, is more, I can grasp it. Relate to it better.

Laurie: Um. And I agree. Should I say that ((Laurie writing while speaking the words out loud)) so we feel that we agree with the big idea and relate to Rabbi Hiyya.

Miriam: Hmhm.

In this part of their *havruta*, Laurie and Miriam comment on how hard it is to read the text objectively and that given their experience, they simply have greater understanding of R. Hiyya. This itself makes perfect sense since the goal is not to read the text with a stance of neutrality -- that would be impossible -- but to be as attentive as possible to all the parts of the text, to distinguish between our own beliefs and the views presented by the text and not merely conflate the two and in doing all of this to create an opportunity to learn something more about both the text and our own beliefs. Laurie notes that Miriam did a good job by not letting them simply write off R. Hanina and Laurie also raises some important questions about R. Hiyya's approach. However, while they keep saying they should not write off R. Hanina, by not further developing their ideas about his statement, they write him off without sufficiently exploring or understanding his ideas. And while Laurie's questions about R. Hiyya's method would have enabled them to more fully reflect on R. Hiyya's approach and their views, neither she nor Miriam pursue the questions further at this point. The evidence that they notice in the portion of the text under study, in the earlier part of the Talmudic text,¹⁸⁰ and in their own experiences, keeps pointing them in one direction and they pursue it without exploring **the text in its entirety** and the counterargument it raises. And given that they agree with one another, there is no one left to redirect their attention.

¹⁸⁰ While they are addressing step four of the task, they read a few lines earlier in the text. This part of the text seems to favor R. Hiyya, although it is unclear from the transcript whether Laurie and Miriam draw this conclusion or if they do, whether they think that the two pieces of text are interrelated.

They conclude their *havruta* discussion having stopped thinking about R. Hanina altogether and further expanding on their interpretation of R. Hiyya's approach. Laurie wonders why he does all that he does. "Why do all that...why did he have to make the Torah each time from scratch?" Miriam develops an idea from this question, building off of Laurie's earlier point about community building and her point about relationship building. Miriam says, "Because he believes in intimately relating to everything...It's a good way. It's a good way to do it..." They end -- tired but exuberant with the web of interpretation that they have spun -- admitting to each other that they each love to study with the other one. They, their life's work and R. Hiyya have all been uplifted by this Talmudic passage. They do not comment on the coincidence.

Generative Points in Their Havruta and Missed Opportunities

In many ways, this is a case of a very generative *havruta*. Laurie and Miriam jointly construct a rich understanding of R. Hiyya's suggestion, drawing on evidence from the text. Each time they revisit the text, they further develop their interpretation of R. Hiyya's position, often making connections between R. Hiyya's statement and their own experiences with and beliefs about teaching and teachers. Through the course of studying the text, they draw out their personal ideas and beliefs.¹⁸¹ They are aware of these beliefs and the fact that these beliefs predispose them to view R. Hiyya more positively than R. Hanina and work hard to challenge their predisposition by trying to consider positive elements of R. Hanina's method and negative elements of R. Hiyya's approach. Isn't this the picture of a rich *havruta* discussion -- they consider the text and their personal ideas and fill out the contours of both?

¹⁸¹ Haroutunian-Gordon, *Turning the Soul*, 5-6. This is a goal she espouses.

On the other hand, this is also a case about missed learning opportunities, for while Laurie and Miriam are aware of these predispositions, they are still unable to be fully attentive to all the parts of the text and to examine their predispositions in light of the text in order to learn from them. They only listen to a part of the text's voice and do not make the entirety of the text equally subject to their inquiry. While they keep trying to consider positive elements of R. Hanina, they do not seem to take his approach seriously enough to focus on it, spin it out in detail and let it advocate for itself. In their rush to favor R. Hiyya's approach and conflate it with their own, they move quickly past many of the textual details of R. Hiyya's approach. The end result of this is that they do not fully explore either of the approaches in the text or make their own inclination to favor R. Hiyya a subject of inquiry. Such exploration and inquiry could have resulted in richer interpretations of both of the approaches in the text and perhaps also greater self-understanding.

In trying to understand what was going wrong in one of the Shakespeare conversations she had with high school students, Haroutunian-Gordon writes, "Our hypothesis, then, is that sometimes you cannot tell discussants a 'truth' that contradicts their beliefs because they are too busy playing the game of interpretive discussion- so busy that there is no place in their thinking for a question about their understanding. When they are engaged in building an interpretation, they are relating beliefs to one another; then only the beliefs consistent with those already accepted may be woven into the fabric, while other ideas are ignored. And why not? After all, it is no mean accomplishment to construct an interpretation, even one that leaves significant points in

the text unexplained.”¹⁸² Haroutunian-Gordon’s statement might suggest that perhaps it is expecting too much of Miriam and Laurie to do more than they did, which was already a lot.

To have learned more from this *havruta* experience would have required that Laurie and Miriam listen more carefully to the details of the text and the insights it suggests and/or have a greater metacognitive awareness of the activity and their role in it. While they had awareness of how their ideas shaped their reading, the text and their ideas reinforced one another and so they were not led to probe either further.

Laurie, more than Miriam, does learn something about her ideas. She is able to step back from her initial rush to favor R. Hiyya and consider a downside to his approach -- that it might be a “roundabout” way to get to a goal. She tells Miriam that she herself may not have preferred this method because of how long it might have taken. Laurie’s encounter with the text has given her an opportunity to reconsider the benefits of “roundabout” approaches and realize that it is very much in line with what she believes about good teaching. Ultimately though, Laurie and Miriam do not pay enough attention to the full text or probe the text or their idea far enough. We will return to the challenge of deeply probing our ideas in Chapter Five.

IV. Conclusion

Looking at these two cases through the lens of the practices of listening and articulating has illuminated a number of things about how these core practices work, what they enable and how they are hard.

¹⁸² Ibid., 158.

We have seen some of the ways that listening and articulating play a central role in these *havrutot* and are at the heart of enabling joint work to occur. Most basically, listening enables us to engage with our partners and their ideas. Articulating helps us draw out our own ideas and put something on the table for us to come together around and work on with our partners. There is no joint work without an idea, even a seedling of an idea, for the *havruta* consider. And there is no joint work unless we have some, even vague understanding, of what the other partners are trying to say.

The back and forth dynamic between listening and articulating, more than the other practices, keeps all partners “in the game.” When we articulate, our partner’s listening can encourage us to further articulate and perhaps get clearer about an idea or try a new idea, and our partner’s listening may lead our partner to ask a question that helps uncover a different idea or insight. And when we listen, our partner’s articulations can draw us in to see things we had not seen before or make us stop our partner to clarify something and in this way, draw attention to something that may have gone unnoticed. Listening and articulating keep us involved and can act as a check on each other.

Furthermore, providing both partners with opportunities for listening and articulating helps the *havruta* to draw on the collective resources of all parties -- moving beyond the single idea or perspective of any one partner -- which ultimately enriches the interpretive discussion. In the first case, we explored some of the ways in which Laurie and Debbie’s turn taking enabled them to come up with ideas and develop them further than they would have otherwise. If Debbie had merely articulated, while Laurie listened, she might have had an interesting (and even rich) monologue, but it would not have been

rich *havruta* learning. Rich *havruta* learning is about engaging in joint work, building compelling interpretations by drawing on the ideas of **all** of the partners.

We have also considered two different kinds of failures of listening in particular, which may have been corrected by greater meta-cognitive awareness. In the first example, Debbie fails to listen to one of Laurie's ideas because it is too hard both to articulate Debbie's own idea and hold Laurie's articulation on-line, while also trying to listen to the text. This failure meant that Debbie ignored a crucial point made by Laurie. Laurie corrects the failure and restates her point, which enriches their discussion. In this case, Laurie is the check on the failure.

In the second example, both Laurie and Miriam fail to listen to all of the details of the text. Unlike a human partner who can proactively reinsert his/her articulation when she is not listened to, the text as an inanimate object is less in "your face." When both Debbie and Miriam fail to listen to understand some of the details of the text, the text does not correct the failure.

Laurie and Miriam's case provides an example of how an awareness of our predispositions is not enough to guarantee that we will be able to maximally listen to all aspects of text and in the process, learn from them as well as from the understandings we bring to our reading. Perhaps if Laurie and Miriam had been able to reflect on their predispositions and not simply acknowledge them, they would have been able to more fully listen to the text. Our listening might be enhanced if we are able to reflect at different points, both on our own ideas and on the *havruta* process in which we are involved, making these, as well as the text, the subject of our ongoing inquiry.

When all is said and done, it seems that it is not enough to merely listen and articulate. Our intentions behind our listening and articulating matter (and it could be helpful for our partners to more clearly understand these intentions and thereby know what to expect and how to respond). When we listen, are we doing this to understand the other or merely to follow along? To what extent do we listen because we are animated by the idea of working together to figure something out? Are we really willing to do what it takes to listen to an alternative perspective? When we articulate, do we do this because we want to hear what the other person has to say or because we need to hear our own voice in order to think through an idea? If the latter, do we get to a point where we articulate because we want a response that may help stretch our thinking or do we continue to merely monologue instead of dialogue?

Chapter 4: The Practices of Wondering and Focusing

Introduction

While the practices of listening and articulating fuel the *havruta*, wondering and focusing help determine the direction that the *havruta* conversation will take. As we wonder about the meanings of the text and articulate these thoughts to our partner we generate all sorts of ideas which can take us in many different directions. We may allow ourselves to get swept away in an ocean of thoughts. As we focus on a particular idea or a particular part of the text or the task, we shift our conversation from the open ocean to a particular stream. We intentionally, or sometimes unintentionally, choose a path to pursue at the exclusion of others in the hope that this path will lead us somewhere productive. Thus, the dynamic relationship between wondering and focusing helps determine the course of the *havruta* conversation. When this dynamic is generative, it creates a middle ground between endless inquiry and prematurely shutting down the conversation.

In Part I, I will define these practices and explore their relationship and potential pitfalls. I will then present two cases. In Part II, I will revisit Debbie and Laurie's *havruta* but this time through the lens of focusing and wondering in order to illustrate these core practices, their interplay and their impact on Debbie and Laurie's interpretive discussion. Debbie and Laurie's *havruta* highlights the creative dynamic that can exist when partners move back and forth between focusing and wondering, as well as the tension that exists, in this case, highly generative, when one partner begins focusing while the other is still wondering. The case also provides an opportunity to explore the

role of questions in the use of these practices. In Part III, I will describe and analyze a second case based on another *havruta* pair to illustrate what can happen when partners do not wonder for a sustained amount of time. This case helps refine our definitions of the practices of wondering and focusing.

Note that *havruta* participants can wonder about or focus on many different things such as the text, an idea or an interpretation, their *havruta* partner, or the *havruta* task.

I: Defining Wondering and Focusing and Their Interplay in *Havruta*

Wondering

Wondering¹⁸³ means feeling curious and looking in multiple directions, as with a light that covers the whole room and allows us to see all around. Wondering implies having a sense of openness to unforeseen possibilities and asking questions. *Havrutot* may wonder about the text and its interpretation.¹⁸⁴ They ask, “What does this text mean?” Their wondering propels them from reading the text to clarify what it literally says to trying to figure out its underlying meaning.¹⁸⁵

One can wonder with a sense of awe and limitless possibilities. This kind of wondering is more likely to occur when a *havruta* first encounters a text. Such wondering is unbounded and can lead one to come up with ideas that go in many different directions without necessarily connecting to one another. One may also wonder

¹⁸³ Wondering is referred to in educational literature as something that is an important part of the learning process. For example, Karen Galas highlights the importance of the “cultivation of wonder.” Karen Gallas, *Languages of Learning: How Children Talk, Write, Dance, Draw and Sing Their Understanding of the World* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1994), 78.

¹⁸⁴ It is virtually impossible and not very useful to try to separate wondering about the text from wondering about textual interpretations, since as soon as one is involved in reading the text, one is already developing interpretations of it.

¹⁸⁵ This move is the difference between talking about the text on a literal level and looking to understand it in a deeper way, as discussed by Calkins, *The Art of Teaching Reading*, 367-7, 482-3. It may also be the difference between reading and interpreting the text as discussed by Scholes, *Textual Power*, 21-23.

in response to a particular question that one has about the text or one's interpretation of it. This kind of wondering is bounded by the particular question.

Wondering in *havruta* often takes the form of working on different ways of understanding a text. This occurs when the *havruta* is curious about the meaning of the text and considers different alternatives in an attempt to figure out the best way to make sense of the text. Wondering can help *havrutot* generate creative ideas about the meaning of the texts they study.

Focusing

Focusing¹⁸⁶ means concentrating attention, as with a laser. When we focus, we keep something at the center of our attention so that we can think about it. Just as with a laser, we zero in on it and bore into it. When studying in *havruta*, one may, at different points, focus on a particular idea or way of understanding the text. This kind of focusing gives *havrutot* an opportunity to deepen an initial idea and try to work it through. The interpretive idea may be about one small part of the text or may be an attempt to figure out the overall meaning of the text. This kind of focusing is very important since it can both help the *havruta* deepen its interpretation and also lead the *havruta* to some conclusions about the meaning of the text. In generative *havruta* discussion, focusing on a way of understanding the text occurs in dynamic relationship with wondering about the meaning of the text. I will discuss the interrelationship in more detail below.

¹⁸⁶ Focusing is referenced implicitly in Calkins' discussion of structuring book talks to help students "go deeper," although Calkins does not highlight it as a specific practice. "My colleagues and I have come to believe that one of the most important ways to lift the level of children's book talks (and our own) is to steer the conversation so that after some important, rich time for laying out one's cares, people talk for a long time about one idea, pursuing one line of inquiry together." Calkins, *The Art of Teaching Reading*, 235.

There are other objects of focus in *havruta* that affect the interpretive discussion. First, we focus on the text. Generally, focusing on the text means we listen to it, as discussed in the previous chapter. For example, when we first sit down in our *havruta*, we can focus on the text to read it before we intentionally bring in our own ideas. We also choose which part of the text on which to focus, which part to read or think about. If we focus too narrowly, we may miss important details in the text, as occurs in the second case in Chapter Three. If we focus too broadly and try to tackle the entire text all at once, we may become overwhelmed and not have an opportunity to probe particular details. In the DeLeT *Beit Midrash*, *havrutot* have study guides with tasks. Thus, in the context of this study, another object of focus is the task itself. *Havrutot* may find themselves focusing on the task a lot at certain points and then letting it fall into the background at other times as they get carried away by a particular idea or part of the text.

The Relationship Between Wondering and Focusing

Often, there is more wondering when the pair first encounters the text and is trying to make sense of it.¹⁸⁷ The pair will have many questions and may pursue many different streams of thought. At this point in the *havruta*, the pair's wonder is aided by its sense of unlimited time. Without the pressure of an impending deadline, many *havrutot* lose themselves in the magic of wondering about a text. As the *havruta* rereads and rereads the text, it becomes more familiar. The *havruta*'s attention can be caught by a particular idea or set of ideas and by particular portions of the text. When this occurs, wondering gives way to focusing. This shift can be abetted by the *havruta*'s sense that time is passing and there is an end to their study in sight. This may be triggered by the

¹⁸⁷ This is similar to "exploratory talk." See Barnes and Todd, *Communication and Learning Revisited, Making Meaning Through Talk*, 15-17.

pair's own awareness of the time or by the teacher reminding the *havruta* of the time.

The shift from wondering to focusing is important because it helps the *havruta* work on a particular idea.

But there is a more nuanced relationship between wondering and focusing than simply: the pair wonders and then focuses and then it is done. Each practice keeps leading to the other. It would be a mistake to allow choosing a focus to automatically signal that we are done interpreting the text. Rather, when we focus, we give ourselves an opportunity to bore into something, to delve into it more deeply, to develop it further and make sure it holds up. All of this delving requires more wondering about the object of our focus and other ideas that might arise. Our focusing keeps leading to further wondering, which then leads to further focus, until we eventually choose one idea to focus on as our conclusive interpretation, either because it is compelling or because there is no more time for study.

While for analytic purposes, it is helpful to separate these practices in order to understand their added value, there is very little pure wondering or focusing. One focuses in order to wonder and one's wonder helps bring certain ideas into focus. When one wonders, one must wonder about something. The wondering is directed, even in the most general way and so one engages in some degree of focus in order to wonder. And in order to choose where to concentrate our attention and focus, one may first have probed and questioned the text and come up with ideas through one's wondering.

The Pitfalls of Leaning Too Much Toward One Practice

Generative *havruta* entails an interplay between wondering and focusing, but what can happen when a pair leans too much toward one practice? When there is too

much focusing on only one idea, especially early on in a *havruta* discussion, the pair can get carried away by unexplored and underdeveloped first impressions.¹⁸⁸ We see this happening with people who are committed to a particular line of thinking even before they look at the text or to people who are uncomfortable with ambiguity or the idea that the text might have multiple interpretations. When there is too much focusing on only one part of the text, the pair will often lose the textual context, which provides important meaning to the different parts of the text. When there is too much focusing on the task, the pair does not even get to the point of being able to consider a particular idea since it sacrifices all wondering to getting the task done. On the other hand, when there is too much wondering, the *havruta* can literally wander and not develop any idea fully. This is the “popcorn effect” -- *havrutot* will pop out one idea after another like individual popcorn kernels that never grow larger or connect to one another. While the mountain of “popcorn” may look impressive, it rarely is substantially filling. We see this sometimes with people who get so carried away by the process of generating ideas that they forget the larger purpose of their endeavor -- to try and develop as full an understanding of the text as possible -- or with people who mistakenly think that half baked ideas that are neither tested nor synthesized with other ideas and the content of the text are really good enough.

Wondering about and Focusing on Our Havruta Partner

While much of the discussion in this chapter will be about wondering and focusing as it relates to the text and interpretations, *havrutot* must also by extension wonder about and focus on their partners, the generators of some of the ideas. By

¹⁸⁸ Very close to this scenario is when people focus on an overall interpretation and get so caught up in it that they do not question it or wonder about other ideas that might help them further understand the text.

wondering about their partners, they may be prompted to ask their partners questions to help clarify how they would like their *havruta* to proceed and probe the meaning of their partners' words. By focusing on their partners, they can learn about them and the ideas they bring to the table and thereby work with partners and their ideas more effectively.

Some *havruta* partners may focus on and wonder about their partners as people and through their wondering and focusing get to know their partners on a deeper personal level. Other *havruta* partners may focus on and wonder about their partners' thinking and their ideas. This is different than just thinking about the ideas on the table. Some *havruta* partners may specifically indicate interest in the other person's thinking before that person has even said anything and proactively draw that person into the conversation and not simply wait to comment on what that person says. And having heard the other person's ideas, they may want to clarify what the person is saying.¹⁸⁹ Doing all of these things helps the *havruta* to engage in interpretive discussion that is built off of shared understanding and both parties' ideas, which may help them develop stronger interpretations. It may also strengthen their working relationship by building trust that each is interested in the other.

II. Case One

Laurie and Debbie's *Havruta*: A Second Look

We continue with the case of Debbie and Laurie from the previous chapter in order to examine the practices of wondering and focusing and their interplay. This analysis draws on the same *havruta* session that we examined in Chapter Three. We begin with the first part of Debbie and Laurie's interpretive discussion in that *havruta*

¹⁸⁹ This is listening to understand as discussed in Chapter Three.

session (interpretive discussion part A in the table below), which we also analyzed in Chapter Three through the lens of listening and articulating. Then we will focus on new excerpts from that same forty minute session, taken from the continuation of the first part of their interpretive discussion, as well as from the second part of their interpretive discussion (interpretive discussion part B in the table below).

Phase	Topic	Details
#1: Start-up		
#2: Interpretive Discussion Part A	What are the motivations of the characters?	- Debbie and Laurie wonder about the connection between insolence and questions. - Debbie wonders about R. Shimi's intentions. She plays out a classroom scenario in which a student tries to make a stir and overhears a teacher saying, "May God preserve me from the insolence of this student." She concludes that no ill meaning student would just stop after overhearing his teacher. By extension, R. Shimi could not have been ill meaning. - Laurie is left to wonder how R. Papa could have acted the way he did. - Debbie picks up on Laurie's question about whether the teacher is overreacting and says "yes, he was." She reads the story as one about a student who asked a lot of questions because he was very inquisitive and a teacher who overreacted in response. - Laurie continues to try to make sense of R. Papa's apparent overreaction, wondering why Papa didn't go directly to R. Shimi. She wonders if R. Papa was seeking strength in God and also whether R. Shimi was perhaps challenging R. Papa as a person and that's what led to R. Papa's response.
#2: Interpretive Discussion Part B	What is their overall theory about the meaning of the narrative?	- Debbie wants to start the task. Laurie asks if they can first clarify their overall theory. - Debbie suggests that their theory is that any discouragement a student gets can really shut them off and that R. Papa didn't mean to be overheard. - Laurie agrees and adds that the lesson is that we must be careful because we never know who will overhear us. - Laurie wonders why R. Shimi didn't just go to R. Papa to ask him why he said what he said. - Debbie concludes that R. Shimi didn't take action because he wasn't supposed to have heard R. Papa. The lesson of the story is to remind us of the impact of our words. - Laurie clarifies their interpretation: Is it that R. Shimi was "innocently asking all these questions, like he was right and R. Papa overreacted?" Debbie responds that she no longer feels that there's a right or wrong character here.
#3: Work on assignment		

Table 4.1: Overview of Laurie and Debbie's *Havruta*

The Dance Between Wondering and Focusing

In what follows, Laurie and Debbie engage in a dance between wondering and focusing which allows them to develop a genuine issue. In legal language, “issue” refers to offspring. It is generative. Sophie Haroutunian-Gordon explains that in interpretive discussions, discussants develop genuine issues or questions; these are questions or issues that matter to participants, that they are invested in figuring out and that do not have a simple answer.¹⁹⁰ Genuine issues can keep our conversations moving forward and keep us moving between wondering and focusing in order to find a satisfactory response.

After Debbie and Laurie read the text a number of times, focusing on understanding the literal storyline such as the meaning of particular words and whether R. Shimi was the student or teacher, they begin to try to unpack the meaning of the story. They wonder a lot at the beginning of this discussion, particularly about the connection between rudeness and R. Shimi’s questions. Laurie explains, “[T]here’s something that R. Papa really, really doesn’t like about the fact that he’s asking him so many questions, or I think...It doesn’t say that specifically...What connection would you make between rudeness and what’s already happened?” Debbie too is wondering about the connection. She says, “[T]he connection is so ambiguous and it’s weird because you would think asking questions is a positive thing...the insolence must have been in the kinds of questions. I’m guessing.” Their wondering is driven by the fact that the text does not explain why R. Papa thought R. Shimi was insolent and also by their own inclination to assume that it is a good thing for students to ask questions. There is a space or gap in the

¹⁹⁰ See Chapter 5 in *Turning the Soul*. On this topic also see Haroutunian-Gordon, “Listening in a Democratic Society.”

text that engages them in wondering and theorizing about Shimi's questions.¹⁹¹ Note that this wondering occurs along with focus since the wondering is focused on Shimi's questions.

- **Laurie** explains, "[T]here's something that R. Papa really, really doesn't like about the fact that he's asking him so many questions, or I think...It doesn't say that specifically...What connection would you make between rudeness and what's already happened."
- **Debbie** too is wondering about the connection. She says, "[T]he connection is so ambiguous and it's weird because you would think asking questions is a positive thing...the insolence must have been in the kinds of questions. I'm guessing."

Table 4.2: Laurie and Debbie's Early Wondering

Their initial wondering leads them to focus on a genuine issue: Who is at fault in this story, R. Shimi or R. Papa? While they do not specifically articulate it as such, this question hovers over most of their interpretive discussion. It creates a purpose to their conversation -- to figure out whether R. Shimi is at fault because somehow his questions were rude or whether R. Papa overreacted to R. Shimi. This larger focus gives their ensuing conversation a direction, even as their conversation wanders in different directions. The result is that the wondering is not pure wandering but actually allows them to build a more and more comprehensive interpretation. This is a kind of focused wondering -- the wondering has a larger focus, which is sustained over time. Their conversation will conclude when they have satisfactorily addressed their genuine issue.

¹⁹¹ Wolfgang Iser talks about gap filling as pulling the conversation forward. Gaps engage readers since the reader is driven to try and fill the gaps in order to make sense of the text. As Iser writes, "What is concealed spurs the reader into action, but this action is also controlled by what is revealed; the explicit in its turn is transformed when the implicit has been brought to light." Iser, *The Act of Reading*, 169. For a related idea -- inferring -- and its specific application to teaching reading see also Keene and Zimmermann, *Mosaic of Thought*, Chp. 8.

Laurie	Debbie:
•“Was he really asking rude questions or was... the teacher just overreacting...” •“If Shimi only had good intentions...then what does this say about the teacher? Is he misinterpreting his student...” •“Who is overreacting?”	•“What is the nature of this kid?” •“What is (R. Shimi’s) intention?” •“Is he misinterpreting his student...is the teacher the one overreacting...or is it the teacher who is not overreacting and the student is being mischievous and inappropriate in some way?”

Table 4.3: Genuine Question/Issue: Who Is At Fault?

As their conversation goes on, Debbie and Laurie continue the dance between wondering about and focusing on other details of the text and interpretive ideas. This multidimensional¹⁹² back and forth movement allows them to consider a variety of details in the story and interpretive ideas and move beyond superficial first impressions. For example, following their discussion about the connection between rudeness and questions, Laurie asks whether R. Shimi was really asking rude questions or whether the teacher was overreacting. Her question is motivated by wonder and the result is that it focuses Debbie’s attention on R. Shimi’s nature. Debbie says, “One of the things I think you also touched upon is what is the nature of this kid.” Earlier in the conversation she had proposed that R. Shimi was merely asking rude questions. This time, her focus on R. Shimi’s nature leads her to wonder more about what type of person Shimi is. She specifically wonders: “What is (Shimi’s) intention?” This question shifts the conversation to consider the intentions behind R. Shimi’s actions and not just the actions themselves. Her wondering focuses her thinking on R. Shimi’s intentions, and she then spends a few minutes building a compelling case based on the idea that R. Shimi may

¹⁹² It is multidimensional in the sense that they move between the practices and use those practices to move back and forth between the text and those ideas that they are developing.

well have had very good intentions. She draws evidence for this from the text and from her experience as a teacher.

In addition to directing their wondering and focusing at the text, they also very explicitly wonder about and focus on each other's thinking. The beginning of each part of their interpretive discussions is framed in the following way. One of them starts by saying: "What do you think this is about?" -- proactively drawing out her partner's thinking. This question puts a focus on the partner and clearly indicates that the first person is wondering about her partner's ideas. The partner responds by thinking out loud and then asks the first one what she thinks about what she just said.

For example, at the beginning of Part A of their discussion, Debbie asks Laurie what she thinks the text is about. This encourages Laurie to articulate her first impressions, that there's a connection between Shimi's questions and the rudeness. After she thinks out loud, Laurie immediately asks Debbie what she thinks of what she just said, which encourages Debbie to articulate her understanding. This pattern of "what do you think?" -- motivated in part by their wonder for and focus on each other -- seems to help Debbie and Laurie engage with the material together and get inside each other's thinking. This is particularly helpful at the beginning of each part of their interpretive discussion, when there is a shift of conversational focus from what came before. In addition, they are able to start each part of the conversation feeling that they have contributed to the topic at hand and that their partner wants to hear what the other has to say.¹⁹³

¹⁹³ This section could easily have been placed in the chapter on listening and articulating. This is because there is a relationship between all of the practices. Listening and articulating are the way *havruta* partners practically express their wondering and focusing (as well as their challenging and supporting, as discussed in Chapter Five).

The Tug Between Partners: To Focus or to Wonder?

Sometimes, one *havruta* partner leans more toward focusing, while the other continues to wonder. This can create tension, as each party may want to take the conversation in a different direction. Debbie and Laurie's *havruta* provides us with an example of what happens when one partner chooses to focus on a particular interpretation that provides a satisfactory resolution to the issue of "who is at fault," while the other partner continues to wonder about this issue.

For the first fourteen minutes of their *havruta*, both Debbie and Laurie move back and forth between focusing on particular ideas and wondering about them and, through this back and forth, generate different ways of understanding the motivations of the characters in the text. Then, they notice the time. At this point, Debbie begins to focus on a particular interpretation of the overall text and also begins to focus on the task, while Laurie continues to wonder about their larger question.

In the excerpt below, we see how this plays out.

LAURIE: Ya. ((Both start writing.)) So I'm going to say-

DEBBIE: Ya

LAURIE: who is overreacting? ((She looks at her watch)). Oh my God. () ((She laughs.))

DEBBIE: Oh, we're-

LAURIE: This is going quickly.

DEBBIE: Ya. okay.

LAURIE: But we're doing well, I think.

DEBBIE: So do you, I mean we can have different interpretations. I would think that if we're going to start putting, inserting the sentences then we should see is the, do you

agree with the notion that the student is actually wanting to ask questions, **maybe** over-asking questions and **maybe** the teacher is, seems like there is an overreaction because of, I mean what I said about that, that if, I'd be interested in hearing a different opinion, if you have one.

LAURIE: So is that what you -

DEBBIE: Ya, I think, ya, I think, I mean I would say, you know, here, he asked him many questions, you know, the whys. He wanted to know every detail about why it happened and where it came from because he was very inquisitive and R. Papa felt like he wasn't allowing him to push forward and stick with his lesson or where he wanted to be at the end and so Shimi was really hurt and realized that he had to stop his inq. What's that word? His inquiry, you know, for the sake of his teacher's sanity-

We see in this transcript excerpt that Laurie looks at her watch and comments on how quickly the time is passing. This seems to trigger a reaction from Debbie who then mentions the task of inserting sentences and suggests they should be clear about their interpretation before they begin to focus on the task. Debbie states her interpretation, using the language of "maybe" -- maybe Shimi over asked questions and maybe the teacher overreacted -- maintaining a sense of wonder. At the same time that Debbie states her interpretation, she says she is also interested in hearing alternative ideas -- she is focused on her idea but not to the extent that she has closed herself off to other interpretations. By telling Laurie that they can have different interpretations and that she would be interested in hearing a different opinion, she is in effect saying that they can agree not to be fully conclusive. She preserves a level of wonder.

Since Debbie's first articulation of her idea is not completely clear to Laurie, Laurie asks for further explanation. Notice that all it takes to help Debbie further articulate her idea is for Laurie to say a sentence fragment, but that sentence fragment shifts the focus back to her idea and creates space for her to say more. In response, Debbie further develops her articulation, filling in more details in the story. She begins

with fits and starts in her speech, but, as she continues, her articulation takes on a more definitive tone as she defends her fuller understanding of the text. She has become more focused on her particular way of understanding the text and loses the language of “maybe”.

At the same time, Laurie continues to have questions about how to understand the text and how to resolve the question of who is at fault. She continues to wonder and explore different possibilities. Specifically, she suggests that perhaps R. Papa actually prayed to God to help him have more patience with Shimi and that he did not intend for Shimi to hear the prayer. It was only in this context of private prayer to God that R. Papa called Shimi insolent. This scenario would help explain R. Papa’s actions in a more charitable light. Debbie refutes this idea, which leads Laurie to propose another reading, that Shimi’s questions were actually rude because they questioned R. Papa as a person:

LAURIE: So I'm just wondering if, for example, **maybe** here, this may be throwing it way off, but maybe he’s not going to, **maybe** it's that he was being rude because he was questioning who R. Papa was like as a person or something, and not necessarily the actual questions he was asking, but just kind of challenging, so **maybe** he’s vowing silence because he, so, yes. I'm not sure whether this is, Shimi is, ya, I guess this is going back to what our theory is, whether he’s kind of closing up into his shell and just cutting off or whether he’s just realizing that he kind of overstepped his boundaries and, questioned this person.

DEBBIE: So you think it's questioning him as a person versus questioning his, the content?

LAURIE: Ya.

DEBBIE: Hmhm. I like that. I didn't see that before. ((She reads out loud from the text.)) “The latter thereupon vowed silence and questioned him no more.” ((Laurie laughs.)) “Questioned him no more.” It's hard because those are- I think it can go either way.

Even while Debbie is focused on her interpretation, she can still appreciate Laurie’s wondering ideas. Debbie maintains some wonder and is able to listen to

Laurie's alternative idea, which Laurie presents as a possibility rather than advocating for it.

In the second part of their interpretive discussion, the interaction above replays itself, with Debbie explicitly suggesting that they focus on the task and Laurie pulling them back to consider "our theory" and consider the Big Idea behind the narrative. Debbie at this point has an interpretation with which she is satisfied and hence is interested in shifting gears and focusing on the task. She feels that she has answered the question of "who is at fault" -- R. Shimi was overly inquisitive and R. Papa overreacted, so both R. Papa and R. Shimi in some way. Laurie is not satisfied with the "answer;" there are still issues she is trying to figure out.

DEBBIE: So how about we start? Okay. ((She's reading out loud from the text.)) "Rabbi Shimi b. Ashi used to attend the lessons of Rabbi Papa." Okay, so-

LAURIE: "and used to ask him [many questions."

DEBBIE: Two lines.]

LAURIE: So. Okay, wait. First, sorry. Before we make our sentences, I'm just trying to go back to the bigger picture.

DEBBIE: Okay.

LAURIE: Do we want to talk about that because maybe it will help us clarify our theory about-

DEBBIE: Oh, okay, you're right.

LAURIE: So what do we think this is saying or could be saying about the teacher-student relationship maybe. Or, I mean I guess that also depends on how we interpret it, but what do you think, just your gut feeling, when you?

DEBBIE: Oh, gosh. You know, the first thing is that any discouragement a student gets, you could really shut them off and really, it makes a big impact on their willingness to be open just based on the tiniest thing, but what's hard about what I just said and hearing myself saying it is that this was not meant to be heard, it seems because "one day he observed that," you know, it seems that this was supposed to be private. So I don't know

if this was, if it wasn't intentional. I wish I knew what happened afterwards with Rabbi Shimi and Rabbi Papa, like their interaction and, and ya. What do you think?

LAURIE: Ya, I agree. I think (10) Sorry. I got distracted (). I definitely, I agree that I think, I agree with you that this wasn't meant to be overheard. So it's not necessarily, it wasn't necessarily meant to lead to him being silent. That's the interesting thing is he's not asking for him to be silent. He's not going directly to him and saying please don't ask me any more questions, so I don't know that it was meant to make him be silent, but then why would he . But I guess it's like you have to be really, really careful because you don't know who can hear you or if your students are there, they might misinterpret what you're saying.

Laurie's question about what this text says about the teacher-student relationship reframes their discussion from being just about R. Shimi and R. Papa to being about a much larger concept. Because Debbie maintains a sense of openness toward Laurie and wonder toward the text, she engages this question, rather than moving forward to complete the task. In the process of going back to the text to respond to the question, Debbie clarifies her larger understanding of the meaning of the story -- that this text is a warning about what discouragement can do to students -- and also clarifies her understanding of a detail in the text -- that R. Papa's intentions were not malicious and that he did not mean for R. Shimi to overhear him. Laurie extends Debbie's articulation, qualifying it to say that the text is about the need to be "really, really careful" when you speak, because you don't know who can hear you or what the impact of your words might be.

- | |
|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Laurie notices the time; Debbie begins to focus on the task and focuses on a particular interpretation (R. Shimi overasked questions and R. Papa overreacted)2. Laurie continues to wonder about the meaning of the text and how to resolve the question "Who is at fault." She raises various alternative ideas (e.g. Shimi was questioning R. Papa as a person). Debbie considers Laurie's ideas.3. Debbie focuses on the assignment. Laurie stops her to wonder about the "big picture" and what this text says about the teacher-student relationship. |
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Table 4.4: Overview of "The Tug Between Partners"

In Part B of their interpretive discussion in this *havruta* session, Laurie's inclination to wonder and Debbie's to focus have created a generative tension that helps them re-examine the text and move toward thinking about it on a more global level. This in turn will help them with the task at hand. Debbie's focusing helps make sure they have a more definitive and fully worked through interpretation on the table to which they can respond and that they think about the task. Laurie's wondering helps them consider many details and also take a step back from the task and the interpretation on the table so that they do not prematurely shut down conversation.

One could well imagine a different conversation in which one partner chooses to focus at the exclusion of the other partner's ideas and at the exclusion of even other details in the text. Or where one partner is so interested in wondering, that she ignores any focusing attempts by her partner. In these cases, the practices might proceed on parallel as opposed to on dynamic tracks.

Conclusion to Case One

What helps Debbie and Laurie maintain a generative back and forth between wondering and focusing? Firstly, they do not simply ignore what they hear from the other person. As illustrated in Chapter Three, they work hard to listen to each other's ideas and understand those ideas. Hence, when one partner focuses, the other partner engages with that focus. Furthermore, neither Debbie nor Laurie engage in one practice to the exclusion of the other. When they wonder, it is not purposeless wondering but focused wondering. For example, when Laurie wonders about their larger theory, this question is connected to trying to complete the assignment and work out an interpretation of the full text. Her wondering is purposeful and focused on helping them answer an

important question. And when they focus, it is not focus to the exclusion of all else, but wondering focus. For example, while Debbie is focused on her interpretive idea, she still engages with Laurie's wondering. This seems to be part of the fact that there is a genuine issue in which they are both interested.

These examples suggest that a productive tension between these practices requires us to be willing to engage in both practices and move back and forth between them.

In concert with this, productive tension also seems to entail being respectful of our partners and being open to their approach, even when it is different from our own. This is crucial to Laurie and Debbie's success. In this way both partners are able to complement each other and learn from the different approach each may take, rather than simply aggravating each other when each goes in a different direction.

Finally, the role that the genuine issue plays in all of this cannot be undervalued. The genuine issue provides the *havruta* with something that they both want to work on which helps them focus and sustain wonder in a complementary and productive fashion.

III. Case Three

Amy and Sally's *Havruta*: Moving On

The previous case helps us explore how generative the interplay between focusing and wondering can be to a *havruta*'s interpretive discussion. The dynamic tension between these two practices can help the *havruta* move their interpretation forward. The second case will allow us to further explore the interplay between focusing and wondering and develop a more nuanced understanding of these practices. In this case, we consider what happens when a *havruta* tends toward task focus and the missed

opportunities that this can engender. Specifically, this case underscores the importance of focused **and** sustained wondering, probing, genuine issues and collaborating to link ideas.

Background

The Students

Our second *havruta* pair, Sally and Amy, are first year students in the DeLeT program. The session that is the focus of this case is their ninth *havruta* session and final session of the summer. Both students have experience studying Jewish texts prior to coming to DeLeT. Sally attended Hebrew school programs through high school, spent a semester in Israel and majored in Jewish studies as an undergraduate. As part of her college coursework, she took courses in Biblical and modern Hebrew. Amy attended Jewish day school through high school and also spent significant time in Israel and in a Hebrew speaking summer camp.

The Text and Assignment

The text they are studying is from Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 119b and reads as follows:¹⁹⁴

[1] Abaye said: Jerusalem was destroyed only because the Sabbath was desecrated therein, as it is said, “and they have hid their eyes from My Sabbaths. Therefore I am profaned among them.”

[2] R. Abbahu said: Jerusalem was destroyed only because the reading of the *shema* morning and evening was neglected [therein], for it is said, “Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink [etc];” and it is written, “And the

¹⁹⁴ This translation is based on the Soncino translation. Students were given a copy of the Talmud page from the Hebrew Steinsaltz edition and a copy of the English translation from the Soncino Talmud. I have formatted the Talmudic text with numbers to make it easier for the reader to follow along. Sally and Amy's text did not have the numbers and was copied straight out of the Soncino Talmud. Epstein, *The Soncino Talmud*.

The content of this text is different than many of the texts studied in the Beit Midrash. It does not focus on teaching and learning but on the destruction of Jerusalem. This is because this text was studied on the 9th of Av, a Jewish fast day commemorating the destruction of the Jerusalem Temples.

harp and the lute, the tabret and the pipe, and wind are in their feasts but they regard not the work of the Lord;” and it is written, “Therefore my people are gone into captivity for lack of knowledge.”

[3] R. Hamnuna said: Jerusalem was destroyed only because they neglected [the education of] school children; for it is said, “pour out [sc. God’s wrath] because of the children in the street;” why pour out? Because the child is in the street.

[4] Ulla said: Jerusalem was destroyed only because they [its inhabitants] were not ashamed of each other, for it is written, “Were they ashamed when they committed abomination? Nay, they were not at all ashamed [...therefore they shall fall].”

[5] R. Isaac said: Jerusalem was destroyed only because the small and the great were made equal, for it is said, “And it shall be, like people like priest;” which is followed by, “The earth shall be utterly emptied.”

[6] R. Amram son of R. Simeon b. Abba said in R. Simeon b. Abba’s name in R. Hanina’s name: Jerusalem was destroyed only because they did not rebuke each other; for it is said, “Her princes are become like harts that find no pasture.” Just as the heart, the head of one is at the side of the other’s tail, so Israel of that generation hid their faces in the earth and did not rebuke each other.

[7] R. Judah said: Jerusalem was destroyed only because scholars were despised therein; for it is said, “but they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and scoffed at his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against his people, till there was no remedy.”

Task excerpt:

1. Read and list with your *havruta* the seven reasons given for the destruction of Jerusalem, in the Tractate of Shabbat, page 119b.
2. Put each of these reasons into contemporary terms. That is, how would you say it in your own words?
3. Comment on anything that stands out to you, questions you have and possible tensions between these different reasons.

“What’s Going On?”: Task Focus at the Expense of Other Focusing and Wondering

As a pair, Sally and Amy are often very task focused; they bring a “let’s get through it” attitude to their work. Their goal appears to be finding “the answer” rather than working through ideas. We see an example of this in this particular *havruta* discussion, and we continue to see examples of this in the latter half of their discussion, even as they try to wonder about the text and develop a “deeper” understanding of it.

At the beginning of their *havruta*, Sally and Amy read through the text, spending very little time on each reason given for the Temple's destruction (see Table 4.5). Sally takes the lead reading the first three reasons and Amy works to paraphrase and write down these paraphrases. For example:

SALLY: "Rabbi Abbahu said Jerusalem was destroyed only because the reading of the *shema* morning and evening was neglected."

AMY: ((Amy is writing)) Okay.

SALLY: "[Therein], for it is said 'Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink ;' and it is written, 'And the harp and the lute, the tabret and the pipe, and wind are in their feasts but they regard not the work of the Lord;' and it is written, 'Therefore my people are gone into captivity for lack of knowledge.'"

AMY: Is it just me or did they get drink, get drunk and forget to say the *shema*?

SALLY: I guess. (5)

AMY: ((She notices what the other *havruta* is doing.)) They always do it in Hebrew.

SALLY: No, we don't need to. "Rabbi Hamnuna said Jerusalem was destroyed only because they neglected the education of school children..."

In this example, Sally reads. Amy asks a question trying to link the proof text to the text itself. Neither she nor Sally explore Amy's question or consider the text further. Amy overhears another *havruta* and comments that they read the text in Hebrew. Sally responds that they do not need to do it and ends their conversation by continuing on to read the next reason for Jerusalem's destruction. Through the course of this interchange, Amy has noticed two things, one about the text and one about the other *havruta*. This noticing may have led them to wonder. Sally might have said to Amy: I wonder why they were drinking? Or, is drinking and saying *shema* mutually exclusive? Why did one lead to the other? Or, I wonder how reading it in Hebrew affects the pair's *havruta* work

together? Do you want to give it a try? Amy too could have questioned her noticings further but does not.

Reasons Jerusalem destroyed	Amount of time Amy & Sally spend discussing each reason while reading through the text
1. Sabbath desecrated	35 seconds
2. Reading <i>shema</i> neglected	45 seconds
3. Education of school children neglected	1 minute, 16 seconds
4. Inhabitants not ashamed of each other	25 seconds
5. Small and great made equal	23 seconds
6. Inhabitants did not rebuke one another	2 minutes, 48 seconds
7. Scholars despised	3 minutes, 20 seconds

Table 4.5: Amount of Time Amy and Sally Spend on Each Part of the Text When They First Read It

After Sally reads the third reason, Amy says, “I’m taking over.” However, she too reads quickly through the text. Both Sally and Amy are focused on the task and the first part of the task is to list out each of the reasons for Jerusalem’s destruction. This is what they are doing. Step number one of the task does not specifically ask them to explore these reasons and so they do not. Furthermore, this *havruta* tends to work on the assumption that they understand the text until proven otherwise. Thus, they do not slow down to probe what they are reading or even try to articulate to each other the meaning of what they have just read in any detail -- which many times makes people realize that they do not understand things quite as well as they had thought -- unless they are faced with,

what is to them, a clear problem. This approach short-circuits opportunities to wonder.¹⁹⁵ With little to wonder about, they often move through their assignments more quickly than other *havrutot*.

Popcorn Wondering vs. Sustained Wondering

Even when Amy and Sally wonder, they generally do not focus on the ideas they raise long enough to work them through or link them to each other. To do this would require them to listen to each other, probe each other's comments and build off of each other's ideas. It is almost difficult to refer to much of their wondering as "wonder," since it is so singularly geared toward focusing on "the solution."

Amy and Sally do slow down when reading reason #6 in the text, initially to figure out the English word "hart," and then to understand the word "rebuke." Amy suggests that rebuke means that the Israelites "didn't criticize each other, help each other." Rather than asking Amy to clarify what she means, Sally proposes her own idea, that rebuke means punish. Amy seeks clarification, but Sally's response is simply to reaffirm her initial statement -- that rebuke means punish. Amy then makes another suggestion, that rebuke means they "didn't help each other with self control." Their conversation of this part of the text ends with this comment since they then turn their focus to what the other *havruta* near them is doing. Instead of trying to work through a particular idea and build on each other's comments, they "pop" around to different ideas and therefore do not develop a more fully worked through reading of this part of the text.

¹⁹⁵ Some *havrutot* prefer to read the text quickly once to get a general sense of what it says and then go back to revisit. This is a fine approach. However, based on Sally and Amy's comments in the early stages of their *havruta*, it does not appear that they were reading quickly because they intended to revisit. Only after reading through the entire text and realizing that they were far ahead of other *havrutot* did they decide to revisit the text.

At the end of their brief discussion about reason #6, Sally and Amy overhear the other *havruta* discussing reason #1.

Amy: Oh, my God.

Sally: They're arguing about

Amy: =the first one.

Sally: Yes. Are w- What's, what's going on?

How Questions Can Help with Wondering and How "Popping" Can Short Circuit Them

After reading through the whole text and hearing other *havrutot* engage in lengthier discussions, Sally and Amy decide to revisit the text to see if they can make more sense of it. They look back at reason #1, which states that Jerusalem was destroyed because the Israelites desecrated the Sabbath.

AMY: How do you feel about the fact that Jerusalem was destroyed because someone didn't, because Shabbat was, was, wasn't respected within, within it? It doesn't say within Temple, just there.

SALLY: Well, you know, it's a commandment. It's an important thing. I want to know whether it's one person or whether it's a whole bunch of people because if one person does something bad, then everyone shouldn't be responsible for it.

AMY: Okay.

SALLY: That doesn't seem fair.

AMY: ((She laughs)) That doesn't seem fair.

SALLY: *Zeh lo* fair.

AMY: *Zeh lo* fair. *Ach b'chayim*. Okay. So questions. Was it a society thing? ((She writes))

SALLY: Or an individual.

AMY: Okay. Now are we trying to, do you want to look at this text here and see if it, where's the proof text from? Okay, shall we see if the proof text supports that, that idea

that Shabbat was to blame? “And they have hid their, and they have hid their eyes from my Sabbath. Therefore, I am profaned among them.”

SALLY: The same thing.

AMY: It sounds - it's a pretty solid proof text. Okay. What else are we supposed to do with these things? ((She looks at the study guide)) Put them in our own words. I said Shabbat wasn't respected.

SALLY: Yes.

AMY: Is that our own words?

SALLY: Or observed.

AMY: Or observed. Maybe not even, is it or observed or is it, is there a difference between not observing Shabbat and breaking Shabbat?

SALLY: Well they desecrate it. It's not just that they aren't doing it, it's that they [desecrate it

AMY: Exactly]

SALLY: So I think they did something really bad on Shabbat. It's not just about -

AMY: So, not, not respecting might be a better way to say it?

SALLY: Yes.

AMY: Or ignoring.

SALLY: Or acting disrespectfully, like doing something that was straight out wrong.

During the discussion cited above, Amy raises four questions,¹⁹⁶ which had the potential to engage them in a deeper discussion of the text:

1. “How do you feel about the fact that Jerusalem was destroyed because Shabbat wasn’t respected?”
2. How does the proof text support the idea?”
3. How might we say this in our own words?
4. And, “is there a difference between not observing Shabbat and breaking Shabbat?”

Table 4.6: Amy’s Four Questions

¹⁹⁶ Sally also raises an interesting question about the nature of the “crime.” They do not pursue this question.

The first question is a useful kind of question to ask in order to consider one's own feelings about claims made in texts. Discussion of this question could have led Sally and Amy to question why Shabbat observance itself was/is so important that its desecration could have led to such a harsh punishment. Sally and Amy do not do this. The second question about proof texts is also a useful question to consider, since considering proof texts often help readers see things in the text that they did not see before. However, for this to occur, it is helpful for the readers to look up the full proof text in context so they can better understand the analogies being drawn. It is also helpful to explore the proof text's meaning and not simply evaluate whether the proof text supports the textual argument. Sally and Amy do not do either of these things.

Sally and Amy do try to put the text in their own words, in response to Amy's third question. This proves to be a fruitful exercise since they try to figure out the best wording and in so doing, are drawn to notice more details about the text, namely that it says "desecrate." This in turn leads to Amy's fourth question, which explores the meaning of the particular choice of words in the text. They consider this question but move on quickly from it without linking their ideas back to the text's larger meaning.

While all of these questions are worthwhile and may have led to a rich interpretive conversation, they do not stay focused on any particular question or idea long enough to wonder all that much about it. Amy has the correct idea that raising questions could help them both focus and wonder and lead to them developing a better understanding of the text. However, in this example, Sally and Amy treat questions in much the same way as they treat the task -- something to focus on and get through. Their questions seem to exist to be answered immediately and not thought about further.

Questions alone will not remedy their lack of substantial wonder or focus on ideas. At this point in their *havruta* at least, they are unable to maintain focus on any one question and sustain wonder about it. As a result, they leave the first two lines of the text without really having developed deeper insights into its meaning.

Focusing on Technical Details vs. Probing the Meaning of the Text

Returning to earlier in the *havruta*, Amy and Sally also slow down when they first read reason #7 in the text. When they read reason #7, Sally stops their conversation because she notices what appears to be a contradiction in the text that she cannot resolve: The Talmud states that Jerusalem was destroyed because scholars were despised but the proof text that is brought uses the term “messengers of God.” Sally questions whether these are really the same thing and wonders whether the proof text supports the point of the text. Amy provides Sally with a way of understanding the first contradiction and explains that the messengers of God are the rabbis. However, Sally raises a further question based on the different terms used in the proof text -- how to understand the difference between messengers of God and prophets. She says that this sounds like two groups of people. Amy suggests that the text is not talking about prophets but God’s prophecies. Eventually, they look to the Hebrew for clarity and get involved in a technical discussion of the meaning of the Hebrew terms.

SALLY: So *malakhei haElohim* is the messengers of God.

AMY: Ya. ((She reads the Hebrew out loud)) “*shema* ()”

SALLY: ((She reads the Hebrew out loud)) [“*bineviav* ()”

AMY: “*Uvozim devarav] umitateim bineviav.*” Because *bineviav* is not *bineviim*. *Bineviav* is a word for his prophecies, isn’t it?

SALLY: Because it has a suffix at the end? *Neviav* to make it his? So-

AMY: So the prophets that worked for him?

SALLY: Yeah.

AMY: Okay. So-

SALLY: There's no real point. It doesn't change the meaning.

AMY: =It doesn't change anything.

SALLY: =See, it doesn't change it, but I felt the need to talk about it [because

AMY: Okay.]

SALLY: everyone else () ((She laughs.))

AMY: Well, I mean, obviously it's good that we now understand the sentence.

SALLY: But I don't think it changes anything. ((She continues to laugh.))

Listening to their transcript, it is not completely clear how looking at the Hebrew resolves the problem on the table. What is clear is that Sally at least does not think there is much point to the wondering she initiated since in her eyes what they figured out did not ultimately change her larger understanding of this part of the text.

It is unfortunate that they do not continue to wonder a little more, returning to probe the larger meaning of the text and the questions that Sally has raised, instead of closing down the conversation about reason #7 and assuming that they are done. And, it is too bad that neither Sally nor Amy really entertain the possibility that the text is talking about two different groups of people. Sally raised this as an initial possibility but neither pursued this idea or revisited it, except to show how this was not the case. If they had really entertained the idea that the text was talking about two groups, it may have eventually led them to consider the possibility that this was a case of the Talmud reading its agenda into Biblical texts and that in Talmudic times, the scholar has replaced the

prophet as the messenger of God; in effect, the proof text shows that scholars are tantamount to prophets. This helps clarify why despising the scholar could have led to something as awful as the destruction of God's Temple -- it is because despising the scholar who divines God's words and wishes is comparable to despising God.¹⁹⁷

This analysis provides another example of why finding an interesting question is not automatically in itself enough to enable generative wondering and rich interpretive discussion. In the previous examples, Sally and Amy had many ideas but did not focus on any one in particular, missing the chance to probe and build on each other's comments to develop a more fully worked through understanding. In this example, Sally and Amy find a very interesting question, one that could serve as a vehicle for substantive wondering and focusing, but, almost as quickly as they find it, they "pop" away from it. While they continue to focus on the same issue, they shift their focus from a question to wonder about -- what the discrepancy between prophets and scholars might mean -- to a "problem" to solve -- the literal meaning of the word "*neviav*." They do not sustain their wondering about the overall interpretation of the text long enough to probe their ideas and develop greater insight into the text's meaning

Focused and Sustained Wondering: Probing, Working Together, and Developing a Genuine Issue

Sally and Amy's conversation when they revisit reason #2 stands out as being different from other parts of this *havruta* conversation.

AMY: "Jerusalem was destroyed only because the reading of the *shema* morning and evening was neglected [therein], for it is said, 'Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink, that they may follow strong drink;' and it is written, 'And the harp and the lute, the tabret and the pipe, and wind are in their feasts

¹⁹⁷ My emphasis in this section is on the importance of probing the text's meaning through exploratory questions. I bring one possible reading of the proof text as an example of what might have occurred had Sally and Amy continued to wonder.

but they regard no work of the Lord;’ and it is written, ‘Therefore my people are gone into captivity for lack of knowledge.’” (5)

What do you think?

SALLY: ((She is looking away from her partner toward another pair. She laughs.)) I got distracted

AMY: Do you think this proof text is saying that they, that it's not that they didn't do *shema* but that they. (1)

SALLY: I think they're-

AMY: purposefully didn't do *shema*? Or did other things and didn't pay respects to, to the Lord?

SALLY: Okay. Let's go, let's go out there and then we'll come back in.

AMY: Take me away. Take me away. ((She laughs.))

SALLY: Out there. It sounds like pagan time right here.

AMY: Okay.

SALLY: The drink and the music. You know, it sounds like Greek mythology, it sounds like Dionysus. You know, it sounds, it sounds really out there so they are, they are screwed up big time.

AMY: So are they, like, partying and, but is it like-

SALLY: So how are they supposed to remember to say the *shema* at night and in the morning when they're having a crazy time?

AMY: ((She is writing.)) Partying too much. A sign of assimilation, maybe?

SALLY: Hmhm ((yes)).

AMY: ((She continues writing)) Forgetting the wonders of God. Do you think it comments on that?

SALLY: I wonder if this one is referring to more like why it was destroyed the second time because of a Hellenistic influence, but that's stuff that we don't need to talk about in *Beit Midrash* because that's more *Tanach* talk.

AMY: Is it?

SALLY: Yeah, because we're not supposed to actually refer to history here.

AMY: Oh. ((Sally laughs.)) Well, I mean we're supposed to understand the time line of events, right?

SALLY: To some extent. But does that seem like that to you?

AMY: That seems like, that seems very logical.

SALLY: So maybe that's where the proof text comes from because people, you know, if you're staying up late and drinking, you aren't going to even know what morning is, let alone be ready to say *shema* in the morning and the evening. [Like you ()

AMY: And it's also the *shema*], what they're forgetting is what is, is a prayer that grounds you back-

SALLY: to God's [oneness

AMY: to God's] oneness.

SALLY: When you're stuck in, pagan, crazy time and you're-

AMY: *Shema Yisrael Adonai Eloheinu Adonai Ehad.*

Amy reads the text, and Sally paints a picture of the context in which the text is taking place based on what she reads in the proof texts. They are working on an idea together, thinking about it, wondering about what was going on that led the Israelites to not say *shema*. To them, the proof text is a reminder of pagan times and seems to point to the fact that the Israelites were “screwed up big time” and “having a crazy time” and therefore forgot to say *shema*.

Amy then asks Sally if not saying *shema* in this context was a sign of assimilation and Sally agrees. Sally then shifts their focus to continue to wonder about the context in which this is taking place, wondering whether it was during the Second Temple and the revelry is a result of Hellenistic influences. Amy underscores the idea that they are not forgetting just any prayer, but the one that would remind them of God's oneness, and

Sally seems to agree that saying this prayer would have been particularly important to do in pagan times. Not saying the *shema* is a symptom of something larger, an overall abandonment of a core Jewish principle.

In this example, Sally and Amy wonder in a focused and sustained way about the meaning of the text; they are working through the meaning of the text by focusing on particular parts of the text and ideas and wondering about them over time. Their wondering progresses as they stick with it: they ask why the Jews did not say the *shema* and what they were doing instead; after they surmise, based on the proof text, what they were doing instead, they wonder about the deeper significance of those actions -- assimilation; and, from that, they are able to ask why it could be so critical to remember to say the *shema*, perhaps critical enough to merit the destruction of the Temple.

This example highlights that their focusing and wondering entails a number of things:

1. They probe the meaning of the proof text, specifically asking questions about it and drawing on their historical knowledge. While in this case, they are probing the text, discussants can probe any object of their wonder in order to bore into it more deeply. Probing is a form of focusing, one where we not only focus on what we can see, but also try to dig deeper into the meaning of what we cannot see.
2. They link their ideas back to the Talmudic text itself. Their wondering results in multiple ideas that are grounded in the text. This both honors their third partner in havruta, the text, and also helps them resist constantly popping onto other questions.

3. They are working together -- listening to each other, explaining their thinking and building off each other's comments to try to create a picture of the context so as to better understand what not saying *shema* might have signified. In this way, they are **linking** ideas that they generate through wondering and focusing.
4. Most significantly perhaps, they are working on a genuine issue that maintains both their focus and wonder -- they are working together to figure out what might have been going on that would have led the Israelites to not say *shema*. This is the big question in mind that fosters further wondering and keeps that wondering focused. They tacitly acknowledge that this is a genuine issue -- something that they did not do in the previously cited section, when they come across the discrepancy between prophets and scholars -- and is therefore worth continued attention.

As in all instances of learning, there are still missed opportunities. For example, when Amy says that *shema* "grounds you back to God's oneness," Sally could have asked Amy to explain this big idea further to help understand Amy's intention and develop the idea. Instead, Sally merely repeats the idea. Despite the missed opportunities, this is the richest conversation they have had in this session.

Another Missed Opportunity: The Case of the Tangent

Their conversation then takes a surprising turn. Amy mutters the *shema* under her breath and explains that she was thinking of it. Their conversation continues as follows:

SALLY: It helps me fall asleep at night.

AMY: Do you say it to yourself?

SALLY: Uh-huh ((yes)).

AMY: (That's beautiful)

SALLY: Not out loud, in my head.

AMY: That's nice.

SALLY: When I am having trouble falling asleep, normally, I realize that I haven't said it and then I say it and I fall asleep.

AMY: Really?

SALLY: You know, when [you're having

AMY: Wow]

SALLY: those toss(ing) and turning moments, but I'm sure it's all in my head.

AMY: No, but [it's still

SALLY: ()]

AMY: it's a calming routine that you like and sometimes breaking away from (routine)-

SALLY: Yes. When I was younger, when I would be home alone.

AMY: You used to do that?

SALLY: Yes, and I'd get scared.

AMY: We used to do *shema* every morning at school over the announcements. It was a weird thing, we all had to take turns going...

This is an example of a tangent. Most *havruta* conversations involve tangential discussion -- discussion that is not specifically about the text at hand. Sometimes these tangents are linked to the text in some way, as in this example where they are discussing their personal practice of saying *shema*. Sometimes the tangents have nothing to do with the text. Often, teachers are concerned that tangents during *havruta* conversation are a waste of time that take time away from focus on the subject matter. This may be the case

some of the time, but some tangents also have the potential to lead to fruitful insights about the text. As Haroutunian-Gordon write, “While free association is not always productive, it has one powerful advantage: It allows the speaker to draw directly upon personal experience in order to find meaning in the text.”¹⁹⁸ Tangents can be an important component of students’ meaning making process.

In our example, Amy says the *shema* to herself. This prompts Sally to tell Amy that *shema* helps her fall asleep at night, which leads Amy to wonder further about Sally’s practice and draw her into discussion. Based on Amy’s muttering, it is clear that this is a prayer she knows well. And based on what Sally reveals, it is clear that the *shema* has played a significant role in her life -- she turns to say it when she needs help falling asleep. The *shema* is personally significant to both of them.

However, rather than stepping back to wonder about why this is the case, they move on to talk about the fourth reason given in the text for Jerusalem’s destruction. While the *shema* is important to them, they do not really wonder why. And they do not wonder what they might learn from their personal experience with *shema* to help them understand why saying the *shema* is so important that not saying it is listed as one of the reasons for Jerusalem’s destruction.

The personal and textual conversations happen side by side but are not drawn into relationship with one another to enrich each other. In the textual conversation, Sally and Amy finally have a genuine question that they work on: what does it signify when people do not say the *shema*? In their tangential conversation, they could have continued to

¹⁹⁸ Haroutunian-Gordon, *Turning the Soul*, 57. Or, as Karen Gallas explains in writing about children’s informal conversations, there are times when the “tangent is part of a continuous process of developing related stories that make the world sensible and orderly.” Gallas, *Languages of Learning: How Children Talk, Write, Dance, Draw and Sing Their Understanding of the World*, 79.

pursue this issue and reframed it in the positive: what does it signify when people do say the *shema* or why is saying the *shema* important. But they do not explicitly make this connection. While they each seem to personally savor the words of the *shema* and find personal meaning in it, they do not sustain wonder about their experiences or wonder about the connections between those experiences and what they have read in the text. They do not even seem to consider the idea that their tangent might be a resource to their textual conversation. If they had, perhaps they would have drawn it out further.¹⁹⁹

IV. Chapter Conclusion

Case One helps illuminate the interplay between the practices of wondering and focusing. It explores some of the ways in which both wondering and focusing are necessary to help *havrutot* delve more deeply into a text and consider its details and their connections in developing textual interpretations. Debbie and Laurie both engage in wondering and focusing. In the middle of their *havruta*, Debbie begins to focus on the task and on articulating an overarching interpretation of the text, while Laurie continues to wonder. Both remain willing to go along with the other's approach. In this way, they are able to move toward "being done," but still continue to refine their ideas. This case illustrates the ways in which partners who favor different practices can complement one another, as long as they remain open to going along with the other's approach. In this way, the partners are able to make sure that their *havruta* does not wonder with no conclusions in sight and also does not prematurely shut down their conversation. For

¹⁹⁹ This pair's lack of focusing and wondering about the text and their ideas is not unique to this session alone, although this session displays it to an extreme. However, there are other sessions where the pair does seem both to wonder and focus more easily. One of the questions this raises is how particular texts and tasks may have helped and hindered their wondering and sustained focus.

Debbie and Laurie to work together in this way, they need to assume the best of each other.

Case Three initially appears to be an example of a *havruta* discussion where wondering is absent and focusing is too narrowly geared toward the task, resulting in a cursory reading of the text. However, closer analysis of the case paints a more complicated picture and helps us develop a more nuanced understanding of the practices of wondering and focusing. Sally and Amy do wonder, but their wondering often leaves them shy of developing richer interpretations. Their case, when compared with Debbie and Laurie's case, helps underscore important elements of wondering and focusing that may make use of these practices more generative. Generative wondering seems to entail wondering both about particular ideas **and** particular parts of the text over time or engaging in what I have called sustained wondering.²⁰⁰ In this way *havrutot* give themselves the time to move beyond more superficial first impressions. This kind of wondering entails picking a focus -- intentionally or unintentionally -- for their wondering. Focusing and wondering go hand-in-hand. In Sally and Amy's case, they do not do this. Instead, they often focus on the task to the exclusion of focusing on or wondering about other things.

This case also calls our attention to the importance of three other interconnected elements of generative wondering and focusing: (1) developing a genuine issue; (2) probing and (3) working together. Sally and Amy's *havruta* suffers from a lack of a genuine issue that hovers over their interpretive discussion and about which they both wonder in a sustained way. In Laurie and Debbie's *havruta*, this issue acts as an

²⁰⁰ There is no formula for the amount of time entailed in sustained wondering. This issue relates to the discussion at the end of the chapter about how to determine when we are done.

umbrella for their wondering and focusing and helps them engage in sustained and focused wondering. The genuine issue acts as an invisible thread connecting different wonderings and foci and helps the partners string together ideas into a larger whole. As we saw in Laurie and Debbie's case, these ideas can organically emerge through the *havruta's* dance of wondering and focusing and become something that the *havruta* is genuinely interested in pursuing. In Sally and Amy's case, the teachers provide a question but it is not really understood by the pair (and also perhaps it is not really compelling to them since it is not their question) and therefore not pursued. They finally do develop an issue when revisiting the text about *shema*. This helps them delve deeper into the text, but ultimately, they do not sustain their discussion about this issue for very long either. In general, they jump from one issue or idea to another and do not build connections between their different wonderings.

Probing can help learners draw out ideas so they do not merely say what comes to them and move on. Probing requires focusing on an idea and wondering about it. Sally and Amy could also have done more probing in order to enhance their focusing and wondering. There are times when Amy tries to do this, especially in the second half of their discussion, but she does not sustain her probing or win Sally's full cooperation.

Finally, the two cases highlight the importance of working together to connect disparate ideas. Through considering Amy and Sally's case in comparison to Laurie and Debbie's, it becomes clearer that Laurie and Debbie probe the text and draw connections between the different ideas they generate through their wondering and focusing. In this way, they draw on the power of their collective wondering and focusing to come up with an even bigger and perhaps more compelling idea and not just be left with lots of separate

and underdeveloped ideas.²⁰¹ Amy and Sally rarely do this. Even when they probe the text, they generally do not work together to connect the different ideas they generate. Their discussion of the *shema* was an exception.

These cases raise an interesting question about what it means to be “done” studying a text and what teachers and students mean when they use that language. *Havrutot* could theoretically move back and forth between wondering and focusing ad infinitum. Even when members of a *havruta* find a satisfactory response to their genuine issue, there are likely other ways to approach the issue and other genuine issues to discover. Laurie’s approach helps us clarify the idea that it is a mistake to assume that just because we become focused on an interpretation that addresses our genuine issue, that means we are done understanding the text. Much of the time, there are still questions to be responded to and ideas to try to synthesize. At the same time, successful interpretive discussions cannot remain open-ended indefinitely. In addressing genuine issues, participants will develop compelling interpretations and come to a point of closure, even if ideas can be revisited in the future.

Rather than thinking about “being done” as a finite point (as we do when we think about “being done” eating the food on our plate), it may be more useful to think about “being done” as a continuum, which builds on what has come before. *Havruta* partners may be “done” when they have engaged in a back and forth between both practices so that they have been able to develop new insights, which they then draw on to understand the text's larger meaning. Further along the continuum, *havruta* partners may be “done” when they have developed a satisfactory response to their genuine issue. Perhaps, the

²⁰¹ This is not to suggest that separate ideas are automatically underdeveloped. However, *havruta* work offers people an opportunity to draw on the ideas of two people and not just one and potentially, through connecting those ideas, build an even more compelling interpretation account.

very language of “being done” is misleading and “visiting” or even “turning” the text may be more apt. It helps highlight that “being done” can be different for different pairs, depending on the issue they are pursuing. And it helps highlight the idea that even when individuals in a particular time and place have developed a compelling interpretation, there is still more to interpret and learn about this text. As Ben Bag Bag reminds us about Torah study, “Turn it, turn it for everything is in it.”²⁰²

²⁰² Ethics of the Fathers 5:22

Chapter 5: The Practices of Supporting and Challenging

Introduction

While wondering and focusing may help a *havruta* navigate the text and develop interpretations, the practices of supporting and challenging help a *havruta* focus on particular ideas, assess their strengths and weaknesses and either refine them more fully or discard them. Supporting and challenging, when used together, can enable *havrutot* to work collaboratively, drawing on their full range of intelligences to strengthen their interpretations and their collaborative capacity as a *havruta* pair. More so than the other practices identified, supporting and challenging grow out of the normative understanding of *havruta* discussed in Chapter One. While there is evidence of both supporting and challenging in the data, these practices are generally used more implicitly than explicitly.

Supporting and challenging are loaded terms in our culture. The idea of offering support generally carries a positive valence, while challenging often carries a negative valence. These stereotypical images complicate the use of these practices. Many of my students who study in *havruta* report not feeling comfortable challenging their partner, while others are prone to superficial acts of support that help their partner feel good but do not necessarily strengthen the ideas on the table. In the minds of *havruta* partners, whether and how one offers support and challenge could put the entire *havruta* relationship at risk.²⁰³

²⁰³ The idea that challenging was something negative was reported by students in the *Beit Midrash* for Teachers. Cazden writes that students report not liking arguments. Cazden, *Classroom Discourse, The Language of Teaching and Learning*, 132. There is a large body of literature on the issue of conflict avoidance. See for example, Goodwin, "Conversation Analysis," and David Johnson, Roger Johnson, and Karl Smith, "*Academic Controversy: Enriching College Instruction through Intellectual Conflict*," in

Given the seemingly risky nature of these practices, *havrutot* can benefit from knowing that their partners will offer **both** supporting and challenging comments and that these comments are not meant personally but are being offered in the spirit of collaboration. In addition, *havrutot* may need specific scaffolding to help them engage in supporting and challenging.²⁰⁴

In the context of the DeLeT *Beit Midrash* for Teachers, teachers spend time helping students create a spirit of collaboration, which focuses on the idea that *havruta* is a mutual undertaking -- that both parties need each other in order to maximize their learning²⁰⁵ -- **and** that a successful *havruta* relies on each party being willing to take responsibility not only for her own learning but for her partner's learning as well. Even before they begin to study with each other, *havruta* partners meet to discuss their strengths and weaknesses as teachers and learners and how they might best be able to support one another through the course of the *Beit Midrash*. They continue to pay attention to their working relationship, reflecting on it and giving each other feedback about it throughout their time in the *Beit Midrash*. In fact, in the middle of the course, each pair must tape record itself so that pair members can look for evidence of ways that they are helping their partners' learning and also examine instances when they make

ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report Volume 25, No. 3 (Washington, DC: The George Washington University, Graduate School of Education and Human Development, 1996), 6-7. The Johnsons specifically discuss the prevalence of "concurrence seeking" behaviors in which groups tend to avoid disagreements.

²⁰⁴ See Johnson, Johnson, and Smith, "*Academic Controversy: Enriching College Instruction through Intellectual Conflict*," 39. They talk about the need for a "supportive climate" and a cooperative mode of working together for people to feel safe enough to challenge and to challenge effectively. They also discuss the task they created to scaffold "constructive controversy." See the discussion later in this chapter for more details.

²⁰⁵ As discussed in Chapter One and Two, the *Beit Midrash* is based on the premise that our learning can be enhanced through constructively engaging with others since we can augment each other's individual learning and there are things we can collectively do that we cannot do as individuals. Thus, learning together not only has the potential to foster individual knowledge but group knowledge.

moves that get in their partners' way.²⁰⁶ This sense of collaboration can help *havrutot* successfully engage in supporting and challenging one another's ideas.²⁰⁷

In this chapter, I define the practices of supporting and challenging and their potential opportunities and pitfalls. I then describe and analyze a case that allows us to see these practices at work and complicates our initial definitions of supporting and challenging as distinguishable practices. This case also gives us an opportunity to see how outsiders can effectively challenge a *havruta* pair. This is followed by a *havruta* case that engages in mostly challenging behavior and highlights the missed opportunities of leaning too heavily toward one practice at the expense of the other. Finally, I revisit the practices of supporting and challenging through the lens of student comments based on their experience engaging in a task specifically designed to help them engage in constructive challenging behavior. These reflections give us more insight into the nature of the practice of challenging.

I. Defining Supporting and Challenging

Supporting

Most simply, supporting means helping one's *havruta* develop her ideas. The focus of supporting behavior is one's partner's ideas and making them as strong as possible. The emphasis is on ideas in order to contravene the notion that supporting is

²⁰⁶ For example, some students have pointed to the fact that they cut their partners off, not fully listening to their partners' ideas and helping them develop them further. Due to this exercise, many participants have realized that they are not listening to their partners as well as they had thought and try to address this shortcoming.

²⁰⁷ A commitment to and sense of collaboration is an important basis for all of the *havruta* practices and engagement in the practices can serve to reinforce this sense of collaboration. I specifically highlight collaboration here because there is more risk associated with challenging, and it is therefore even more important that the *havruta's* work be based in a sense of collaboration to help make the challenging constructive.

about making someone feel good, no matter what the quality of the ideas. The latter kind of supporting can easily amount to condescension, which in turn undercuts attempts at supporting.²⁰⁸ This does not mean that one should hold back from engaging in the practice of supporting in order to help build a trusting *havruta* relationship. Having a trusting *havruta* relationship is important so that both partners will be willing to risk trying out different ideas. However, it is difficult for trust to flourish in the long term when partners merely affirm one another without any regard to the actual ideas.

According to this definition, supporting the ideas of one's *havruta* is decoupled from how one might feel personally about one's partner and whether or not one agrees with one's partner's idea. The goal of supporting is to help one's partner succeed in developing a rich interpretation. Even if one does not agree with one's partner, one can still support him or her in making her ideas stronger. In the process of doing so, we may gain insight into our partner's ideas or even our own. This definition of supporting is countercultural. We are not generally taught to support that with which we do not agree in order to help another person succeed. Thus, supporting in this way can be hard to do.

Supporting occurs at multiple levels. At its most simple level, we find partners using "supporting" language with one another. This falls into two categories: a. language that indicates agreement such as "okay" or "I like that" and b. language that does not necessarily indicate agreement but indicates that one's partner is paying attention, such as "yes" or "hmm." By either agreeing or demonstrating that one is paying attention, one signals to one's partner that her ideas may be worthy of further consideration. This type of supporting language helps one's partner feel that she has a

²⁰⁸ This does not mean that one cannot do things to make one's *havruta* feel good and build rapport. This just should not be the sum total of one's support.

worthwhile idea that should not merely get discarded and may be worthy of further consideration. While this might seem trivial, it is not. During the course of any one *havruta* session, partners come up with a plethora of ideas. Many of those ideas die off seconds after first being uttered while a few continue to live on and be worked on as part of the discussion. Supporting language can help keep an idea in play that might otherwise meet an untimely demise. It can also provide needed encouragement to a partner to continue to engage in the interpretive discussion, even when it seems hard. And especially the latter type of supporting language is important in building trust in a *havruta* relationship by making it clear that each partner can rely on the other one to listen to her ideas.

Another level of supporting comes in the form of making explicit moves to help one's partner develop her idea. This often comes in the form of asking questions about one's partner's interpretation that require her to think about it some more, clarify it and flesh it out. It also comes in the form of offering supporting evidence for one's partner's ideas, either from the text itself or other sources. This form of the practice is seen less frequently than supporting language. Perhaps this is because it requires each partner to put aside her own ideas and really focus on her partner's ideas for an extended period of time, and this does not come naturally.

Finally, there is an implicit level at which supporting occurs -- when partners build onto each other's ideas in the form of co-building.²⁰⁹ By building onto one's partner's ideas, one sends a signal that these are good ideas and worth working on together.

²⁰⁹ Co-building, as discussed in Chapter One, is when *havruta* partners work together to develop an interpretation by building off of each other's ideas. The end result of this mode of interpretive discussion is generally an interpretation that is an amalgam of both of their ideas.

The practice of supporting not only brings *havruta* partners together to refine and strengthen interpretive ideas but also helps *havruta* partners develop a trusting working relationship. As one partner engages in supporting the other, the latter sees that she can count on her partner to listen to her and take her ideas seriously. This in turn may energize her to continue working on these ideas, instead of leaving them in their undeveloped form. Here we have an example of the ways in which the social aspects of *havruta* intersect with the intellectual work.

Challenging

Challenging means questioning the ideas on the table. Some examples of the forms this kind of questioning take are: Is this idea really supported by the text? What are the limitations of this idea? How might this idea stand up under this X hypothetical situation?²¹⁰

In addition to explicitly questioning the ideas on the table, challenging occurs when a partner offers an alternative interpretation. This may be an indirect challenge, as happens when one partner suggests an alternative reading, not commenting on what she is doing or what she thinks about her partner's reading. On the other hand, partners can directly challenge each other with alternative readings by saying something like, "I see things differently than you. Here is why. And, here is my alternative reading based on how I see things." This kind of challenging occurs less frequently than the former in the *havruta* data. Perhaps this is because it requires people to explicitly violate the norms of "politeness" and "agreement" and directly confront someone else. This kind of

²¹⁰ Eleanor Duckworth calls our attention to the role of such questions in slowing down "rapid assumptions of understanding" and pushing ideas to "their limits, to see where (they) hold up and where (they) do not hold up." Duckworth, *The Having of Wonderful Ideas*, 78.

challenging sometimes manifests itself as “interpreting through opposition,” when one partner posits an opposing perspective.²¹¹

Challenging gives *havruta* partners the opportunity to step back and rethink their ideas: “Are the ideas supported by the text?” “Do the ideas really offer a compelling interpretation of what the text is trying to teach?” “How does the interpretation stand in the face of this alternative interpretation?” When effective, challenging can help a partner come up with a better articulated version of her interpretation, a more all encompassing idea or a new idea altogether.²¹² Sometimes, it will force *havruta* partners to leave aside untenable ideas, which can be hard for the person who came up with the idea. It thus requires that *havruta* partners be committed to the endeavor of coming up with the strongest interpretation possible as opposed to solely being committed to their particular ideas, at the expense of all else.²¹³

To be willing to engage in challenging requires the ability to embrace disequilibrium.²¹⁴ Disequilibrium can be a powerful motivator. By being challenged with alternatives, our own views can be rendered unstable. In order to re-establish a sense of stability and find a resolution, we may be moved to think and try out new ideas and even discard old ideas when they do not work. Disequilibrium can also be unsettling

²¹¹ See Chapter One for further elaboration of interpreting through opposition.

²¹² On the benefits of controversy, see David Johnson and Roger Johnson, *Cooperation and Competition, Theory and Research* (Edina, MN: Interaction Book Co, 1989).

²¹³ This is not an easy requirement. People have a lot at stake in their ideas, often more than they even realize.

²¹⁴ For discussions of disequilibrium and related ideas such as “cognitive conflict” see for example Johnson, Johnson, and Smith, “*Academic Controversy: Enriching College Instruction through Intellectual Conflict*,” 89., Robert Kegan, *The Evolving Self, Problem and Process in Human Development* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1982)., Rogoff, *Apprenticeship in Thinking*, 141., and Laurent Daloz, *Mentor, Guiding the Journey of Adult Learners* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999), 216. These ideas are rooted in Jean Piaget’s work.

since it requires us to move beyond the comfortable confines of familiar ideas and behaviors into unknown territory in order to find better solutions.

The Text as a Source of Supporting and Challenging

While the primary focus in this chapter is on the ways in which each person in the *havruta* engages in supporting and challenging, the text can also serve as a source of supporting or challenging. The text can validate certain lines of argument, providing evidence to strengthen the argument. The text can also challenge a reader's interpretation by providing contrary evidence and contravening the basic assumptions that underlie the reader's interpretation. This in turn can cause the reader to step back and re-examine her ideas and/or beliefs. More subtly, a text can engage us in seeing ideas from different perspectives, thus challenging initial beliefs and impressions. We see an example of this in the *havruta* case that follows. Of course, when we rely on the text to be a source of supporting and challenging, it is up to the reader to be proactive in reading the text and allowing the words of the text to engage her in supporting or challenging.

The Balance Between Supporting and Challenging

Laurent Daloz, a scholar in the field of adult learning and mentoring, lays out a framework for understanding the importance of both support and challenge in the mentoring relationship. This is a fundamentally different kind of relationship than the *havruta* relationships under discussion. In the mentoring relationship, the mentor comes in with more experience and it is his/her job to help her mentee grow in her role. There is no expectation that the mentee must do the same for the mentor. The *havrutot* in this study are comprised of equal status individuals; each is expected to help the other, and

there is no assumption that one partner is more experienced or knowledgeable and therefore is solely responsible for the other's growth. Despite these differences, we can still learn from Daloz's framework.

For Daloz, "support is the activity of holding, of providing a safe space where the student can contact her need for fundamental trust, the basis of growth....helping her see that she is both OK where she is and capable of moving ahead whenever she chooses."²¹⁵ The key to support is creating a sense of safety and trust, which in turn allows students to take risks and function on their "leading edge."²¹⁶ Challenge, on the other hand, is about "creating cognitive dissonance, a gap between one's perceptions and expectations."²¹⁷ It's about "opening gaps"...rais[ising] questions about their students' current world view and invit[ing] them to entertain alternatives to close the dissonance...think afresh. A key to challenging then is to create gaps in order to help people "rethink their fundamental assumptions."²¹⁸

For our purposes, Daloz's model of the relationship between support and challenge is most useful to consider. He explains the relationship as follows: When both support and challenge are low, there is little growth. When support is increased and challenge stays the same, there is the risk that the learner will merely confirm his ideas and not really explore anything different. When challenge is increased and support remains low, the learner may retreat. And finally, when support and challenge are increased in an "appropriate mix," growth can occur.²¹⁹ We will see echoes of this

²¹⁵ Daloz, *Mentor, Guiding the Journey of Adult Learners*, 209.

²¹⁶ Ibid., 215. Note that Daloz's explanation of support is different than mine, which highlights supporting ideas. Daloz's explanation of support highlights supporting the mentee as a person, which may include supporting her ideas, among other things.

²¹⁷ Ibid., 216.

²¹⁸ Ibid., 217. For this point, Daloz draws on Stephen Brookfield's (1987, 1990, 1995) work.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 208.

model in our discussion of the pitfalls of supporting and challenging in *havruta* and in the cases discussed later in this chapter.

Like Daloz, I posit that at its best, *havruta* will include a high level of both supporting and challenging. This can build and reinforce the *havruta*'s commitment to a collaboration in which they respectfully work together to strengthen ideas. Through supporting each other's ideas, they can build them up as much as possible and through challenging them they can determine what does and does not work in a particular interpretation and consider alternatives that may be better. The end result are more fully worked through interpretations, as well as working relationships that allow *havrutot* to continue their work together.²²⁰

The Pitfalls of Leaning too Much Toward One Practice

Sometimes, *havruta* partners may engage in more supporting than challenging. This can sometimes lead to *havruta* partners to engage in the "affirmation game" (or what Daloz labels "confirmation). They throw out a lot of different ideas and make many affirming comments to one another, but do not really struggle to sharpen the ideas. This affirmation game can lead to one or both partners accommodating, that is, giving up on a particular idea and going with her partner's idea, not because she thinks her partner's idea is better, but in order to uphold the feeling of "good will" that pervades their work together.²²¹ While the practice of supporting can help generate stronger interpretative ideas, affirmation merely leaves ideas as they are in their inchoate state.

²²⁰ There are possible scenarios where a *havruta* could develop a more compelling interpretation but sacrifice its working relationship in the process. This is not the goal since such a sacrifice will short change future interpretive endeavors and is therefore short-sighted.

²²¹ For these points see Daloz, *Mentor, Guiding the Journey of Adult Learners*.

Other times, *havruta* partners may engage in more challenging than supporting. Too much unchecked challenging can easily move the *havruta* into debating/competing with one another. This means that instead of challenging for the ultimate goal of getting to a larger truth, challenging occurs in the name of defending particular ideas for their own sake.²²² In a competition, there are winners and losers and, therefore, some voices get lost. In competition, participants are generally not concerned with supporting others or learning from them. The result of this competing stance is that there can be less open-ended probing and strengthening of each partner's ideas. Sometimes, one party may even feel under attack and either accommodate to her partner or as Daloz points out, exhibit avoiding behavior and retreat.²²³

Again, the ideal is to promote collaboration/joint work, in which interpretations can be developed and strengthened, drawing on the intelligences of both parties. Collaboration entails both supporting and challenging. By moving between supporting and challenging, the *havrutot* have the potential to develop stronger interpretations, building off of each other's ideas and critically assessing them along the way. The balance between the practices helps the *havruta* avoid getting stuck on weak ideas or having a stand off between partners.

Why Might These Practices be so Hard and Underdeveloped?

Some of the explicit forms of challenging, and to a lesser degree supporting, occur infrequently in my *havruta* data, leading me to the conclusion that these practices may be

²²² In this discussion, I use the terms competing and debating to refer to challenging done solely for the purpose of defending or defeating an idea. While challenging to defend an idea can be productive, if this is the ultimate goal of the challenging, then it can easily cause the *havruta* to miss important opportunities to strengthen their interpretations. Johnson and Johnson suggest that certain kinds of competing can be productive but that competing is not generally productive when dealing with new or complex tasks. Johnson and Johnson, *Cooperation and Competition Theory and Research*, 25-34.

²²³ Ibid.

particularly hard and need to be developed and scaffolded.²²⁴

A primary activity that lies at the heart of supporting and challenging is “interrelating viewpoints.” When one *havruta* partner hears another partner’s ideas, if she is trying to listen and collaborate with her partner, she will try to relate her partner’s ideas to her own. When the viewpoints are similar, this can result in supporting. However, when the viewpoints are different, this can result in challenging. It is not as easy to relate viewpoints that are different, and the process can feel hard and uncomfortable, resulting in the sense of disequilibrium discussed earlier. To relate different viewpoints, partners must literally stretch their own ideas in order to allow them to encompass a different idea. This is what it means to expand one’s horizon or assimilate the new to the known and thereby develop new frameworks or schemas for making sense of the world. This is how readers not only clarify their existing understandings but also develop new ones. This process is a key part of learning with others but also makes it very hard. It is part of all six *havruta* practices but plays a more explicit role in supporting and challenging.²²⁵

Furthermore, to engage in explicit supporting and challenging that is constructive seems to require a high level of metacognitive awareness of the work that the *havruta* is doing from moment to moment. Each partner must be able to continually step back and say: There’s this idea on the table. How might we strengthen it? And what might some

²²⁴ Perhaps these practices are taught less frequently than listening, articulating, wondering and focusing. All of these practices require scaffolding in order to develop them further in students. However, supporting and challenging appear to be weakest in my context and thus require extra attention.

²²⁵ See Barnes and Todd, *Communication and Learning Revisited, Making Meaning Through Talk*, 147-148 for a discussion of interrelating viewpoints. For a related discussion of assimilating information to create new schema see Bransford, Brown, and Cocking, *How People Learn*. The idea of interrelating viewpoints is connected to the idea of expanding horizons, briefly discussed in Chapter One. It is also related to the ideas of disequilibrium and cognitive dissonance, since as people try to interrelate viewpoints, they may find their ideas challenged in a way that creates a sense of disequilibrium or cognitive dissonance.

compelling alternatives be? Each partner must also be able to monitor her own commitment to various ideas on the table in order to maintain “active uncertainty”²²⁶ -- actively pursuing ideas but not as ends in themselves and thus being willing to consider alternatives.

II: Case One

Debbie and Laurie’s *Havruta*: A Final Look

Creating a Collaborative Spirit and Developing Ideas Through Supporting

We return for a final look at the case of Laurie and Debbie. As one reads the entire transcript of their *havruta* conversation, it becomes clear that they are engaged in the collaborative work of co-building and are **together** trying to figure out why R. Shimi and R. Papa acted as they did.

The questions that Debbie and Laurie raise to one another are often questions that they themselves are wondering about. They are genuine questions and not simply questions that undermine the integrity of a particular idea. What might appear as a confrontational challenge in another *havruta*, in this *havruta* appears as a gentle challenge or even as a supportive move. Because of this, it is often difficult to differentiate between supporting and challenging in their exchanges. Their work, as Laurie notes, is to develop “our theory,” -- not Laurie’s theory and Debbie’s theory -- but “our theory.”

²²⁶ Kegan and Lahey, *Seven Languages for Transformation, How the Way We Talk Can Change the Way We Work*, 135. Kegan and Lahey describe this stance as “not paralysis and indecision, but holding of one’s own view tentatively...seeking clarity, via honest inquiry.” For Kegan and Lahey, this stance is critical to being able to make conflict and disagreement a source of learning.

Rather than each staking out a single position about how to interpret the text, Debbie and Laurie explore different perspectives -- is the teacher overreacting or the student -- in order to flesh out the strongest interpretation possible. In this case, the text itself serves as a source of challenge -- it can be read from the perspective of each character -- and they exploit this opportunity in their *havruta*.

In this context, Debbie and Laurie engage in a lot of supporting. They make supportive moves to explicitly help each other develop her ideas. They frequently employ supportive language; their discussion is peppered with “okay’s,” “yes’s” and “I agree,” and they explicitly tell each other when one of them likes the other’s ideas. They offer implicit support through ongoing co-building. We see examples of some of this in the excerpt below:

LAURIE: So what do we think this is saying or could be saying about the teacher-student relationship maybe. Or, I mean I guess that also depends on how we interpret it, but what do you think, just your gut feeling, when you?

DEBBIE: Oh, gosh. You know, the first thing is that any discouragement a student gets, you could really shut them off and really, it makes a big impact on their willingness to be open just based on the tiniest thing, but what's hard about what I just said and hearing myself saying it is that this was not meant to be heard, it seems because “one day he observed that,” you know, it seems that this was supposed to be private. So I don't know if this was, if it wasn't intentional. I wish I knew what happened afterwards with Rabbi Shimi and Rabbi Papa, like their interaction and, and ya. What do you think?

LAURIE: Ya, I agree. I think (10) Sorry. I got distracted (). I definitely, I agree that I think, I agree with you that this wasn't meant to be overheard. So it's not necessarily, it wasn't necessarily meant to lead to him being silent. That's the interesting thing is he's not asking for him to be silent. He's not going directly to him and saying please don't ask me any more questions, so I don't know that it was meant to make him be silent, but then why would he . But I guess it's like you have to be really, really careful because you don't know who can hear you or if your students are there, they might misinterpret what you're saying.

Laurie asks a question: “What do **we** think this is saying ...about the teacher student relationship?” This question, asked in the plural, further emphasizes the collaborative nature of their work -- figuring out the lesson of the text is not an individual endeavor but a process of co-building. The question is a supportive move since it is meant to help them flesh out their larger understanding of the text. It is representative of many of the questions that they ask each other -- questions that are open ended, that do not have a right answer but support their thinking process. Laurie’s supporting move creates space for Debbie to think through her ideas. Debbie points out that the text teaches that discouragement can shut a student off. At the same time, she poses a challenge to her idea -- that what R. Papa said was not meant to be overheard. In the context of a collaborative *havruta* in which both partners continuously draw attention to the other side of the story in the text, challenging oneself makes perfect sense.

After Debbie has finished articulating her idea, Laurie offers supportive language to Debbie. She starts out with general support- “Ya, I agree.” And she then gets more specific: “I definitely, I agree with you that this wasn’t mean to be overheard...” She then provides implicit support for Debbie’s idea, co-building on it by extending the idea that R. Papa’s prayer was not meant to be overheard to mean that the prayer was not meant to make R. Shimi become silent. The lesson she draws from this is that “you have to be really, really careful of what you say because you don’t know who can hear you” or if your students will misinterpret your words.

Up until this point, they have engaged in supportive language and co-building. There is a strong collaborative spirit that they maintain through the support they provide

to one another. They seem to be completely on the same page and instead of directly challenging one another, allow the text itself to challenge their thinking.

Challenging that Helps with the Articulation and Clarification of Ideas

This sense of total agreement comes to an end when Laurie extends her idea little bit further.

LAURIE: I think it's going to the extreme and it's saying even when you're alone and you don't think anyone's listening, it can still filter out and, your students can still pick up on it.

DEBBIE: But then doesn't that go against the whole notion of being able to pray and open up to God? Let's say you're, you know, it's during the lunchtime and he's doing the *minchah* service and he did this as he's praying. He said this, hoping, maybe to get strength, you know, like you said before, to preserve him from lashing out at this child. And then Shimi heard that. So I wonder: Is it saying to not open up your feelings even alone because somebody might hear you because if you don't, you know, it seems like he's calling out to God to help him. You know, "Please preserve me from this rude child so I won't kill him." But Shimi, I mean I think it's, line four is a pivotal point because it shows the outcome of hearing such a prayer.

Debbie challenges Laurie's interpretation, suggesting Laurie's idea could be interpreted to mean that one should not open up to God in prayer, which logically does not make sense. She draws out the scene in which R. Papa was praying to God in order to help make her case (and in fact, in doing so, invokes an idea Laurie had earlier, which Debbie had challenged.) She then poses a challenging question to Laurie: "Is it saying to not open up your feelings even alone because somebody might hear you ..." However, she starts out by saying "I wonder," making clear that the question is not just a question to challenge Laurie but is a question that she too is wondering about. Debbie then shifts the focus of the conversation back to line four of the text, "The latter thereupon vowed silence and questioned him no more," which to her is the key to understanding the lesson of the text.

Laurie responds to the challenge by agreeing with Debbie. However, she does not simply acquiesce to Debbie's challenge and retreat, as she might have done if she either felt threatened by the challenge and/or was not particularly invested in her own idea. Debbie's gentle challenge has pushed Laurie to try and clarify her idea further. As Laurie talks, it becomes clear that she has another point she is trying to make, while also trying to explain that Debbie may have misunderstood her.

LAURIE: Yah. And I think the other thing is that Shimi, I think there's, I agree. I think that there's sort of a disconnect here, where this [Shimi becoming silent] shows what happened, but Shimi could have also gone to him and said "I heard you. What's that about?" instead of just becoming silent, and he, Rabbi Papa, could have talked to him instead of, I don't think it's saying don't open up to God but it seems like –

Laurie is suggesting that the story could have been played out differently -- that it might have had a different ending if Shimi had talked directly to R. Papa or if R. Papa had talked directly to Shimi. She is not trying to say that the lesson is not to open up to God but that saying things when you are alone doesn't help you avoid negative consequences and so perhaps it is better to think about speaking to people directly. In this example, Laurie is both responding to Debbie's challenge and trying to work through her idea. This takes time to do.

Challenging and Supporting Intertwined

However, Debbie does not give Laurie the chance to explain all of this in full sentences. Instead, Debbie interrupts Laurie's clarification and explanation.

DEBBIE: Because it didn't seem like Shimi would be able to go up to him because it doesn't seem he's supposed to have heard it.

LAURIE: Ya.

DEBBIE: So if you went up to him and said so, I heard you [kind of talking

LAURIE: praying]

DEBBIE: to God and you called me insolent. It seems like Shimi's reacting out of hurt. You know, I think he's more hurt than anything else. But I, I think you gave the best, the best big idea as far as I'm concerned in terms of, like, being careful no matter where you're at of what you say and also knowing the impact words have. That's what I love about Judaism, is we're very realistic in, in disagreeing with the notion of sticks and stones will break my bones but words will never hurt me. Like they [do make a

LAURIE: they do]

DEBBIE: big impact and they stay with you. So I like that. Maybe that is, I'll go with that as the big picture.

LAURIE: Okay.

DEBBIE: Does that sound good?

LAURIE: Oh, that sounds great, yes.

Rather than asking Laurie to further explain her idea, Debbie at this point seems to assume she understands Laurie's point in full and she counters it by suggesting that R. Shimi could not have approached R. Papa directly. In so doing, she short-circuits an opportunity for them to develop their interpretation even further. Debbie moves the conversation back to Laurie's initial idea about being careful with words and strongly supports it by using supportive language and bringing outside support from her knowledge of Judaism. As one listens to what Debbie says to Laurie, "I think you gave the best, the best big idea of all..." one has sense that they have been in complete agreement all along and that there has been no difference of opinion.

Laurie in turn seems to abandon her idea and agree with Debbie. Debbie's challenge to Laurie is by no means conclusively supported in the text and is rather Debbie's opinion of what seems to make sense based on the text and her personal experience. Laurie could have continued to articulate her understanding and challenged

Debbie's challenge. This may have resulted in a more detailed discussion of what R. Papa and R. Shimi did. Instead, Laurie uses supportive language and even helps Debbie finish the sentences of her challenge to Laurie. When Debbie offers her final interpretation, Laurie explicitly tells her that it "sounds great." Laurie's different idea that either R. Shimi or R. Papa could have talked to the other one directly and thereby shifted the course of the story has been washed away.

In the example above, Laurie and Debbie both use language that seems to suggest that they are in complete agreement and miss an important opportunity to pursue an alternative line of thought. This is perhaps the shadow side to the collaborative spirit that pervades their work; they share so many ideas and so often agree, that the differences in their ideas can be blurry, requiring more effort to sort out and test, effort they may not feel compelled to make. Furthermore, even when there are distinguishable differences, the language of challenge is still so supportive, that it might not invite much of a response from one's partner.

Returning to Our Theory

This section of their *havruta* concludes as follows:

LAURIE: So do we think that, so in this sense, do we think that, let's say we have to play right and wrong. Do we think that Shimi was innocently asking all these questions, like he was right and Rabbi Papa overreacted? Is that kind of our-

DEBBIE: Well, that's funny because now I almost feel like now there isn't a right and wrong. I think he was being honest in his private prayer and wanting God to preserve him from reacting to what he thought Shimi was, being rude, and maybe Shimi --²²⁷

²²⁷ Laurie does not even let Debbie finish this idea but rather picks up on it to consider how to reflect it in the sentences that they want to add to the text. Her response seems to suggest that she is in full agreement with the idea.

Laurie asks a supportively phrased question to help them reach a conclusion about the story itself and which character overreacted. She is returning them to their pivotal question. She uses the language of “we” and “our,” again drawing attention to the collaborative nature of this endeavor. This is a question that both of them are considering. Spurred on by Laurie’s supporting move, Debbie initiates a new idea: Neither R. Papa nor R. Shimi is wrong. They both have valid reasons for what they are doing. This has been an idea that both Debbie and Laurie have stated far less clearly two other times in the discussion. Through their work supporting one another to keep considering each side of the story and let the text challenge them to see different perspectives and interrelate them, this idea is finally able to come the surface of their conversation.

Debbie and Laurie’s *havruta* helps us see the difficulties of challenging in a collaborative *havruta*. Their challenges to one another can get buried, or they may in fact not stop to challenge each other’s ideas because of their overall feeling that they are both in agreement. They miss opportunities to engage in challenging in order to sharpen an idea or consider an alternative. At the same time, they do not abandon challenging completely. Their *havruta* helps us see the possibilities that ensue when a pair engages in ongoing support and gentle challenging. There is something awesome about their ability to engage in building “our theory” through exploring questions together and looking at both sides of the text.

In the last part of their *havruta* conversation, Debbie and Laurie go on to work on the task of inserting two sentences into the Talmudic text that clarifies to an outside reader their interpretation. They insert the sentences to maintain the ambiguity of R.

Papa's and R. Shimi's actions, helping the reader understand the impact of the story, rather than casting judgment on either character. Their interpretation reads:

R. Shimi b. Ashi used to attend the lessons of R. Papa and used to ask him many questions. One day he observed that R. Papa fell on his face [in prayer] and he heard him saying: "May God preserve me from the insolence of Shimi. **Shimi keeps asking these questions like "why does this happen?" and "where did you find that?" and "who is the source" which prevents me from getting all the information I need to in the lesson."** The latter thereupon vowed silence and questioned him no more. **From that day on he shut down and never had confidence in his inquiring mind."**²²⁸

In a sense, the message that they understand from this text -- that there is no right or wrong in this particular relationship -- is the message of their *havruta*.

This first case provides examples of supportive language, co-building and some explicit supportive moves. Despite the frequency with which they engaging in supporting one another, their *havruta* could have benefited from focusing support on particular ideas in a more sustained way and not moving so quickly on from idea to idea - either by challenging them or by bringing up new ideas. For example, Debbie misses an opportunity to draw out the implications of Laurie's nascent idea that R. Papa did not directly approach R. Shimi. More sustained support could have helped each partner more fully develop her idea before shifting the focus of the conversation. The *havruta* could also have benefited from more challenging to help explore alternative ideas. When they do challenge one another, it is gentle challenging along with support. This helps them maintain a collaborative spirit and not retreat but also means that challenges do not get heard as direct challenges to be countered. There is something about a direct challenge

²²⁸ The bolded words are their inserted sentences.

that raises the expectation that the next move will counter the challenge and a constructive back and forth will ensue, which will reveal the strengths and limits of the idea. While Debbie and Laurie engage in some countering moves, for the most part, their *havruta* discussion is based around a sense of ongoing agreement and supporting moves.

Challenging from the Outside

Sometimes, *havrutot* require challenging from the outside in order to help them examine and refine their ideas. Outside challenging can come in different forms. They can come through a person -- either a teacher or another student -- or an alternative text. A person can provide a challenge that specifically addresses something in the interpretation on the table, while a text can provide an alternative reading or details that challenge the interpretation on the table, but it cannot explicitly reference the interpretation on the table and is therefore less direct in its challenge.

In the class following Laurie and Debbie's first *havruta* about the R. Shimi and R. Papa text, Laurie and Debbie receive outside input from fellow students. The first part of the *Beit Midrash* was designed for each member of a *havruta* to meet with someone from another *havruta* and get feedback on their interpretation and the big idea of the text that they had composed. Laurie and Debbie's interpretation and big idea read as follows:

Final Interpretation: R. Shimi b. Ashi used to attend the lessons of R. Papa and used to ask him many questions. One day he observed that R. Papa fell on his face [in prayer] and he heard him saying: "May God preserve me from the insolence of Shimi. **Shimi keeps asking these questions like "why does this happen?" and "where did you find that?" and "who is the source"? which prevents me from getting all the information I need to in the lesson.**" The latter thereupon vowed silence and questioned him no more. **From that day on he shut down and never had confidence in his inquiring mind.**"

Big Idea: [O]ne big idea the text is trying to convey is that our words and attitudes toward each other (especially between teachers and students) can have a tremendous (sometimes detrimental) effect on each other. We need to be careful of how we interact with each other and the messages (even unintentional) that we send to each other

Table 5.1: Laurie and Debbie's Final Interpretation and Big Idea

Debbie and Laurie receive a good deal of supportive feedback during this exercise. But they also receive some feedback that challenges them to rethink.

Laurie first reports on the feedback she received during the exercise. Her new partner found support for their first insertion and their big idea but thought that their second sentence insertion was not supported by the text.

LAURIE: And then he said the text itself, okay, you know how we said Shimi lost confidence in his ability to question? He didn't think that the text actually said that. It just said that he was silent. It doesn't say, you know, why he was silent or that he lost confidence or anything. You know, maybe he wasn't silent with every teacher, maybe he was just silent with Shimi, with Rav Papa, so that was what he said the text didn't support. So – yes...

DEBBIE: Yes. Well, it's interesting he said that ... Okay, so he's saying that it's too broad for, for this because we don't know. Okay.

They both seem to accept this particular challenge as valid. Debbie then reports on the feedback she received. Her partner also found support for their sentence insertions but challenged their “big idea,” suggesting that it could be more specific to the particulars of the case and thereby have a stronger message.

DEBBIE: But he also said, which I thought was interesting, that our big idea only was relevant for lines three and four, that we totally disregard one and two and that also our big idea is something that applies, like, everywhere in life. So words have, you know, affect on other people, like that is something that, okay, it's true, but he just thought it was very, very narrow and very small compared to what we expanded and where we could have gone with it, which I thought was interesting.

LAURIE: Yes.

DEBBIE: I was thinking yes, I think you're right...

LAURIE: Ya. Maybe it's not too narrow. Maybe it's too broad.

After they share what they have heard from people outside their *havruta*, the task specifically asked the pairs to revisit their interpretations and big ideas and try to make it even more compelling based on the feedback they heard.

DEBBIE: Yes. So do you think that, would you, after hearing comments, would you be interested in changing or do you think –

LAURIE: I like ours. We could maybe tweak it a little but, and I think this is what we were getting at. Maybe we just didn't write it down, is that I think maybe, maybe correct me if I'm wrong, but we're talking about, our words obviously hurt each other or affect each other in everyday life, you know, but there's a special, it **has a special affect in a teacher-student relationship**, I think, so, so maybe, in that sense, they would be more specific to this story and these lines could work too because it's setting up, like you said, but it's setting up that they're a teacher and a student, and that that's their dynamic, and so the way that they should be acting towards each other is, is as teacher and student.

DEBBIE: Hmhm. I like that

LAURIE: I mean, extra sensitive to, you know, how their words are going to affect each other because...I think **teachers and students become really vulnerable to each other**. As a teacher, you're like oh, my God, my student is going to, you know hate me

DEBBIE: **And how to tell a student they are wrong.**

Their initial response to the challenge helps them put a few new ideas on the table and sets them up to talk about how students and teachers need to be able to communicate and what makes for effective communication.

In light of this conversation, they revisit the text again in order to try to make sense of R. Shimi's silence at the end and R. Papa's seemingly extreme reaction, two issues that they had not fully resolved in their last conversation. Debbie and Laurie both

consider the ways in which each Rabbi responded to the other -- through indirect speech and silence. Neither ever talked to the other one directly about the issues at hand. This is an issue that both Debbie and Laurie had wondered about earlier in their *havruta*, but it took a challenge from the outside to help them create the space in their conversation for both to truly consider this issue and its consequences. Laurie wonders about R. Papa and R. Shimi, “Do you think it’s that they both sort of didn’t understand the way they should be interacting...” Debbie considers the importance of both being sensitive to who will hear you when you speak and also the importance of people being open to criticism.

After fourteen minutes of conversation that moves seamlessly between focusing on the text and considering their own feelings and experiences with student-teacher communication, Laurie gives voice to their refashioned big idea:

Laurie: “We have to be conscious of how we talk...how we tell students things and teachers things and how we hear things back from them and we have to be willing to say and hear them say it instead of just ignoring each other and going off to our separate corners and overeating.”

In this particular case, meeting with outsiders helps Laurie and Debbie consider a weakness in their interpretation of the ending of the story and in their big idea. Laurie and Debbie are open to hearing the challenges and are even willing to rework their interpretation in light of these challenges. In response to the challenge, Debbie and Laurie rearticulate their interpretation to clarify it. The act of clarifying and rearticulating, while apparently simple, has important results. It involves Debbie and Laurie in a conversation about effective communication, which leads them to revisit the text to try to make more complete sense of the story. They talk through how differently the story might have ended if either R. Papa or R. Shimi had talked to the other one

directly. These are ideas that they had touched on in their earlier conversation, but they had not managed to develop them beyond a few sentence fragments and questions and make them a central and sustained focus of their joint work. The challenge from outside creates an opportunity for them to both seriously consider these ideas more fully, which results in their developing a more nuanced big idea about the text's message.

The task also scaffolds their ability to receive and draw on supportive and challenging feedback. It specifically calls for outsiders to provide both types of feedback in two separate steps, making it less likely that anyone will confuse supportive feedback with challenging feedback. It also specifically asks Laurie and Debbie to discuss the feedback they have received and consider how it might impact their sentence insertions and big idea. It thus requires them to synthesize new and old ideas. This last step is one that is easily skipped over. As we have seen, Debbie and Laurie sometimes challenge each other's interpretations with new ideas and then overlook some of those ideas. This time, the task helps them not overlook the challenges they received but creates a space for them to revisit their ideas in light of what they heard. The end result is a more fully worked out understanding of the text and a more specific message about the text's larger meaning.

III: Case Four

Judy and Lisa's *Havruta*: The Dangers of Leaning Too Heavily Toward Challenging

Background

There are some who believe that in order to develop the best possible ideas, we need to have our ideas explicitly challenged. It is under these circumstances that we are

forced to step back from our interpretations and consider alternatives. We will see in our second case that challenging on its own does not necessarily create the conditions that help *havruta* partners rethink their interpretations or develop stronger interpretations.

The Students

Judy and Lisa, two female students in their twenties, are in their second and last summer of classes in the DeLeT program. Judy has much more experience studying Jewish classical texts and studying in *havruta* and has a better command of Hebrew. Lisa has limited exposure to these kinds of texts, *havruta* study and Hebrew, although she was enrolled in an *ulpan* and is trying to improve and practice her Hebrew. This *havruta* session is the third time they have learned together in the DeLeT *Beit Midrash*. They have worked together in other contexts in the DeLeT program, although not necessarily in an ongoing *havruta*, and they have reported liking working together.

The Text and the Assignment

Judy and Lisa are studying the same text as Laurie and Debbie did, two summers earlier. The task they have been given is an earlier version of the task given to Laurie and Debbie. It asks the *havruta* pairs to come up with two interpretations of the story of R. Shimi and R. Papa, to choose one interpretation and to add two lines to the story based on their interpretation.²²⁹

²²⁹ This earlier version of the task is slightly different from the later version used by Laurie and Debbie. The later version of the task asked the pair to practice activities of good text study, which had been discussed earlier that day. It also used the language of “compelling interpretation,” something that was also discussed in that year’s *Beit Midrash*. Finally, the later version did not highlight the idea of coming up with two interpretations, although it was an option. All of these differences may have played a role in the different course that each *havruta* took. However, a full analysis of task’s impact lies outside the scope of this discussion, which is focused on the ways in which *havrutot* engage in the practices of supporting and challenging,

Judy's Interpretation and Lisa's Challenges

Judy and Lisa read the text three times, once in Aramaic and then twice in English. Like Debbie and Laurie, they spend the first few minutes trying to figure out the general story line, particularly the meanings of “insolence” and “annoy.” They look to the Aramaic and Steinsalz Hebrew translation and their teacher for help. Judy starts to get excited that she knows what the story means and wants to share her insight with Lisa.

JUDY: He's a rabbi. He needs to be open to questions. Okay? He's a teacher, he's a rabbi, he needs to answer questions, he needs to raise questions-

LISA: Who?

JUDY: The rabbi.

LISA: But there are two rabbis. There is Rav Shimi and there is Rav Papa.

JUDY: Rav Papa () We're going to call him the teacher because the other guy is trying to learn from him.

LISA: Okay.

JUDY: How does one learn? By asking questions. What are we doing? *Havruta*. What's the reason they gave us this text? This is why. Okay? Then you have this other guy Shimi, whatever his name is. So he keeps, he is the one doing the questions. This annoys him. () questions, () more of what happens. He stops asking. He stops hearing. He stops learning. He stops learning. So one person decides to end his growth as a learner. You're not just cutting off yourself from learning, you are also cutting off somebody else.

LISA: That is a beautiful story, but I do not see it in the text anywhere.

Judy gives R. Papa the title of teacher and says that it is his job to answer and raise questions. She also notes that one learns through asking questions. In her interpretation, Shimi, “this other guy,” is doing the questioning, which annoys R. Papa. He overhears R. Papa and as a result, he stops asking questions and therefore stops learning. She does not raise questions about any of the ambiguities in the text. Instead,

she is clear that people ask questions to learn and when questions get cut off, so does learning. Lisa, who is listening, responds by either using supportive language or being sarcastic (or some mixture of both) -- "This is a beautiful story." She then challenges the validity of Judy's interpretations by saying that she "does not see it in the text." In this statement, she seems to imply that nothing Judy has said fits with what is in the text. She does not return to the text to show Judy why she thinks this is so but just makes a general challenging move.

As their conversation continues, Judy tries to brush aside the challenge. She responds to Lisa: "Oh, it's everywhere." Lisa does not back down and again tells her she needs to see it in the text. The conversation continues as follows:

JUDY: It's going to be grounded in text, okay?

LISA: Show me here.

JUDY: Here is the part where he asks questions.

LISA: Okay, that part I got.

JUDY: Here is the part where he gets annoyed.

LISA: Right.

JUDY: Here is the part where he says, () let's assume that "preserve me from this insolence" is this disobedience, this defiance, in his own perception.

LISA: Okay.

JUDY: He sees all these questions, why, why, why as defiance. Okay.

LISA: Right.

JUDY: I mean he's praying to God, like enough with the questions. So what happens? What's the [result of

LISA: Right]

JUDY: enough with the questions? So what happens? Silence. No more learning.

LISA: No, but see that is where you're making a jump. Silence and no more learning, that's a jump because it says silence and annoyed him no more with questions. That doesn't mean that he didn't learn anymore, that doesn't mean that Rav Papa didn't teach anymore, that just means that he listened. It doesn't tell us what happened after that.

We see a number of important things in this excerpt. At this point in the interpretive discussion, Judy and Lisa seem to be operating on two different principles of how interpretations work. For Lisa, one's interpretation must be literally grounded in the text; the text must specifically point to an interpretation. Judy does not agree with Lisa's approach and believes that she should be able to have greater interpretive license to make inferences. As Lisa presses Judy, Judy is able to show Lisa different parts of the text that support her reading. Lisa's challenging is helping Judy clarify her own interpretation and how it links to the text. Lisa's challenging also becomes clearer through this process. She is no longer saying that nothing in Judy's interpretation is in the text. It is no longer a blanket condemnation but a specific critique. The crux of her challenge is Judy's conclusion, that there was no more learning, since nowhere is this stated in the text.

Judy tries to support her conclusion by getting Lisa to imagine how R. Shimi might have felt upon hearing R. Papa's prayer. To her, the logical emotional response to hearing such a prayer would be negative feelings. And a negative result would follow from such negative feelings. Lisa does not agree with Judy's logic. She thinks that a negative emotional response, such as embarrassment, could actually help a person improve so that he would be in a better position to learn from his teacher in the future.

Lisa's Interpretation and Judy's Challenges

At this point, Lisa asks Judy to listen to her interpretation. As she continues, she underscores the point that for Judy to understand Lisa's interpretation, she has to believe that R. Shimi really respected his teacher. In saying this, she makes the grounds for her argument transparent.

LISA: So listen, if your teacher, if you, but you have to go with the idea that you really respect this teacher.

JUDY: Can you show me that in the text, please?

LISA: Yes. Because if he frequented discourses, then he must have really respected him otherwise he wouldn't have continued going there. He has lots of options. He could go to whoever-

JUDY: Are these other options in the text?

LISA: Yes, because if he was "want to frequent," that means he didn't have to frequent him, but he could have done, could have gone out-

JUDY: What's the Hebrew for want?

LISA: *Havei, hu hayah*. It was a continual thing.

JUDY: It doesn't say that there were choices out there, other great rabbis to learn from?

LISA: He could have just like gone to chop trees or something like that.

JUDY: I'm fine accepting this, but you're making a lot of inferences, which you didn't seem to give me any leeway to make.

LISA: All right, all right, all right. I [don't think I'm making-

JUDY: Sure. No problem.] He could have chopped trees. [I see that being in there

LISA: Historically, No!] Historically, there were lots of rabbis guys preaching. They each had like Beit Shamai, Beit Hillel, Beit-

Likewise, Judy is not simply willing to accept Lisa's statement but also challenges her to show her the basis of her claim. Lisa bases her claim on the fact that

the text tells them that R. Shimi “frequented” R. Papa’s discourse, which implies he respected him. According to her logic, if he didn’t respect R. Papa, he would have gone to learn from someone else. Each time Judy questions Lisa, Lisa refines her argument slightly. In the end, her claim that R. Shimi respected R. Papa is based on making an inference about what is said in the text -- that to frequent implies respect. Judy points this out. Lisa does not seem to think she is making inferences. She continues to explain her interpretation by referencing her knowledge of Jewish history.

“Rest Stop:” The Beginning of a Discussion about whether All Questions Help People

Judy interrupts her to restate her point that questions help people learn, and they finally engage in a few minutes of supportive discussion that ironically begin with Lisa challenging Judy’s idea about questions helping learning:

LISA: Not all questions help people learn. If you ask too many questions, that means you're not really listening to what the teacher has to give you. For example, I had a math teacher once and people would just ask her so many questions that she couldn't even teach it-

JUDY: Hm

LISA: and you didn't really even learn because she, you don't even know the right questions to. That’s () about DeLeT () because we think we know what we need to know -- see, we ask all these questions of the teacher. The teacher never gets anywhere and then, like me, I'd feel unfulfilled because like Lilian, she'd be like, no, I'm not answering the questions because I know where we need to go and if your question is still not answered by the very end, then ask me because the teacher needs to, knows where to go.

JUDY: That's why Susan's class was so good yesterday-

LISA: Right!

JUDY: because she's like, you know what, that's not going to be what I'm asking-

LISA: Exactly

JUDY: You need to shut up.

LISA: She is like (). So if you are asking all the questions, you think you know it all, you think you're, you know, you're their teacher, the teacher is finally, oh my God, help me with this student. I think, well, what he did is-

Lisa finally expresses why she doesn't think that questioning is always helpful to learning, rather than simply challenging this idea in general: "If you ask too many questions, that means you're not really listening to what the teacher has to give you."

Lisa then shares an example of a time in a class when questioning got in the way of learning. Rather than simply making sweeping claims, Lisa is more specific in her challenge and provides an example to back up her point. This enables them to have a conversation about her idea, since there is finally something for them to discuss. After hearing Lisa's example, Judy supports her idea further by providing an example from an experience that both she and Lisa had just shared. Lisa agrees with Judy's example and notes that if students ask all of these questions, they begin to think they are the teacher. The teacher will then reach the point of invoking God to help him with the student. In this final comment, she links their conversation back to the text.

This is an important conversation since it is the first time that they can both imagine the same perspective. This sense of mutual understanding is followed by Judy specifically asking Lisa to "take me through your scenario." This is a supporting move, which creates space for Lisa to talk through her interpretation in full.

LISA: So he could have gone anywhere-

JUDY: He could have chopped trees.

LISA: he could have () his teacher or he could have gone to Beit Hillel, Beit Shamai or whatever. He went to Beit Papa and he asked so many questions that his teacher was like, "dear God, save me from this person." And he heard it and then he reflected upon himself and he was like, "oh my gosh, I'm such an idiot, I better shut up so that I can

learn.” And so he shut up and he learned and Rav Papa was able to teach and then if he had -- now, I'm going beyond beyond, like how you went beyond, beyond -- if he had any other questions, he would maybe ask it at the end.

It appears that Lisa's interpretation is different from Judy's in a number of ways. First, she starts out with the assumption that R. Shimi specifically went to R. Papa to be his teacher as opposed to some other teacher. This helps support her idea that R. Shimi respected R. Papa. She also understands Shimi's reaction to R. Papa's prayer very differently. According to Lisa, R. Shimi learned that he needed to be quiet in order to learn.

Interestingly, the conclusion to her interpretation seems to cross some kind of interpretive line. She says she's going “beyond, beyond.” Her comment seems to refer to adding details that are not specifically implied by the text, which is different from the rest of her interpretation, which she sees as grounded in the textual details. Lisa adds that after this incident, if R. Shimi, had questions, he might have waited to ask them at the end of the teacher's lesson, rather than interrupting the teacher. By drawing this conclusion, in no way explicitly implied by the text, Lisa is doing what she had previously accused Judy of doing. Lisa is not willing to concede that they have both made similar moves and continues to advocate for the greater accuracy of her interpretation.

Stepping Back to Reflect on Their Interpretations

Judy at this point does not challenge Lisa's interpretation. She steps back and tries to articulate the larger point behind Lisa's interpretation.

JUDY: It really sounds like you are saying, tell me if I'm right, that you see this as there is an obligation on the student's part to listen.

LISA: Yes.

JUDY: And it's interesting, because I didn't phrase it that way, but now that I'm looking at the thing that made no sense back here with the drawing, that I was talking about the obligation of the teacher to listen.

LISA: Yes.

JUDY: It's interesting.

Judy states a big idea of Lisa's interpretation, checking with her to make sure she's on the right track. She's actively supporting Lisa's interpretation, zeroing in on the fact that at the heart of her interpretation stands the notion that it is a student's responsibility to listen. She links this idea to her own, noting that she had been talking about the teacher's obligation to listen. In stepping back, Judy articulates larger ideas that lie behind each of their interpretations and reframes their interpretations in relationship to each other.

One could have imagined Lisa supporting Judy and asking Judy to explain her idea a little more. She does not do this but instead emphasizes how far apart their interpretations are and moves them back into a debating stance:

LISA: Yes.

JUDY: (Okay)

LISA: We have opposite interpretations.

JUDY: Just different. I don't think they're opposite.

LISA: They're opposite. In your case, the [student stopped learning

JUDY: I think the student] and the teacher both need to listen.

LISA: Right.

JUDY: I don't think they're opposite.

LISA: No, I think that in yours it's a negative thing what happened and in mine it's a positive thing...

From the get go, Lisa and Judy have two very different readings of the story. The passion with which they express and argue out their views is palpable. Each one challenges the other and in the process, helps the other clarify her ideas and explain them more fully. In this sense, their practice of challenging is helpful. However, it only gets them so far.

Conclusion to Case Four

In Case Four, we see Lisa and Judy engaging in challenging to a much greater extent than supporting. The challenging moves help them articulate their ideas more clearly but do not necessarily help them deepen their ideas and further develop them. This may have occurred for two reasons. Their constant challenging leads them to focus less on developing ideas and more on defending their ideas. Related to this point is that their mode of interacting with one another does not create conversational space for building off of the best ideas to deepen either of their interpretations. These are risks of engaging in challenging without balancing out the challenging with supporting. A close look at this case also reveals that not all challenging is equal. Some kinds of challenging enable actual conversation to occur in which partners can truly engage with different ideas and develop greater understanding and more fully developed ideas. Other kinds of challenging, challenging focused solely on proving one's point and "winning," creates the need for ongoing rebuttals. In this case, there is little conversation since partners simply wait for their next turn to offer a rebuttal; they engage with alternative ideas only

enough to rebut them. There is little motivation or space to actually generate deeper insights.

Initially, Judy challenges Lisa to find proof for her ideas in the text. She is effectively claiming that Judy's ideas are not related to the text. Judy raises similar challenges to Lisa. Each finds herself needing to rebut the other over and over again and their conversation has the feel of a ping pong match, with no slowing down to try and understand the other side. At one point, Judy tries to slow things down and help Lisa see her perspective by asking Lisa to think about how she would feel if she were in Shimi's shoes. Despite her persistence, this move still does not help Lisa understand Judy's claim. Finally, Lisa explains her belief about questions, which is attached to one of her challenges and this gives them something to talk about. They finally step back from their ping pong match to have a conversation, in which they find themselves in agreement about the detriment of interrupting a teacher to ask too many questions. Their agreement sets the stage for Judy to support Lisa's articulation and explanation of her interpretation and to draw a connection between their different ideas. Judy's efforts to clarify their respective views and the relationship between them could have been a potential resource to their thinking, but she does not get help from her partner. Lisa does not really believe in Judy's idea and cannot sustain interest in it past the need to rebut it. She therefore does not try to relate her idea to Judy's.

In the end, they are not able to reflect on the connection between their ideas long enough to consider how the connection might impact on or change what they think. One wonders what might have happened if they had explicitly noticed their earlier point of agreement -- that sometimes student questions get in the way of the learning goals

established by the teacher and in these cases, it may be quite productive for teachers to not answer the questions -- and then stepped back to consider how their agreement on this particular point might change what they think. Perhaps, for example, this would have led them to a more nuanced discussion of the role of student questions and the responsibilities of teachers and identified this as a larger idea in the text.²³⁰

IV. Student Reflections On A Task Focused on Challenging

In the summer of 2006, we created a specific task to scaffold students' use of challenging.²³¹ Following completion of the task, students wrote reflections on the experience, which indicated their growing appreciation for and understanding of the practice of challenging. One person talked about the challenge of challenging when one generally acts as an agreeable person. She wrote, "One thing which I learned this summer about myself as a facilitator of someone else's learning is the importance of challenging the other person in order to help them push their learning forward. By nature, I tend to be a very agreeable person. Therefore, when it comes to challenging another's interpretation, I sometimes need to push myself to do so. I have learned this summer that by simply agreeing with my partner, I may be having a pleasant conversation but I am not helping myself or my *havruta* to engage in the learning process. I have learned that being challenged forces the person to deeply examine their interpretation and to find evidence in the text to support their interpretation. It forces a person to really think. That, I learned this summer, is from where the true learning

²³⁰ This is an example of what it would mean to interrelate viewpoints, as discussed in Section I of this chapter.

²³¹ I mention this task merely as a way to introduce students' remarks about the challenging and supporting, which provide further insight into these practices. I will examine the task in full in a future study.

comes.” A number of her fellow students shared this feeling and worked hard to challenge their partners, despite their general unease with challenging.

A number of students also called attention to the challenge of challenging when one agrees with one’s partner or when one simply believes in the validity of multiple interpretations. As one student wrote, “I think it’s sometimes hard for me to disagree with someone’s interpretation of a text because I believe there are multiple ways to read a text.”

These comments help draw attention to the important distinction between challenging and disagreeing and between supporting and agreeing. Challenging does not necessarily indicate disagreement and supporting does not necessarily indicate agreement. Decoupling these practices may make it easier for students to engage in more effective challenging and supporting for the purpose of refining ideas, whether or not they agree or disagree with them at that particular moment. These comments also highlight the particular challenge of challenging in a context which values multiple interpretations and also assesses interpretations as more or less compelling or accurate.²³²

Other reflections on the experience of engaging in the supporting and challenging task help highlight the interrelationship between these practices. For example, “I feel something I did well [while studying a Talmudic text with my *havruta* partner] was that I responded to Naomi’s interpretation (or at least a part of it) by agreeing and building on it, asking for clarification and then asking ‘what are the limitations of what you’re saying? When would it not work?’ I think I challenged in a comfortable and respectful way while still trying to push my partner’s thinking.” Or, in the words of another

²³² In such a context, it would seem particularly important to provide students with tools for evaluating interpretations so that they will be better equipped to determine what and how to challenge.

student, “Your partner will not feel the need to have a perfect idea if you are a challenger that can support her in the development of that idea.” Both of these students underscore the link between supporting and challenging. The first student underscores the role of supporting one’s partner’s interpretation in creating a context in which constructive challenging can then take place. The second student points out that when someone knows that her partner will not only challenge her ideas but also support their development, she will feel more comfortable expressing her nascent ideas. As we have discussed in Chapter Three, expressing ideas out loud is key to successful joint work and the creation of rich interpretations.

V. Conclusion

These two *havruta* cases highlight some important points. From the first case, we learn that *havrutot* cannot simply engage in supporting and assume that this alone will enable them to refine and develop their ideas. Supporting needs to be balanced by challenging. We also learn that when there is a great deal of supporting, it can produce the illusion that both partners are in perpetual agreement. This assumption can get in the way of the *havruta* engaging in challenging and pursuing alternative ideas. The first case also highlights the role that the text can play in challenging a *havruta*’s thinking.

From the second case in this chapter, we learn that *havrutot* cannot assume that challenging on its own will enable them to refine and develop their ideas. Challenging needs to be balanced by supporting. We also learn that when there is a great deal of challenging, it can result in the assumption that both partners are in perpetual disagreement and that there is no relationship between their different ideas. This

assumption can get in the way of the *havruta* pursuing connections between their different ideas and trying to build an even bigger idea that might emerge out of these connections. These cases illustrate how hard it is to engage in each practice in an ongoing way and how hard it is to move back and forth between these practices in the same *havruta*.

In both cases, an important ingredient to supporting and challenging could have been increased. That is a sense of intellectual play.²³³ This idea of play comes out in the student reflections, in which students talk about taking on particular roles.

Peter Elbow's work on methodological doubting and believing sheds light on this issue. He writes about the "believing game" and the "doubting game." "When the doubting game works well, it is a lively and energetic process. The staple ingredients are disagreement and argument. People are having fun wrestling...The believing game....is essentially cooperative and collaborative. The central event is the act of affirming or entering into someone's thinking or perceiving..."²³⁴

Elbow's analysis calls our attention to the important role of believing and doubting in enabling successful supporting and challenging. When one plays the part of believing an idea, it is easier to build it up through supporting. When one plays the part of doubting an idea, it is easier to challenge it. Furthermore, by using the terms "game," Elbow highlighting the playful nature he envisions as people come together to try out

²³³ Helen Featherstone discusses the role of play in learning. She specifically draws a link between teacher's curiosity and commitment to students' purposes and students' willingness to play with ideas. One can imagine cultivating such curiosity and commitment among *havruta* partners as well. Helen Featherstone, "Preparing Teachers of Elementary Mathematics: Evangelism or Education?," in *Transforming Teacher Education, Reflections from the Field*, ed. David Carroll, et al. (Cambridge: Harvard Education Press, 2007), 77.

²³⁴ Elbow, *Embracing Contraries*, 289.

ideas.²³⁵ Elbow's approach makes it possible to challenge even if one agrees with an idea and to support even if one disagrees. One need not only support when one fully agrees with an idea. Nor need one only challenge when something is wrong. Rather, one can take on the **role** of challenger or supporter for the purpose of strengthening textual interpretations.

When we engage in intellectual play, our goal is to develop the most compelling interpretations possible. We are thus willing to take on roles that help ourselves and our partners consider ideas from different angles and work hard to make sure we do not simply get locked into one perspective over the entire course of our *havruta*. Because it is a "game" and "methodological," students can have the experience of taking on playful roles in the spirit of collaborative learning, as opposed to engaging in personal accolades or attacks. In the words of a student in the *Beit Midrash* for Teachers, "It is important ... to keep in mind [through this process that] the overall goal is to further both of your learning."²³⁶

One should not assume that because people are "playing a game," that they can or should simply put aside their personal opinions. Just as they can take on the role of advocating for an idea about which they have doubts or critiquing an idea with which they sympathize, they can choose at any point to cease playing that role, and return to working on, and advocating for, their own viewpoint. Playing at believing and doubting does not call for an ideological stance that all ideas and opinions are equally valid; rather, it requires the ability to see interpretations from different angles. Viewing one's own

²³⁵ Note that Elbow assumes that believing is collaborative and doubting is not. I am claiming that both need to be part of a successful collaboration. Hence, Gadamer writes, "Dialectic consists not in trying to discover the weakness of what is said, but in bringing out its real strength." Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 330-31. When we challenge in order to strengthen as opposed to undermine, we are collaborating.

²³⁶ Student reflections on exercise designed to help students challenge one another, July, 2006.

idea dispassionately, even temporarily, is certainly not easy, given our particular commitments to our own ideas, but, if we can do so, we have the potential to make them even stronger. Proper scaffolding, which in part reminds people that they are choosing to temporarily take on a role rather than abandoning their ideas, can help us learn to do this and increase our opportunities to strengthen our ideas and our overall interpretations.²³⁷

²³⁷See Johnson and Johnson for a description of a task created to scaffold constructive controversy and perspective taking, in which students take turns both advocating for a particular idea and arguing against it. This is followed by students synthesizing and integrating the best ideas and reasoning into a joint position. Johnson and Johnson's research has shown the benefits of this kind of task for students' learning. David Johnson and Roger Johnson, "Structuring Academic Controversy," in *The Handbook of Cooperative Learning Methods*, ed. Shlomo Sharan (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1994). See also Johnson, Johnson and Smith, "Academic Controversy: Enriching College Instruction through Intellectual Conflict," and David Johnson and Roger Johnson, *Cooperation and Competition, Theory and Research*.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Introduction

“It’s important to learn with and from others so as to widen your perspective and think about things in new ways...It’s also good to be able to ask questions of another person and also to be able to voice your ideas out loud in order to clarify them for yourself.”

-Laurie 7/5/2006 reflections²³⁸

It helps me to bounce my ideas off of someone else, and to work with a partner to clarify my thinking and explore it more in depth...I was having trouble forming my thoughts into cohesive sentences so my *havruta* partner helped me by asking guiding questions...Hearing her ideas and having her add onto mine helped me reach a new level of understanding about the text that I would probably not have arrived at on my own.

-Cara, final assignment 2006²³⁹

In Laurie’s words, we hear some of the potential benefits of *havruta* learning:

working with a partner can expand one’s perspective. One can learn new ideas and strategies from one’s partner. One is helped by the questions that one’s partner asks.

Simply articulating ideas out loud to someone else provides an opportunity for clarifying one’s thinking. Cara’s words echo Laurie’s, highlighting the fact that her *havruta* partner actively helped her develop and clarify her ideas and, through co-building their interpretation together, they were able to reach a deeper understanding of the text.

Reading their remarks leaves the impression that these students had productive *havrutot*, that learning with another positively affected their learning experience and the ideas they produced.

All too often, educators and learners assume that if we simply put people together, they will naturally be productive in the ways Laurie and Cara describe. This idea is

²³⁸ This is the same Laurie in Case One and Two.

²³⁹ Cara -- a pseudonym -- is not a student who was videotaped studying in *havruta* but her response in her final assignment helps highlight some key ideas about *havruta* learning.

carried over into the way *havruta* is often used in Jewish education. “Turn to the person next to you and discuss the text.” These are the central and often only instructions given on many *havruta* occasions. In response, some people will have lively, even rich discussions and some will not. For those who do not have productive *havruta* experiences, *havruta* is seen as a failed learning strategy. Even when people do have productive *havruta* experiences, they seldom consider the greater learning potential offered by studying in *havruta*. For the most part, teachers and students alike do not stop to wonder, “Why study in *havruta*?” or “What must I know or be able to do to help make it an educative experience?” To utilize *havruta*’s potential, we must step back to consider what things people do when they study in *havruta* that create the opportunity for generative learning and what keeps this from happening.

I am not advocating *havruta* as a panacea for enhancing the quality of Jewish studies or making Jewish educational experiences more “Jewish.” Rather, I am recommending that Jewish scholars and educators consider the potential of *havruta* learning and what actually happens when people study in *havruta* that can make it a powerful and transformative experience and then use that knowledge to figure out when, where and how to use *havruta* study.

My conclusions emerge in response to my primary research question: “What can we learn about text study in *havruta* and students’ meaning making processes through close examination of teacher candidates studying classical Jewish texts in the DeLeT *Beit Midrash*?” I have used the words “meaning making” to refer to the *havruta* pair’s process of making sense of the text and each other’s ideas. Meaning making thus refers to their learning process, their developing an understanding. My choice of the words

“meaning making” highlights the active and ongoing nature of this endeavor and also point to the idea that the meaning that is made will go beyond a literal understanding of the words on a page and will point to something beyond oneself and thereby carry significance.

I began this dissertation with a view of *havruta* as a Jewish interpretive social learning practice involving norms, phases, moves and stances. I developed these ideas in my pilot study, where I carefully analyzed one *havruta* interaction. These ideas signal the fact that *havruta* is a complex and potentially powerful learning Practice.²⁴⁰ It involves social interaction between two human partners and meaning making efforts involving three partners, two people and the text. In its ideal, the partners collaborate, drawing on each other to build and refine ideas as co-creators in a meaning-making journey.

My dissertation research has built on these ideas. By systematically analyzing many more *havruta* interactions, I have explored ways that *havruta* is a highly complex activity. While one might listen to a transcript of a *havruta* interaction and hear partially formed ideas and many stops and starts, the messiness of *havruta* interactions actually have their own rhythms and can ultimately result in more fully developed ideas. In order to highlight the fact that messiness does not mean purposelessness, I have presented transcript excerpts in their original messy form and described and analyzed the meaning that emerges from people’s words.

My study resonates with sociocultural views of knowledge and provides evidence for the idea that our meanings are informed and shaped through our interactions with

²⁴⁰ As noted in Chapter One, *havruta* is a learning Practice made up of a number of central practices. To signal this distinction, I capitalize the P when referencing *havruta* as a Practice.

others. Thus, learning should not merely be viewed as an isolated affair taking place “inside” one’s head. Rather, the social and cultural elements of learning are central features of this process, not just interesting “add-ons.” Over and over again, we have seen how working with another impacts the thinking of the learners in this study, even when one person is simply sitting and listening to her partner. Seemingly small gestures can have enormous impact on how we think, talk and generate ideas together. Does our nod or question invite our partner in or shut her out? Does it generate a new idea or somehow disrupt a current one?

Specifically, through looking at what people do in *havruta*, I have identified six practices central to the work of the *havruta* pairs in this study: listening, articulating, wondering, focusing, supporting and challenging. Through the course of this dissertation, I have displayed and probed these practices as they are enacted in particular instances in order to develop a deeper understanding of the practices and their relationship and of *havruta* learning.

In this concluding chapter, I revisit why I chose to focus on practices and what I have learned about these practices and *havruta* learning in the context of the DeLeT *Beit Midrash* for Teachers. Then I briefly touch on what I have learned about teaching *havruta*. This will lead to a discussion of the contributions this dissertation makes to Jewish educational scholarship and future steps in the research, which have emerged through this work. Finally, I will discuss the transformative potential of *havruta* learning and return to the question of “why study in *havruta*.”

I. *Havruta* Practices

Why Focus on Practices?

My account of *havruta* learning is focused on central practices of *havruta* learning. It is grounded in empirical description and analysis of the interaction among the three *havruta* partners, the two human partners and the text, in a particular context.

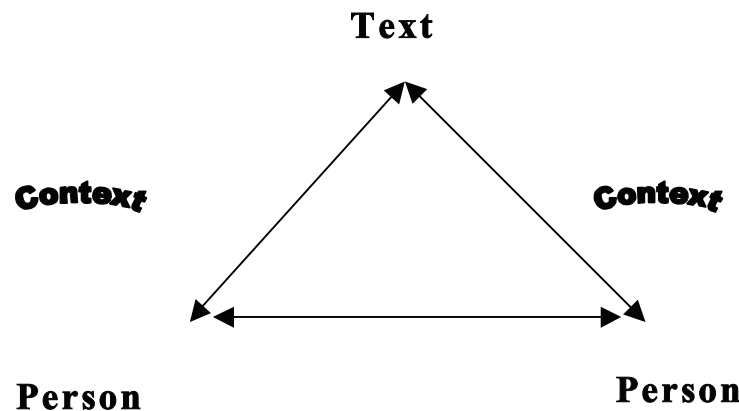


Figure 6.1: Three Partners of Havruta Learning

I did not focus on the structural factors that affect *havruta* study such as the text, task and the context in which the learning takes place or on the backgrounds of the participants. While all of these factors affect the learning that occurs in *havruta* and studies of these factors would contribute to our emerging understanding of how students make meaning when studying in *havruta*, this study has focused primarily on six central practices of *havruta*, providing a language for describing them and their interaction with one another.

I have focused on practices for a number of reasons. Most importantly, a focus on practices highlights the nature of *havruta* itself -- that it is about ongoing interaction

between two people and a text. A focus on practices has allowed me to describe and analyze what people do to engage in rich *havruta* discussion and when and how things go awry. It also calls attention to the interpersonal and intellectual dimensions of *havruta* work and in this way bridges the frequent divide in scholarly literature between understanding how people interact with a text -- the intellectual work -- and how people interact with each other -- the interpersonal work. The focus on practices thus helps us more clearly understand *havruta* as a social learning Practice operating simultaneously on multiple and interrelated dimensions.

The core *havruta* practices depend on skills, knowledge and dispositions to be enacted. I have chosen to focus on the level of practices which is more general than moves or skills and more particular than dispositions. As such, the framework of practices is helpful for moving beyond both overly specific or overly general descriptions of *havruta* interactions to develop a conceptualization that helps explain *havruta* interactions across different cases. Other studies of *havruta* or Jewish text study have not done this.

My focus on the work done in *havruta* partakes of a particular view about learning with others. In this view, generative *havruta* interactions depend less on the particular personalities of participants and more on the capacity of individuals to engage in skillful *havruta* practices.²⁴¹ This view shifts the focus from getting the “right” individuals in the room or putting together the “right pairs” to helping *havrutot* develop

²⁴¹ This parallels an argument made by Sharon Parks about her view of leadership. She talks about moving the focus from personality to presence. “In this view, acts of leadership depend less on the magnetism and social dominance of heroic individuals and more on the capacities for individuals to skillfully intervene in complex systems.” For Parks, a key factor in individual capacity is one’s ability “to be present.” Sharon Daloz Parks, *Leadership Can Be Taught: A Bold Approach for a Complex World* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2005), 11.

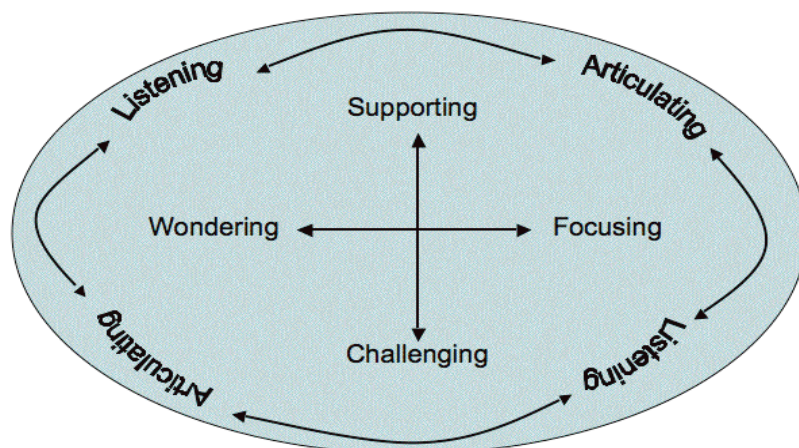
their ability to employ core practices in productive ways. It implies that learners with a range of backgrounds and experiences can have generative *havruta* experiences through learning and engaging in these central practices.

What Have We Learned about the Practices and Their Use in Havruta Learning?

This study has identified six central practices of *havruta*, provided a language for describing them and their interaction with one another, and explored their use through particular cases.

We have seen ways that these practices are in relationship to one another and interact in dynamic ways. Sometimes they are in tension with one another and they are not easy to do well. When utilized in delicate balance with one another, they can be resources for rich *havruta* discussion. In what follows, I will review some of the central insights about the practices and *havruta* learning.

**Figure
6.2:
Six
Havruta
Practices**



Listening and Articulating

Listening and articulating are at the heart of the work of the *havrutot* in my study. Without listening and articulating, there can be no *havruta*. These practices in dynamic relationship provide the grounds for joint work. They keep all three partners involved in the conversation and help make sure that the *havruta* draws on the collective resources of all partners.

To listen requires us to slow down, to pay attention, to revisit ideas. This is not easy to do in the midst of a conversation where much of the material generated is verbal and hard to hold onto given the forward conversational momentum. We have thus seen instances of failures of listening. The task discussed in Chapter Three attempted to help promote listening by slowing down the reading process and reminding partners to revisit the text and their ideas.

To listen within *havruta* also entails attending to three partners. This is hard to do for at least two reasons: It is simply difficult to focus in three directions at once and maintain that much information “on-line.” It is perhaps hardest to listen to the text, since the text cannot talk back to us when we do not listen to it. At the same time, there are many examples within the *havruta* data of people simply not listening to one another. In these cases, the failures to listen seem to point to another related insight. It is hard to step back from immersion within a particular line of thought to reflect on it and the underlying assumptions we bring, particularly while we are in the process of generating those thoughts. I will return to this insight below.

Finally, besides building the pool of ideas, the practices of listening and articulating can help *havrutot* develop collaborative relationships, in which they take

turns and work together on the text in front of them and the ideas they generate about it. As *havrutot* take turns listening and articulating, they signal to each other that they take each other seriously and trust and respect one another. Thus, in a sort of spiral motion, listening and articulating help *havrutot* develop their ideas and develop their working relationship, with each aspect mutually reinforcing the other.

Wondering and Focusing

We have seen some of the ways in which an interplay between wondering and focusing help *havrutot* delve more deeply into the text and consider different ways of understanding the text. There is often an open ended, unbounded kind of wondering in which *havrutot* are drawn to notice different ideas and parts of the text. This kind of wondering can go in many different directions and allows the *havruta* to think out loud and generate new hypotheses and insights about the text, which may or may not connect or might even contradict each other. There is also a more focused and sustained wondering, which allows the *havruta* to focus on a part of the text or a particular interpretation and delve into it more deeply, considering different details and making connections among the details. Focused wondering helps the *havruta* make connections between the parts and the whole of the text and in this way, develop a deeper interpretation that encompasses more and more aspects of the text.

We have also seen an example that highlights the importance of moving toward task focus, while maintaining a sense of openness toward new meanings and ideas that might emerge from the text. This is a complicated stance to take -- moving toward closure, while simultaneously maintaining an openness. It is something that Laurie and Debbie, the pair carried through in each of the three data chapters, do particularly well.

Sometimes, as in the case of Laurie and Debbie, one *havruta* partner will move in one direction, while the other moves in the other direction. This can work in a complementary way when each partner continues to respect the actions and the ideas of the other.

We have also seen through the case of Amy and Sally some of the ways in which partners can short change their wondering by not asking follow-up questions, switching to another topic or simply embracing an undeveloped idea. As one student in the *Beit Midrash* put it, “I think I jump on ideas rather than drawing out ideas and that may be why we come to a halt . . .”²⁴²

We have seen some ways in which wondering itself is not enough. It is also helpful when *havrutot* develop a genuine issue or question, which they pursue and which holds the focus of their wonder. And it is helpful when they focus in on each other’s ideas and the text and probe them in order to better understand them and consider alternatives. Finally, as they wonder and probe ideas to draw them out, it is important that they work together to make connections between their many ideas and the text in pursuit of new insights or more all-encompassing interpretations. Simply developing ideas through wondering and focusing may put a lot of different ideas on the table, but it is through connecting the ideas to each other and the text that compelling interpretations may emerge.

Supporting and Challenging

In Chapter Five, we looked at the way in which supporting and challenging can help the *havruta* refine their ideas further. As with the other practices, it is important that the *havruta* engage in the pair of practices, both supporting and challenging each other

²⁴² Heidi, 2005, 4th session class discussion

and not merely doing one. These practices not only have an impact on the quality of the ideas that the *havrutot* develop but also impact the quality of their working relationships. Supporting can help *havruta* participants feel that they can trust each other to listen to and take each other's ideas seriously. At the same time, we have seen an example in which a great deal of supporting can result in the *havruta* partners assuming that they are in perpetual agreement, making it hard to pursue alternative ideas. Alternatively, too much challenging can result in hostile feelings between partners. Too much challenging can also make the *havruta* think that they have no common ground, making it hard for them to truly collaborate and draw on each other's ideas. Finding the right balance between supporting and challenging is a very complicated affair and moving back and forth between these practices can be very hard to do.

As we have seen in the data, not only do the *havrutot* support and challenge each other but the text can also support and challenge in different ways. The text studied by Laurie and Miriam in Chapter Three seemed to support their views about learning and creating learning communities. They drew on this textual support to further develop their ideas. The text studied by Laurie and Debbie (and Susan and Judy in Chapter Five) challenged their ideas about the role of student questions in learning. While Laurie and Debbie came to the text assuming that student questions were positive, the text seemed to pose an alternative idea, which challenged them to clarify their own understanding, as well as to work harder to figure out what the text was saying. Since the students in this study are studying to be teachers and some have spent time teaching, they come to these texts often having given considerable thought to the issues of teaching and learning

presented in the texts. Through their interaction with the text, their ideas on these matters are drawn out further and sometimes even transformed.

II. Why is *Havruta Learning* so Complex?

Through the description and analysis of Laurie and Debbie's case in Chapters Three, Four and Five, we have seen the ways in which *havruta* learning entails drawing on six practices, each of which is complex in its own right and requires an integration of intellectual and interpersonal work.

Through the course of this dissertation, I have discussed and illustrated the opportunities provided by each of the *havruta* practices and the idea that these practices do not stand-alone but are interrelated. In the ideal, it is not enough to engage in one practice or one pair of practices but one must be able to engage in all six in delicate balance with one another in order to generate the richest *havruta* discussions. Furthermore, these practices must be used in relationship to two partners, a text and a person. And, while these practices may seem familiar from other parts of our lives, the context of *havruta* learning requires us to use them differently. All of this underscores the idea that *havruta* is a complex learning Practice which must be taught and learned in context in order to meet its potential. I will address each of these points in turn below.

The Six Practices are Interrelated

In the ideal, *havruta* partners not only have to be able to practice the six individual practices, but they use them in relationship to one another. *Havruta* partners engage in both listening and articulating in order to access the text and their own thinking, bring themselves and the text into relationship to develop interpretations and

also step back from their interpretations to assess them critically. They engage in wondering and focusing and challenging and supporting through their ongoing listening and articulating. As they do this, they must make many decisions in the moment -- Should I listen now and to what and for what? Should I share my new insight even though it is not fully formed? Should I focus attention on that particular idea and pursue it further? Should I brainstorm new ways to consider this part of the text? Should I let my partner keep talking or should I jump in to challenge her idea with another perspective or simply to reinforce her perspective, since there is a part that I agree with? These are some of the questions the *havruta* partners might consider, consciously or unconsciously, as they move through their *havruta* discussion.

The Six Practices Must be Used with Multiple Partners

At the beginning of this dissertation, I stated that part of my normative understanding of good *havruta* is that it entails interaction with three partners, the two people and the text. This is not akin to reading a text on one's own, where one must make textual decisions without considering another person. Nor is it akin to having an interesting discussion with someone, where one must make interpersonal decisions but not necessarily have to consider a written text.

Through each of the cases, we have seen ways that paying attention to the three partners through the use of the practices allows the *havruta* to draw on what everyone brings to the table and in this way builds on the *havruta*'s potential. Laurie and Debbie skillfully maintain this balance. They move almost effortlessly between their own ideas and the text, back and forth, over and over again. In so doing, they draw on all partners as resources in developing their interpretation. They not only draw out many ideas in the

process, but their back and forth provides a certain amount of rigor to their work. By having to align their various ideas and their reading of the text, they are forced to consider the accuracy and depth of their thinking.

Havrutot do not and cannot always hold the three partners in balance.

Sometimes, *havrutot* will pay far more attention to one another than to the text. This might lead participants to feel good about *havruta* study, but it will not automatically foster rich interpretive conversations. In some *havrutot*, the people in the pair may pay far more attention to the text than to one another in order to mine it for the strongest possible read. While this might make some people feel good about their *havruta* study, it does not reflect my normative view of *havruta* as a learning Practice. *Havruta* as a learning Practice requires the balance between engaging with both one's human partner and the text to develop the best possible interpretation and the most productive working relationship. As we have seen in the case of Laurie and Debbie, each partner must have time to be heard in order to listen for the new that may emerge. While at any given moment there will likely be one partner who is not being heard, the key is to move rigorously back and forth among all three and make sure everyone, including the text, keeps getting a turn.

Each of the Six Havruta Practices is Similar to But Different from What We are Used to Doing in Other Contexts

The six *havruta* practices are a way for *havruta* partners to engage with one another, to draw out each other's thinking, open up the text and ideas for exploration, rub ideas up against each other to build ideas and refine them. While these practices may seem familiar to us from our daily lives, we must be able to use them differently in *havruta* to engage in as generative a conversation as possible. Many of us might think

that we listen all of the time, but there is a difference between listening to understand which is what *havruta* requires and listening to follow along, which is what many of us do during our daily interactions. And, there is a difference between listening to a weather forecast and listening to someone else's developing ideas and, based on that listening, trying to help that person develop her ideas further. While we might wonder about current events, this is different from wondering about the underlying meaning of a text in the service of trying to develop a compelling interpretation of it. Using these practices in the service of *havruta* learning requires a higher degree of facility and intentionality than is required in use of these practices in every day life.

Not only are these practices used differently in *havruta* than they are in everyday use, but they are also used differently than in other learning contexts. When one studies a text with a partner, one cannot simply go at one's own pace, listening solely to one's own ideas as one would when studying alone. One also cannot simply rely on other people in the larger group to provide new insights, to support or challenge. There is an intensity about studying in *havruta* that is simply not present when studying either on one's own or in a larger group that requires a higher degree of attention to both the text and the other person.

III. Teaching *Havruta* Practices

I have illustrated the complexity of *havruta* and the use of the six practices, while also illustrating ways in which learners use the six practices in the service of generative *havruta* discussions. Given this complexity and the potential offered by the skillful use of these practices, if we want students to get better at using the practices, we need to help

students learn them, experiment with them and reflect on their use. This in turn requires that we intentionally teach these practices.²⁴³ *Havruta* is too complex a Practice for teachers to expect students to use it well without explicit instruction and guidance. Through the cases in this study, we have seen examples of how giving students time and space to talk with one another about Jewish texts is an important part of their learning process; however, teachers cannot simply say “go read and talk about this Talmudic passage” and expect the talk to be productive. Students need to be taught how to engage in generative *havruta* talk -- to clearly express their ideas, to draw each other out and into each other’s ideas, to work in sync, to listen and make connections. By intentionally focusing instruction on these central practices, students will have an opportunity to learn how to use them and work at getting better at them and may be more able to call on them in the service of their learning.

While a full exploration of the pedagogy of teaching these practices is beyond the scope of this dissertation, I want to highlight two issues, both of which require more research: the importance and challenge of fostering metacognitive awareness of the use of *havruta* practices and the role of the task in supporting the development and use of *havruta* practices and in helping to make *havruta* work as generative as possible.

I believe that *havruta* learners can benefit from a level of metacognitive awareness concerning their *havruta* learning. In educational literature, metacognition refers to learners’ knowledge of what they do and do not know in any specific context and their ability to think about their own thinking and activity processes. Metacognition

²⁴³ My dissertation is not a study of the effects of teaching the core *havruta* practices. Thus, my claim about the need to teach the practices is not based on evidence that teaching the practices results in improved use of the practices. Rather, this claim derives logically from both my research and classroom teaching experience, which has shown that *havruta* and the use of its practices is a complex affair and as such, it entails some amount of learning on the part of the participants. Learning in turn is aided by teaching.

has been shown to be a critical part of learning.²⁴⁴ When one has metacognitive awareness, one can step back, reflect on one's performance and revise it accordingly, both during the actual performance and after. Metacognition can help *havruta* learners be intentional about their actions and their use of the *havruta* practices and learn from what they do.

At least two factors may make metacognition especially difficult to foster in the context of *havruta*. First, the learning is conducted by peers; there is no outsider on hand to help promote metacognition, in the way that a teacher in the context of teaching a lesson can direct student's to be more reflective or can call student's attention to certain aspects of their learning processes. A related point is that *havruta* is an immersion experience. One actively engages in an ongoing way with an other to make sense of a text. This kind of immersion can result in a powerful experience, making it hard to step back, reflect and self-correct.²⁴⁵ I have seen both of these challenges at work in my experience using *havruta* in my classroom. Given the extra challenge of being metacognitive in the course of studying in *havruta*, it may be especially important that teachers work with their students to foster their awareness of *havruta* practices and find ways to support them to be intentional and reflective during their *havruta* work.

²⁴⁴ Keene and Zimmermann, *Mosaic of Thought*, 195. See also Perkins, *Smart Schools, Better Thinking and Learning for Every Child*. and, Bransford, Brown, and Cocking, *How People Learn*. Bransford, Brown and Cocking write, "Teaching practices congruent with a metacognitive approach to learning include those that focus on sensemaking, self-assessment, and reflection on what worked and what needs improving. These practices have been shown to increase the degree to which students transfer their learning to new settings and events." *How People Learn*, 12. Given the link between metacognition and the ability to transfer learning, there is a great deal of interest in metacognition and how it can be fostered. Perkins talks about four levels of metacognition: tacit, aware strategic, and reflective. *Smart Schools*, 102. While metacognition appears to be crucial to learning, how it is cultivated and how it works is not entirely clear.

²⁴⁵ One might even argue that too much "stepping back" could detract from the *havruta* experience. Figuring out the balance between immersion and "stepping back" is certainly an area worthy of further study.

Clearly, *havruta* work can be scaffolded by direct instruction prior to or following *havruta* learning. It can also be scaffolded through the intervention of the teacher during the course of the *havruta*. However, an important and often overlooked form of scaffolding are the tasks that can be provided to *havruta* learners. At different points in this dissertation, I have touched on the critical role of the task in the learning of *havrutot* in the *Beit Midrash* for Teachers.²⁴⁶ Although this has not been my main focus and there is much more to say about the specific tasks used by the learners in my study, a few comments are in order.

The tasks developed in the *Beit Midrash* for Teachers were designed to serve several purposes. Some tasks helped students slow down their learning process. Particularly in a context of verbal interaction, which can move quite quickly, being able to slow down is key to being able to listen, revisit the text and one's ideas and hopefully articulate more developed interpretations. This can also contribute toward greater intentionality and reflectivity. Some tasks helped students ask questions, which prompted a great deal of wondering about the text and complicated their reading of the text and their interpretations. Some tasks invited students to revisit the text, their partner's ideas, or their joint interpretations. Again, revisiting slows down the learning process and forces people to take a second look. In the process, they are often surprised by what they see, either in support of or as a challenge to their interpretations. Revisiting is central to building deeper interpretations. The task can also be structured to give each party in the *havruta* time to be heard. This increases the interactivity of the interpretive

²⁴⁶ In many contexts in which people study in *havruta* there are no specific study tasks. Perhaps this derives from the idea that tasks are unnecessary or might even hamper the learning and be overly constraining. However, guidance is different from constraint. For detailed discussion of the value of tasks in collaborative learning situations and the ways in which they can support or constrain student work see Cohen, "Restructuring the Classroom: Conditions for Productive Small Groups."

discussion, thereby increasing the possibility of new and connected ideas and allowing all parties to both build on the ideas of the others and act as a check on them.

Besides shaping the students actions and interactions, the task can also shape how a pair thinks about their joint work. Does the task ask the pair to develop separate interpretations? To work together to come up with a joint idea? Does the task require the active participation of both partners? Does the task provide some guidelines for negotiating different ideas? There are many ways tasks can influence learning in *havruta* and their use as scaffolds is certainly worthy of further study.

IV. Contributions of This Study

Developing a Tradition of Research on Learning in Jewish Educational Scholarship

This study makes a unique contribution to the field of Jewish education. There is no strong tradition of research on learning in Jewish education, especially the kinds of empirical studies that have proliferated in general education. My dissertation, in small part, begins to fill this gap by offering a careful, close up look at people learning.

Learning by its nature is complex. There is no one way that people learn and no simple script for teachers or learners to follow. It is therefore very helpful to look at how learning unfolds over time. The data presented in this dissertation contain many examples of student learning in circuitous process. Students generate ideas and abandon them, only to reincorporate them into a more developed framework at a later point. When we study learning processes up close in their messiness, we are able to see students' fits and starts as more than simply fits and starts but as core building blocks in a larger meaning making endeavor.

Looking at learning up-close and unedited challenges the simple dichotomy between learning processes and learning outcomes and the idea that only particular processes will lead to particular outcomes. Often times, research on learning focuses on pre- and post-tests and leaves out the work that students do in between. My dissertation is concerned with this in-between space -- how student learning unfolds, what contributes to it and ultimately, how this process shapes students' interpretations -- and encourages more close up studies of student learning. The learning process of students in my study is the heart of their intellectual work and is part and parcel of the final interpretations or "outcome" of their *havruta* discussion.

Finally, close up studies of learning enables us to gain a greater insight and appreciation for what serious learning entails. Ultimately, it is this that will help educators develop more appropriate learning tools.

Expanding Our Understanding of a Central Activity in Jewish Education: Text Study in Havruta

Jewish text study is a central endeavor in Jewish education and it often occurs in *havruta*. However, there has been almost no empirical research on text study in *havruta* and no conceptualization of this process. The ideal of learners engaging in passionate discussions with each other about Jewish texts does not simply happen. While this may be an ideal, exactly what this goal entails of teachers and learners and how it is enacted and achieved in the context of educational settings is vague and unexplored. Most teachers and learners are left to figure this out through trial and error without shared language or frameworks for identifying what the process might look like. This study begins to fill another hole in Jewish educational research: our understanding of how students make meaning while studying texts in *havruta*.

This dissertation offers descriptions of *havruta* conversations which provide rich images and allow us to see how *havruta* learning unfolds. This dissertation also provides an analytic framework that helps account for generative *havruta* discussions and missed opportunities in one particular context. Furthermore, this dissertation offers a normative view of *havruta* learning, an idealized image of what *havruta* could look like in its fullest sense. Meeting this ideal is in part dependent on the degree and quality of enactment of the six core *havruta* practices.

Expanding Our Understanding of Interpretive Discussion

This research also contributes to scholarly discussions about text study and interpretive discussion in both religious and general education. As such, this study brings together scholarship on both collaborative learning and text study, highlighting the interconnection between interpersonal and intellectual work. There are many parallels between interpretive discussion and *havruta* learning, such as the focus on meaning making, listening to other people and texts, and working together on central ideas that emerge through the course of the conversation. There are some potential differences as well. Interpretive discussions generally happen in small groups, while *havruta* occurs in a dyad. Without a comparison study, I cannot make claims about clear differences; however, there appears to be a heightened level of intensity and maybe the grounds for more accountability in the dyadic interaction, where there is simply no anonymity and no way to avoid the person sitting across from you.²⁴⁷ This may result in a greater degree of involvement. The study of students' meaning making of complex texts both individually

²⁴⁷ The dyad may create greater grounds for accountability, which the *havruta* partners may or may not act on. The dyadic relationship does not in and of itself create greater accountability.

and with peers is ripe for further investigation since there is much that we simply do not know.²⁴⁸

Providing Conceptual Tools to Practitioners

Lastly, this study has practical application. While I cannot generalize from my small study to other contexts, the cases and framework presented in this study will give educators an opportunity to look closely at students engaged in *havruta* learning, something that most do not have an opportunity to do. Such close looking may raise questions about the purposes of *havruta* learning, what students need to know and be able to do to do it well and what kinds of support is required from teachers. Furthermore, the framework may help educators design more effective tasks and interventions to help their students engage in more generative *havruta* learning. Anecdotally, this has already begun to happen.²⁴⁹

VI. Future Research Directions

This study raises many questions for future research. Through this study I identified core practices that contribute toward student meaning making in *havruta* in the context of the DeLeT *Beit Midrash* for Teachers. How might other contexts shape the nature of *havruta*? In other contexts, do *havrutot* use these same practices? In what ways are the practices used differently? Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, there are

²⁴⁸ Pamela Grossman writes in a review of the literature on teaching and learning literature that the process of literary understanding is “many layered and recursive” and that “(u)ltimately, we will need more powerful conceptual tools for explaining, in general terms, the kinds of interactions that support the continual development of students’ interpretive powers.” Pamela Grossman, “Research on the Teaching of Literature: Finding a Place,” in *The Handbook of Research on Teaching*, ed. Virginia Richardson, 427.

²⁴⁹ Two teacher educators have written to me to say that introducing their students to the six practices was very helpful for helping their students think more deeply about *havruta* learning and how to engage others in it. One elementary school teacher, who is specifically teaching the practices of listening and wondering in her classroom, has also found that this has enhanced her students’ abilities to engage in generative *havruta*.

aspects of *havruta* learning that this study does not consider. For example, it would be useful to consider students' backgrounds and compare more experienced with less experienced learners in order to develop a more nuanced picture of the differences that might entail. Comparison studies between novices and experts have been conducted in the area of teaching literature with useful results.²⁵⁰ It would also be highly illuminating to consider the impact of different genres of texts on *havruta* study and compare the process of studying Jewish texts in *havruta* to studying other kinds of texts in a dyad.

In addition to more studies of teaching and learning in *havruta*, more sociological work is needed on the culture of learning in *batai midrash*. Given the rise of non-traditional *batai midrash* in Israel and the United States, it would be useful to consider the differences between these new types of study houses and more traditional study houses. Some of these differences are that these new *batai midrash* include women learners and include the study of different kinds of Jewish texts, including but not solely focusing on Talmud. One could well imagine that these differences, among others, could contribute to very different kinds of learning environments, with implications for how teachers teach and how students learn.

Of the many possible directions for future research, I am interested in three in particular: further study of select practices, the pedagogy of *havruta* learning, and the transformational nature of *havruta* learning.

As mentioned above, there is more to learn about the six practices of *havruta* learning, what they entail and how they are used by other learners in other contexts. For example, what would it look like for a 3rd grader in a liberal Jewish day school to use

²⁵⁰ For example, Earthman, "Creating the Virtual Work: Readers' Processes in Understanding Literary Texts."

these practices while doing *havruta* in her elementary school classroom? What skills would they need in order to successfully use these practices to enhance their *havruta* learning? I'm particularly interested in further study of the practices of listening and articulating and the ways in which they come into play in the other four practices and further study of the practices of challenging and supporting and the ways in which listening plays a role in both.²⁵¹

I'm also interested in further understanding the pedagogy of *havruta* learning and teaching the six practices, including what teachers do to help students get better at *havruta* and the six practices. How can teachers effectively teach these core practices and how does this affect student learning? Does teaching these core practices also entail teaching particular skills? If so, which ones? For example, it is clear from my *havruta* data that asking questions plays a role in each of the six practices and that depending on which practice is in use, there are different questions that can be asked for different purposes. Further study of the pedagogy of *havruta* would also entail studying the teacher's role in supporting *havruta* work before, during and after *havruta* study and a more thorough analysis of different kinds of *havruta* tasks and their impact on student learning.

Finally, those of us involved in the design of the DeLeT *Beit Midrash* for Teachers believe that *havruta* study can be personally and professionally transformative.²⁵² As discussed below, *havruta* has the potential to be transformative.

²⁵¹ The American Educational Research Association (AERA) has developed a Special Interest Group (SIG) on listening to which this further research can contribute.

²⁵² For a discussion of why Jewish education is concerned with the transformative dimension of education, see Holtz, *Textual Knowledge: Teaching the Bible in Theory and in Practice*, 40. "Jewish educators want to encourage the transformative dimension of teaching because the ultimate mission of most Jewish education is far broader than helping students acquire mastery of a subject matter...Jewish education

Ultimately, I hope that my research will help us better understand the transformative potential of *havruta* study and the conditions that promote this kind of transformative engagement.

VI. *Havruta* as Providing an Opportunity for Transformation Through Relationship

I have noted that *havruta* is a potentially transformative educational experience. What does this mean? In what ways can *havruta* study be transformative?

According to my normative conception of *havruta*, to engage in *havruta* one must be committed to being in relationship. This requires people to open themselves up, get to know, learn from and work with others. Ultimately, *havruta* rests on the belief that we need each other to grow our ideas and also to grow ourselves. This is the idea of partnership that I discussed in Chapter One. When we study in *havruta*, we try to develop our ideas and understandings in relationship with these others. We do not consider ourselves lone voyagers. Rather, we recognize the value inherent in attuning ourselves to another and working together. In order to do this, we make a number of central moves such as: eliciting, articulating, extending, challenging, revisiting, and clarifying our own and others ideas. All of these moves create conditions for mutual interaction and relationality.

This is very hard work. It requires us to figure out how to be attuned to others and ourselves in the deepest senses possible. I think this work is at the heart of *havruta*'s transformative potential since through our attunement to another person and a text, we have the potential to transform them and be transformed by them. The work of two

ultimately is judged by its success or lack of success in its greater mission, to nurture Jews with a deep and living connection to being Jewish.”

scholars has helped enlarge and elaborate this point about the potential for transformation that arises through our relationship with our *havruta* partner and the text. While neither writes specifically about *havruta*, their ideas are nonetheless applicable.

Wolfgang Iser, a literary scholar, writes about what happens when our ideas meet the text. Iser explains that our studying the text creates an “involvement, or entanglement,” and this is what places us in the “presentness of the text and what makes the text into a presence for us.” Iser continues to explain that “in so far as there is entanglement, there is also presence.”²⁵³ This kind of involvement, leading to presentness, enables our ideas to be reshaped by the text and enables the text to take on new life and meaning. Citing Dewey in Art as Experience, Iser elaborates, “The junction of the new and old is not a mere composition of forces, but a re-creation in which the present impulsion gets form and solidity while the old, the ‘stored’, material is literally revived, given new life and soul through having to meet a new situation.”²⁵⁴ Iser is pointing to the transformation of our ideas and being and the transformation of the meaning of the text through what he calls involvement or presentness or what I’m calling relationship. According to Iser, when we “merge” with the text for an instant through our close attention to it and through our direct contact with it, our thinking and experiences are changed in some way. I think that Iser’s description of what happens in our encounter with a text is certainly applicable to what happens when we seriously engage with another person and her ideas -- in both instances, all parties can be “recreated.”

²⁵³ Iser, *The Act of Reading*, 131.

²⁵⁴ Ibid., 132.

In a completely different context, Patricia Carini, an educational scholar and pioneer of methods for closely observing students, talks about how teachers make meaning of their students' work.²⁵⁵ Carini writes, "What is meaning? "Meaning arises through the relationship among things or persons: that mutual reciprocity that occurs in the act of truly 'seeing' something...Meaning designates the experience of relatedness which enhances and makes more vivid each of the events or persons it joins. For meaning to arise, there must be recognition."²⁵⁶ Carini's description of meaning making calls our attention to seeing and relationship. Through relationship, we are able to see an other more vividly. It is through a seeing of relatedness that meaning emerges. Carini's focus on seeing and relatedness are reminiscent of Iser's "presentness." There is something important about the quality of attention we have for another that affects the meaning we are able to make. It is through some kind of merging of these different others, enabled by seeing and relating, that all parties can be "'recreated'" and that *havruta* partners may experience a sense of transformation. *Havruta* has the potential to engage us in deep involvement with another person and an other text and through the quality of our relatedness to these others, to help us see, hear and be in new ways. The cases in this dissertation provide examples of *havruta* partners developing new ways of seeing or hearing an idea through their encounters with others.

Furthermore, these "others" are part of a larger cultural and religious community. Our *havruta* triangle can engage us in something much larger than just two people and a text. It can connect us to a Jewish communal conversation that spans history.²⁵⁷ Because

²⁵⁵ We have seen these ideas in Chapter One.

²⁵⁶ Carini, *The Art of Seeing and the Visibility of the Person*, 15.

²⁵⁷ See for examples Barry Holtz, ed., *Back to the Sources, Reading the Classical Jewish Texts* (New York: Summit Books, 1986)., and Holtz, *Textual Knowledge Teaching the Bible in Theory and in Practice*, 39.

of this, the nature of the text matters. If *havruta* is transformation through relationship and part of the power of transformation is engaging people in this larger Jewish conversation, then the object of our attention matters. Studying Shakespeare may help us develop capacities for listening and relatedness and transform how we think, but this will not connect us with the larger Jewish conversation, as would studying a Jewish text.²⁵⁸

VII. Why Study in *Havruta*?

In the final class of the summer of 2006, students presented posters depicting key ideas that they learned in the *Beit Midrash* for Teachers. One student pair presented three symbols: two pieces of paper on opposite ends and little bits of paper attaching them; an onion, and a traffic light with a large yellow light. The pair explained the meaning of these symbols as follows:

Working together to become a havruta unit: The two pieces of paper represented them when they first met. They were two distinct individuals coming from different places. Through the course of the summer, they worked hard to understand one another and through their growing understanding, they began to impact each other's thinking. The students use the word "merged" to describe the process of going from individual thinkers to becoming a real *havruta*. They experienced a merging of thought (and feeling); a new unit -- the *havruta* pair -- came into being.

"True, we want to nurture students who will receive an inheritance of narratives and laws, but we also want to encourage them to enter that conversation actively, to create new tales, new readings of the law, new interpretations, new ways of understanding the old."

²⁵⁸ For a discussion of what it means to be constituted by Jewish texts in an age when we merely read fragment of texts and have many different referents for what we read, see Michael Fishbane, *Garments of Torah, Essays in Biblical Hermeneutics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 126-33.

Peeling away to go deep and gain new insight: The onion represented the layers of the text that they discovered. The students said, “As we uncover more (in the text), it makes us discover new layers of ourselves. And it makes us cry.” They recalled studying one particular text and feeling as if they could have gone on and on, reading and re-reading and discussing and continuing to make new discoveries. For them, text study in *havruta* was not simply an intellectual process, but a process that engaged their whole beings.

Paying attention and being open: The yellow light in the stop-light represented the idea of slowing down. The importance of doing this became particularly apparent to this pair when the task they had been given by the teachers helped the *havrutot* in the room slow down their study process. The end result was that the class as a whole generated many, many insights about a very short text which, at first glance, did not appear to hold an abundance of meaning. The students continued to explain that the slowing down was not just about reading the text, but also about how they encountered others, particularly highlighting the value of not rushing to judge another (or her ideas).

These symbols represent important aspects of *havruta* study: the work required to be able to work together and affect each other’s thinking and the amazing possibility of developing into a *havruta* unit; the peeling away of layers of meaning, boring into something or someone to gain new insight; and the necessity of paying attention and being open in order to successfully work together towards greater insight. These aspects of *havruta* study are supported by the six central practices discussed in this dissertation. By focusing on these practices, engaging and reflecting on them, *havruta* partners are

able to work together, discover new layers of meaning and remain open to new possibilities.

This returns us to a question that I raised at the beginning of the chapter. Why study in *havruta*? Why might teachers choose to use this form of learning in their classrooms? And why might students be interested in it, despite the hard work that it entails? For many teachers and learners, *havruta* is a learning strategy that can help students sharpen their understanding of the text. Through working together, students are able to share different perspectives, uncovering new textual layers and sharpening their ideas. As a teaching and learning strategy, *havruta* must be matched with the goals and needs of the particular context in which it is being used. If a teacher is most interested in covering a large amount of material in a short time frame or if a teacher wants to convey to her students particular scholarly interpretations of the text, *havruta* may not be the best way to do this. If students have a particularly hard time studying without direct teacher guidance, then spending a lot of time in *havruta* might also probably not be a good idea. In both of these cases, the learning goals and context might require a different learning strategy, such as direct teacher instruction or independent seat work. On the other hand, if students have developed some of the skills necessary for peer learning and a teacher is interested in students exploring the multiple facets of meaning in a particular piece of text, *havruta* could be a very useful learning tool. Having an opportunity to discuss a complex text with another person is a wonderful way to generate new insights and refine ideas. Alternatively, if the learning goals are about helping students learn how to work

better with others, work in *havruta* would also be a means towards achieving such a goal.²⁵⁹

There is another level of consideration regarding *havruta*. *Havruta* is not simply a learning strategy. Through it, we learn and enhance our capacities to be in relationship with another person, with texts that connect us to a larger cultural, religious and historical community, and even with God. This is perhaps the force of the word “merge” used by the two students quoted above. The Talmud tells us that when two people work together, it brings God’s love upon them and that when two people listen to each other when studying a *halakhah*, the *shekhinah* -- God’s emanation on earth -- listens to them.²⁶⁰ *Havruta* is not just a means towards better textual understanding or learning the rules of collaborative work. It is also a powerful end in and of itself. At its best, *havruta* engages our hearts and minds, our whole person, with important others. Through this complex engagement, it can help us cultivate both our humanity and our relationships with others, simultaneously constituting those others and allowing us to be constituted by them. And in this process, perhaps, if we are lucky, we have the ephemeral sense of “flow,”²⁶¹ that energy which occurs when we are creating and in sync and momentarily have the sensation of being part of something that we do not completely control and that is bigger than our individual selves.

²⁵⁹ On matching learning goals with learning strategies see Johnson and Johnson, *Learning Together and Alone, Cooperative, Competitive, and Individualistic Learning*.

²⁶⁰ Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 63a. See also Gilla Rosen’s interpretation of these texts in Gilla Rosen, “Empathy and Aggression in Torah Study: Analysis of a Talmudic Description of Havruta Learning,” in *Wisdom from All of My Teachers*, ed. Jeffrey Saks and Susan Handelman (Jerusalem: Urim Publications, 2003).

²⁶¹ See Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Creativity, Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1996). See also Rav Kook, *Orot Hatorah* for his discussion of the power of the creative flow and its connection to God, the source of all that is created.

Appendix A

Transcript Notations

.	falling intonation
?	rising intonation
,	continuing intonation
()	empty parentheses indicate impossible transcription
(word)	filled parentheses indicate best guess about what is being said
((word))	double parentheses enclose author's descriptions or notes and sometimes the addition of a word to a quote so that it makes sense to the reader
[]	brackets around one word or letter indicate that a word has been inserted to assist the reader's understanding or that the case of a letter has been changed.
[]	brackets on successive lines indicate the beginning and ending of overlapping speech
-	speech is cut off (generally by other person)
=	no noticeable interruption between utterances
...	some content has been cut out
(5)	silence of 5 or more seconds, timed to the nearest second
word	author's emphasis

Other notes on transcription

I often took out the word “like” in most places in the transcript.

In the tables, I often took out repeated words (for example, "because, because") and "ya's" and "hms" to make the excerpts easier to read. I sometimes took out "hms" in Chapters Four and Five but did not do this in Chapter Three, since these additional words were part of the analysis of the practices being discussed in that chapter.

Appendix B

Matching *Havrutot*

How were *havrutot* matched in the DeLeT *Beit Midrash* for Teachers?

At the start of the summer, the head of the DeLeT program, in consultation with the teachers in the *Beit Midrash*, pairs students in *havrutot*. Faculty consider what they know about students based on their experiences with them and based on students' applications and work in the program. One challenge is having to make the pairs before faculty members have had much time to get to know the new students. Every effort is made to pair new students with returning students so that students from different cohorts can get to know one another and so that students with more experience studying in this context can help guide newer students.

When matching the pairs, faculty consider the past experiences of students studying Jewish texts and their Hebrew fluency and try to match students with similar backgrounds in these areas. However, creating pairs based on text study experience and Hebrew proficiency does not guarantee a successful *havruta*. For example, one match between two students with a lot of text study experience and a high level of Hebrew proficiency was not so successful; the pair often studied the texts very quickly, making many assumptions about what they knew and therefore, not examining certain parts of the text with care. One could imagine that with a less experienced partner, this may not have happened if the partner with less knowledge was persistent in asking questions.

Other factors are also considered and affect the pairing, such as students' stance toward studying in the *Beit Midrash* (Are they invested in this kind of study and open to

learning from it and their partner?), preferred modes of learning (Do they focus solely on the information in the text? Do they try to build connections to their own experiences? Do they read metaphorically or literally?), learning goals in the *Beit Midrash* (Do they want to get better at working with others? Do they want to get better at generating a lot of different readings about a text? Do they want to get better at reading Hebrew?). For example, one student whose tendency was to focus on translating and reading the texts literally was paired with someone with a weaker Hebrew background but more expertise in uncovering metaphors and the big ideas behind narratives. Each person in this pair appreciated what the other had to offer. Through the course of studying together, one partner learned a lot more Hebrew and recognized the value of working through the Hebrew text, and the other learned to spend time trying to figure out the meaning of the text, beyond the literal translation. Another match was made between two students who had very different levels of Hebrew and text study experience but who really respected one another and wanted to learn from each other.

There is no hard science to determining the matching, and teachers understand that all pairs need to be supported to be able to work as well as possible together. Towards this end, each student at the start of the *Beit Midrash* works on an assignment with her *havruta* in order to help the partners get to know one another and their learning styles and articulate their goals. Students also engage in other in-class work and take home assignments that give them an opportunity to see other *havrutot* at work and reflect on their own *havruta* experience.

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