Article

Resources of Jewish Culture: A Case Study of Two Talmud Teachers

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Abstract: This article offers a conceptual framework for understanding the diversity of pedagogies found in Talmud classrooms. It looks at how two different Orthodox Talmud teachers responded to an academic article about constructivist learning practices in the context of a professional development program. The case study presented in this article helps to illuminate Lev Vygotsky's theory of learning. Ultimately, this article argues that whether Jewish studies teachers are open or resistant to constructivist learning practices depends less on their particular theory of teaching and learning than on their understanding of Jewish culture.

1. Introduction

Although Lev Vygotsky is frequently cited by education scholars as promoting student inquiry in the classroom (see e.g., Alexander et al. 2002; Alvermann et al. 1990; Blanton et al. 2001; Shargel 2013), Vygotsky himself held a more complicated position. In certain circumstances, he believed that direct instruction is more appropriate than student inquiry. This study suggests that, because of their particular goals, religious Jewish educators serve as an illuminating case study for understanding the nuances of Vygotsky's position. Because religious Jewish educators often see themselves as uniquely responsible for transmitting a body of knowledge to the next generation (Hassenfeld 2017), they may negotiate the choice between direct instruction and student inquiry differently than general studies teachers would. This study presents a case study of two religious Jewish educators negotiating between direct instruction and student inquiry and, thereby, sheds light on the nuances of Vygotsky's position.

Vygotsky (2012) investigated how children learn new concepts. He distinguished two kinds of concepts: spontaneous and scientific. Spontaneous concepts emerge from everyday life. Vygotsky wrote, "The development of spontaneous concepts knows no systematicity and goes from the phenomena upward toward generalizations" (p. 157). For example, a child sees a specific dog and then another dog, and then another. Over time, she forms the concept of a dog in general. Scientific concepts, on the other hand, do not emerge from everyday life. They must be taught. They move from the abstract to the concrete. They begin from "initial verbal definition, which, being applied systematically, gradually comes down to concrete phenomena" (p. 157). For example, in teaching grammar a teacher may begin by defining a verb as "an action word." Students come to understand this concept through applying it to specific cases.

Vygotsky argued that direct instruction must necessarily play some role in teaching scientific concepts. After all, these concepts begin from the child receiving a definition from the teacher. But Vygotsky also recognized that this initial definition might not be enough for the child to grasp a scientific concept. To be able to use and apply the definition, the child must engage in active, cognitive work. This line of reasoning led Vygotsky (2012) to pose a question: "What is the relation between the assimilation of information and the internal development of a scientific concept in the

child's consciousness?" (p. 158). While Vygotsky was interested in the psychological relationship between instruction and development, the pedagogical implications of his question continue to animate educational debates today: how should educators balance direct instruction and student inquiry?

Vygotsky (1980) answered this question arguing that direct instruction and the cognitive development of the student build on each other dialectically. To illustrate this complex interaction, Vygotsky focused on writing. He argued that many teachers failed to teach writing effectively. In Vygotsky's words:

> The teaching of writing has been conceived in narrow practical terms. Children are taught to trace out letters and make words out of them, but they are not taught written language. Instead of being founded on the needs of children as they naturally develop and on their own activity, writing is given to them from without, from the teacher's hands (p. 102).

By over-emphasizing direct instruction in the teaching of writing and making no room for student inquiry, teachers missed an opportunity. If teachers focused less on transmitting the mechanics of writing and more on students' discovery of "written language," students would be more likely to succeed (Engeström 1991, 2001; Leont'ev 1981; Wertsch 1993). One imagines helping young students discover writing as a means of communication. If someone is not with them in the room to talk to, but they wish to communicate a message to them, the young child can explore writing as a tool for doing so. This "writing," which starts as scribbles on a page, develops through direct instruction of alphabetics and phonics. The direct instruction of alphabetics and phonics pushes students to ask more questions about writing as symbolic speech. This, in turn, accelerates students' mastery of formal writing.

Lave and Wenger (1991), who first developed the theory of situated learning, admired Vygotsky's approach. They saw in Vygotsky's defense of student inquiry and "their own activity" (1980, p. 102) a defense of social learning. To value student inquiry and activity in the educative process is to emphasize the social nature of learning and the cultures and environments in which they are embedded. Lave and Wenger explained that "there is no activity that is not situated" (p. 33) and there is no activity that is not an act of learning. The epistemological principle underlying the theory of situated learning was that "a community of practice is an intrinsic condition for the existence of knowledge" (p. 24). In other words, every action one takes is a practice that belongs to a certain community of practice.

Learning, according to Lave and Wenger (1991), requires three features: legitimacy, peripherality, and participation. Legitimacy refers to how a learner is perceived by the community of practice. Does the community of practice accept the learner? Is she eligible for joining the community of practice? For example, a child is expected and invited to join the adult community when she grows up. A non-Christian is welcomed and encouraged to accept Jesus and join the community of believers. But a low-income student at Princeton University may never be invited to join a Princeton eating club. Without legitimacy, one does not have access. While the child and new Christian have legitimacy in their respective communities of practice, the low-income student may not.

Peripherality refers to the learner's proximity to the community of practice. Can she metaphorically, or physically, see the community? Even if a newcomer is accepted by the community of practice and has access to it in theory, in reality, she may not have access to the central practices of the community. The example Lave and Wenger (1991) used in their study was apprentice butchers. Though these butchers-to-be had legitimacy in the community of practice of butchers, they did not have peripherality. In their apprenticeship, they were confined to jobs in the shop that were removed from the master butchers' work. They were left working the automatic wrapping machine for long periods of time. This prevented them from learning how to cut meat, a central practice for butchers. In their apprenticeship, they were not on the periphery looking in on the master butchers, but apart and sequestered.

Participation refers to engagement in the activity of practice. One could have legitimacy and peripherality, but not participation. A newcomer may in theory be invited into the community of

practice, may even be able to see the old-timers and watch them do the practices, but may not herself be able to participate in the practices. Lave and Wenger suggest that this scenario best matches the reality of school children. They have legitimacy to enter the adult community, they have peripherality in that they can watch the adult community, but at school they have no opportunities to engage in the practices of the adult community because the activities they do at school are not part of what the adults do. Compare the experience of doing arithmetic sheets in math class to the arithmetic adults use when food shopping (Lave 1988).

Lave and Wenger's situated learning theory adds a new layer to Vygotsky's discussion of how to balance direct instruction with student inquiry. Their argument implies that the balance between direct instruction and student inquiry depends on the adult activities for which teachers are preparing their students. Vygotsky, because of his particular sociocultural context, imagined the students he studied using reading and writing primarily to express themselves, communicate, and make meaning of the world around them. For this reason, he asserted that teaching students to read and write through direct instruction without student inquiry was misguided.

But reading and writing do not play these roles in every cultural context. In other words, what it means to successfully read and write is always relative to the society and culture of which those activities are a part (Scribner and Cole 1981). For example, in some religious communities, reading and writing center on the ritual recitation of authoritative texts and textual interpretations. Given this activity, one would expect text education in these communities to look very different. Learning to perform religious rituals competently or learning the behavioral standards of a religious community might shape the form education takes, particularly with respect to the balance of direct instruction and student inquiry.

Wells (1999, 2002), building on Lave and Wenger, introduced the notion that educators should offer students "cultural resources," those tools they will need to operate as adults in their particular sociocultural context. The cultural resources any particular community teaches depend on what is required of adults in that particular community. Vygotsky's critique of teaching writing essentially amounts to a claim that schools are failing to provide students with the cultural resource of writing as a means of adult expression. However, in a community that values the mechanical copying of authoritative texts, imagine the community of Torah scribes (*Soferim*) for example, the method of teaching writing that Vygotsky criticized might actually be quite effective. In sum, when communities require that adults repeat certain behaviors accurately or can produce particular items of knowledge on demand, teaching reading and writing exclusively through direct instruction, without room for student inquiry, may well be the most effective way to transmit cultural resources.

For example, Alan Peshkin (1988), in his revealing ethnography of a fundamentalist Christian school, quotes the headmaster's position on teaching and learning:

> The more you do that is student-centered, the more you surrender control of the class. Teacher-directed activity is the key to learning. Lecturing is more important than discussion. We believe strongly in the prepared person and that comes from our preaching heritage. Don't apologize for telling the kids what is right (p. 59).

In some religious educational contexts, teachers emphasize direct instruction over student inquiry. These communities have clear ideas about the correct ways to live in the world and may be wary of allowing individuals to explore their own questions and find their own meaning. Instead, they hope that religious education will initiate new members into the community of believers committed to religious practice (Peshkin 1988; Luhrmann 2012; Bielo 2009). These considerations suggest that the more a religious community values the competent performance of ritual or the accurate recitation of authoritative positions, the more it will rely on a pedagogy of direct instruction. Vygotsky (2012), after all, rooted his defense of student inquiry in a notion of education that values more than "empty verbalism" (pp. 158–159), and a notion of culture in which reading and writing are autonomous communicative acts.

Jewish education provides a unique test case for this hypothesis. Classical Jewish texts contain multiple and conflicting conceptions of what adult Jewish activity looks like. Some sources seem to align with stereotypes about religious education that the goal is rote memorization and obedience to authority. At the same time, Jewish tradition also includes many sources that emphasize inquiry and exploration (Panken 2005).

The first conception, which emphasizes the value of transmission, finds expression in various stories in the Talmud. For example, the Talmud praises Rabbi Eliezer reporting that he "never said anything he didn't hear from his teacher" (Tractate Sukkah 28a). In other words, Rabbi Eliezer portrays the good student as a perfect transmitter of authoritative interpretation. Rabbi Eliezer's statements suggest that the goal of reading Jewish texts, and therefore, of teaching and learning Jewish texts, is transmission and recitation of a fixed body of knowledge.

But alongside this elevation of tradition, Jewish tradition praises inquiry and exploration. In fact, in traditional Jewish text study, the biblical text never appears alone, but is accompanied by many commentaries. This design highlights the value of multiple interpretations.

In many editions of the Hebrew Bible, each biblical verse (or set of verses) is followed by nine different commentaries composed across Jewish history from the 2nd century to the 19th century (Figure 1). These commentaries offer different, often conflicting, answers to the same questions in a textual debate that extends across millennia (Maller 2013). The edition of the Hebrew Bible featured in Figure 1 is named, "*Torat Chaim*," ("the Living Torah") to emphasize that the document is never finished being written. Each time a new commentary is added, the Hebrew Bible, imagined as a living being, continues to grow.
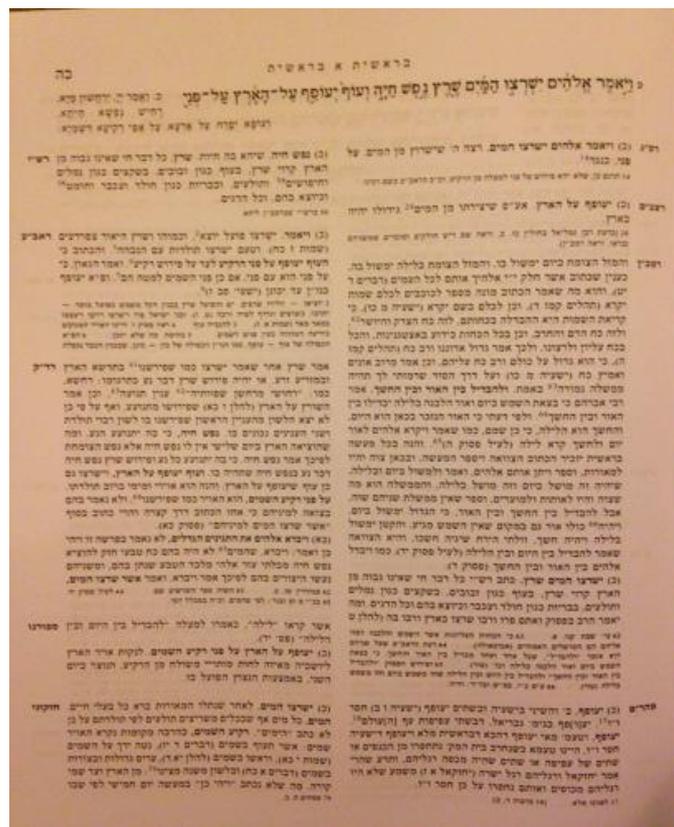

Figure 1. Page of *Torat Chaim*.

The value of inquiry finds clearest expression in the famous story of Rabbi Eliezer's conflict with the other Rabbis (Tractate Bava Metzia 59a–b). The story, a widely cited rabbinic text

(see, e.g., Berkovits 1983; Luban 2004; Rosenblatt and Sitterson 1991; Rubenstein 2002), begins with Rabbi Eliezer fighting with other Rabbis over a particular Jewish law. Rabbi Eliezer insists that his interpretation of the law is correct and to prove it he calls on God to intervene. To everyone's surprise, a divine voice booms out, "The law is in accordance with Rabbi Eliezer." But the story doesn't end here. Rabbi Joshua responds to the voice, "The law is not in heaven." His response establishes that the interpretation of Jewish law is much more than the recitation of authoritative interpretation as Rabbi Eliezer believes. It is a human activity about which it is possible to disagree. Ultimately, the majority rule of the Rabbis prevails over Rabbi Eliezer's position despite that fact that his position had divine approval. Interpretive autonomy prevails over divine decree.

The Jewish tradition contains voices that conceive of the central activity of Jewish life as the recitation of authoritative positions as well as those that conceive of the central activity of Jewish life as the autonomous interpretation of text. How do Jewish studies teachers in Jewish day schools negotiate between these conceptions? This study sought to explore how K-12 Jewish studies teachers reflect on their approaches to pedagogy as they encounter contemporary scholarship in education.

Specifically, I wanted to know:

1. How do Jewish studies teachers describe their own pedagogy with respect to direct instruction and student inquiry?
2. How do Jewish studies teachers respond to a scholarly article promoting a constructivist pedagogy that emphasizes student inquiry over direct instruction?

2. Materials and Methods

In the winter of 2014, I led a program titled, *Pedagogy Lishma* through the Jack, Joseph, and Morton Mandel Center for Studies in Jewish Education at Brandeis University. In the program, seven K-12 Jewish studies teachers from across North America met six times over the course of three months via Blue Jeans, a teleconferencing program. For each session, teachers read and discussed an article drawn from the field of education that explored an issue of pedagogy. This paper focuses on one article. For a more detailed description of the program and the articles read see Appendixs A and B.

I facilitated the sessions with a colleague. Teachers read the article in advance, wrote and submitted a response to the article, and read excerpts from each other's responses. Each session began with an open-ended question intended to re-acquaint teachers with the article. After each teacher responded, we moved into an open discussion where teachers shared their thoughts, questions, and ideas about the article. The facilitators participated in this open discussion minimally, occasionally probing teachers on their comments, or asking them to clarify and expand on their thoughts. While teachers ranged in their level of participation, every teacher spoke at least three times in every study session.

3. Participants

Participation in this program came with a $500 stipend. Participants in this program completed an application process. The application asked teachers to describe their professional trajectory, to describe one positive professional development experience they had had, and to respond to a quote from Devra Lehmann's research comparing English teachers to Jewish studies teachers (Lehmann 2008). It also asked for a letter of recommendation from a supervisor.

We received 21 complete applications (submitted by the due date and with a reference letter). We selected seven teachers to participate. We followed two guiding principles in our selection process: first, we wanted to put together a group of teachers that reflected the diversity of the North American Jewish community, and second, we wanted the most thoughtful, reflective applicants. We did not seek a representative sample of Jewish studies teachers, but rather an extreme case sample (Patton 1990) of some of the strongest educators in Jewish day schools. Given the responsibilities of teaching and working full-time, taking on an additional professional development was not easy. For this project, we chose strong teachers to explore what this study group looks like under ideal circumstances.

Participants were aware that this professional development was being conducted as part of a research study. The research for this study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Brandeis University, and was conducted in compliance with institutional and ethical standards for research with human participants.

4. Article

In our fifth session, we discussed Maren Aukerman's article "When Reading It Wrong is Getting It Right: Shared Evaluation Pedagogy Among Struggling Fifth Grade Readers." Aukerman (2007) argues that teachers should follow students as they try to make sense of texts rather than trying to impose any particular meaning or even process for arriving at a meaning. This pedagogy emphasizes student inquiry and looks very different from the stereotypical model of a teacher who seeks to teach her students the "right" answer. Student inquiry is so central to Aukerman's proposed pedagogy that she argues that teachers should never correct student interpretations even when those interpretations involve misreading the text (e.g., reading the word "best" as "beast"). Many teachers, even outside religious contexts, resist this approach (Nystrand 1997). I wondered how religious teachers, who are charged with transmitting religious values, would understand and react to this article. I hypothesized that at least some of the teachers would resist Aukerman's proposed pedagogy and argue for direct instruction from a place of religious conviction.

5. Data Collection

This study relied on two different data sources: reflection writing from the teachers and the transcripts of the study session. Some of the teachers wrote things they may not have felt comfortable saying in front of the group, while other teachers expressed themselves more articulately through speaking than writing.

5.1. Reflection Pieces

Before each session, the teachers wrote reflection pieces on the pedagogy article they had read. These reflection pieces followed the same format every time. After reading the article, teachers wrote a response to one of three questions: What was surprising to you about this article? What was troubling to you about this article? What was inspiring to you about this article? Teachers submitted these responses a week before the study session. They then had a chance to read a compilation of excerpts from each other's written responses that were distributed a few days before the study sessions.

5.2. Study Sessions

Study sessions took place every other Sunday evening from January 2014–March 2014. The group met online through an interactive platform. The sessions were audio and video recorded and then transcribed.

6. Data Analysis

The transcription of the study session focused on Aukerman's article was divided into talk turns and each talk turn was coded. A talk turn was defined as a single participant comment, including any follow up question and response. When coding the written reflection pieces, which ranged from 1–2 pages, I coded each response as a single unit. My interest was in understanding how Jewish studies teachers responded to Aukerman's push for student inquiry when readings texts. Therefore, I used two pairs of mutually exclusive codes. First, I coded each talk turn and written response by whether the teacher seemed receptive to Aukerman's proposed pedagogy or resistant. Second, I coded each unit by whether they justified their stance with reference to Jewish concepts or not. Finally, I used the code "neutral" when none of these codes seemed to apply. Appendix C provides the complete codebook.

To assess the reliability of the codes, a second coder coded all written reflections and the session transcript. For the written reflections, the two coders agreed in six out of seven cases. After discussing the single case of disagreement, we decided that while the piece has elements of several codes, the author never took a clear stance. Indeed, this reflection was written in elliptical bullet points rather than in full paragraphs like the others. In the end, we decided to code it as "neutral."

For the session transcript, a second coder coded 26 talk turns. In distinguishing receptiveness from resistance, the two coders agreed in 96% of cases (Cohen's κ = 0.92). In distinguishing a Jewish rationale from a general pedagogical rationale, the two coders agreed in 92.3% of cases (Cohen's κ = 0.84). The three cases of disagreement were resolved through discussion.

7. Results

In discussing the article, three teachers were receptive to Aukerman's approach. These teachers embraced the idea of a constructivist pedagogy that focuses on student inquiry. In their written reflections and their comments during the study session, they expressed eagerness to try this model of teaching. One teacher said:

> I was really struck by the line that describes socio-cultural construction of text . . . . This is what I want my students to do. I want them to wrestle over the text . . . . My question is, some material needs to be frontloaded at some level so they start to move out of their already existing cultural framework. Does this fit?
>
> (Moshe, written reflection)

This teacher was excited about the idea of a pedagogy that focuses on student inquiry. He immediately moved to consider the challenges of the approach and how to overcome them. He shares Aukerman's goal of students encountering the text on their own terms and wonders about how to scaffold that encounter. The other receptive teachers agreed. They saw the student encounter with the text as valuable for its own sake regardless of whether the students got to a particular answer. The important thing was that they "wrestle over the text."

Four teachers resisted the idea of a pedagogy that focuses on student inquiry. In their written reflections and their comments during the study session, these teachers argued that this teaching would not work in their classroom—either because the obstacles to implementation were too great, or, more often, because it did not serve their teaching goals. For example, one teacher explained:

> I think what I'm having a difficulty with, and that kind of irked me in the reading and made me think that I could never do this in my classroom, is that the example that happened in the classroom didn't seem very valuable to me where the discussion went . . . . I want students to get something out of my class. I have certain enduring understandings that we're going to be following. (Saul, study session)

For this teacher, student inquiry was not, in and of itself, a value. If such a discussion failed to get students to the enduring understanding he had set in advance, it was of limited value. The other resisting teachers echoed this position. They each emphasized that they had material, ideas, and content knowledge that they wished to transmit to their students and that this way of teaching would prevent them from doing so.

One could easily imagine teachers in any educational context, religious or not, expressing receptiveness or resistance. One wouldn't necessarily think that this group of religious educators would see their stance on Aukerman and her proposed constructivist pedagogy as connected to their religious identities. But, in fact, whether receptive or resistant, all but one of the teachers explained their position with reference to their conception of religious education. The receptive teachers appreciated Aukerman's constructivist pedagogy because they saw student inquiry when reading sacred texts as an essential goal of Jewish education. These teachers emphasized the value of inquiry, discussion and

dialogue manifest in the Jewish tradition. For them, it was not a stretch to teach a religious class with students' own questions and interpretations at the center.

The resistant teachers argued that Aukerman's constructivist pedagogy directly contradicted the goals of Jewish education, which in their view requires transmission of authoritative interpretations and normative guidelines for behavior. These teachers emphasized the value of submission to authority and faithful transmission also manifest in the Jewish tradition.

To show how teachers explained themselves in religious terms, the following analysis will focus on two teachers, one receptive and one resistant, chosen for their similarity. Both are white, Orthodox, and male, with extensive backgrounds in classical Jewish text study. Both teachers spent many years studying in Yeshiva (in Europe and Israel) and entered teaching without formal teacher training, though both reported participating in ongoing professional development at their schools. In other words, these two teachers lived very similar lives and shared a deep commitment to following the strictures of traditional Jewish law. Both these teachers grounded their reactions to Aukerman in their conceptions of effective Jewish education. Despite their similarities, these teachers had opposite reactions to Aukerman. One expressed receptiveness to her pedagogy, the other, resistance. In understanding how these two religious educators explained their responses in terms of their conceptions of the central activity of Jewish life, we begin to understand the nuance of Vygotsky's educational theory.

8. Jewish Education as Transmission

Shimon resisted Aukerman's push for a pedagogy that focuses on student inquiry. His written response to the article was telling (see Table 1).

Table 1. Shimon's Response.

	Shimon's Written Response
1	I worry about the role of *mesorah* (tradition) in her conception of knowledge acquisition.
2	Indeed, the Jewish model of knowledge was not through text study but through oral
3	teaching. Even the written Torah was orally learnt and explained. Text, although
4	important, is not necessarily the primary source of knowledge—but rather our forbearers
5	are. Learning Judaism is really about living Judaism, and perhaps cannot be contained in
6	a text. The ultimate authority lies not in my perception of what I feel is right or justified,
7	but is laid down by Rabbinic authority... If education shifts over to what she is proposing
8	I am wondering if *mesorah* (tradition) would be out the door.

Shimon resisted a pedagogy that puts student inquiry at the center. Shimon stated explicitly that having students make their own sense of the text in front of them (the Hebrew Bible or the Talmud) is not his primary goal. These texts need to be "explained," (line 3) and these explanations lie in the words of our "forbearers" (line 5), some of which are recorded but some of which remain "only through oral teaching" (line 3).

For Shimon, Jewish education is not about encountering texts and finding one's own meaning, but about accepting the authoritative meaning of a text recounted by an expert (line 2). This is because, as he put it, "learning Judaism is really about living Judaism" which "perhaps cannot be contained in a text," (lines 5–6). What does it mean to "live Judaism?" Shimon immediately explained: It is not to be guided by what any individual feels is "right or justified" (line 7), but rather to submit to "rabbinic authority" (line 7). The study of Jewish texts is a means to the end of understanding how one should behave in the world. Some classical Jewish texts convey these instructions directly, but for others, one has to understand the authoritative textual interpretations of our "forbearers" to know what to do. Like the instructions on the wall of a classroom for what to do in the case of a fire, it doesn't matter if or how the students interpret the text as long as they do the right thing in case of a fire. For Shimon, knowing how to live Jewishly, knowing what behaviors are permitted and forbidden, what to do for each holiday, how to prepare food that is permitted to eat, these instructions are tantamount to the fire

drill instructions. The information must be accurately transferred to students, and if the text helps, great. If not, forget the texts.

Given his conception of Jewish education, Shimon's problem with Aukerman's pedagogy becomes obvious. If student interpretation and textual hypothesizing is given precedence in the classroom, then how will the students learn the "*mesorah*" (tradition), the authoritative interpretations of the text? Shimon's educational goals are incompatible with the pedagogy Aukerman proposes. And in fact, Aukerman (2007) agrees. She writes, "When students pursue their ideas and assume substantial ownership over the conversation, they might never get to a common understanding of the big points you want them to take away (p. 38)." To teach texts with a student-centered pedagogy, the teacher must hold as her goal to develop critical readers who are comfortable textually hypothesizing. The teacher cannot teach texts this way if her goal is to get students to arrive at a specific interpretation of a text.

9. Jewish Education as Dialogue

Given common stereotypes about religious education, Shimon's approach may not be that surprising. Indeed, many people, including the head of school in Peshkin's ethnography, see authoritative instruction as central to religious education. But this study found that there is no necessary connection between Jewish education and teaching submission to religious authority.

David, the second Orthodox Jewish studies teacher, who also teaches at an Orthodox school, had a different reaction to Aukerman's pedagogy and its focus on student inquiry. David embraced it. His response essay to the article was telling (see Table 2).

Table 2. David's Response.

	David's Written Response
1	I thought that this approach that we saw in the reading is much closer to teaching
2	Talmud really. The Talmud is really a free discussion, almost free discussion, and
3	mistakes are an important part of the learning-mistakes or misunderstandings.
4	And this trial and error takes time when we learn Talmud. And one of my
5	thoughts was how we lost it in teaching text. We lost the rhythm of the *Torah*
6	*She'Be'Al Peh* and the teaching of *Torah She'Be'Al Peh* which is actually based on
7	"Let's try to understand." Not everything will be just thrown on us by the Rabbi.
8	And it's interesting how teaching Talmud somehow became the antithesis of
9	learning Talmud.

David was receptive to a pedagogy that focuses on student inquiry. For him, the Talmud itself is essentially a project in textual meaning making. It is as David explains in line 2, "really a free discussion." For David, learning how to participate in this discussion is the ultimate goal of Jewish education.

David believed that much of Jewish education has lost sight of this goal. He explained, "[W]e lost it in teaching text. We lost the rhythm of the *Torah She'Be'Al Peh* and the teaching of *Torah She'Be'Al Peh*" (lines 5-6). David used a traditional name for the Talmud, *Torah She'Be'Al Peh*, the Oral Torah. In doing so, David emphasized the orality of Jewish text study. Just as the Talmud is structured as a long discussion of classical Jewish texts including the Bible, David pointed out, modern study of Talmud must continue that dialogue. David explicitly rejected Shimon's view that learning to accept Rabbinic authority ought to be the goal. David explained in line 7, "Not everything will be just thrown on us by the Rabbi."

He noted the consonance between his vision of Jewish education and Aukerman's approach: "I thought that [Aukerman's] approach is much closer to teaching Talmud really" (lines 1–2). David ended by writing, "And it's interesting how teaching Talmud somehow became the antithesis of learning Talmud" (lines 8–9). In other words, the teaching of classical Jewish texts in school is no longer connected to the learning of those texts in the community.

For David, Jewish education is not first and foremost about behaviors and instructions, but about learning how to learn Jewish texts. This goal requires giving students the freedom to encounter texts and make sense of them on their own. It cannot be accomplished through the passive repetition of authoritative interpretations. Talmud study embodies both an engagement with the dialogic back and forth *in* the text as well as a continued dialogic back and forth between modern learners *over* the text. The true heart of Jewish culture is the *Torah Haim*, the *Living* Torah. David doesn't see Aukerman's approach as modern or progressive. Rather, his receptiveness to Aukerman's pedagogy comes down to the fact that he sees it as restoring Jewish education to a more authentic past.

10. Discussion

This study examined the reactions of seven exemplary Jewish studies teachers to a contemporary article in educational research that advocates for a constructivist pedagogy that places student inquiry at the center. Eliciting teachers' own accounts of their teaching has its limitations. Misalignment between teachers' descriptions of their teaching and their actual classroom teaching is well documented (see e.g., Alvermann et al. 1990; Hassenfeld 2017). Nonetheless, if we hope to help teachers reflect on and adjust their teaching, we need to understand how they respond to new pedagogies. Where are they likely to feel resistant? Inspired? This study focuses on what may have been their first encounter with constructivist pedagogy precisely to get insight into the nature of Jewish studies teachers' experiences of that encounter.

In this study, teachers disagreed about whether this constructivist pedagogy was right for the Jewish studies classroom, and they framed their reactions not in general educational terms but in religious terms. They grounded their stances in their conceptions of successful Jewish education. Two very similar teachers, who shared a gender, a school setting, and a denominational identity, had different conceptions. One saw the essential goal of Jewish education as learning the authoritative rabbinic interpretations of Jewish texts. The other saw the essential goal of Jewish education as learning how to make sense of Jewish texts independently. How can two teachers, who live very similar Jewish lives, arrive at such different conceptions of Jewish education? That is, how can one see student inquiry as a potential obstacle to effective Jewish education, while the other sees it as the very essence of Jewish education? Why is it that religious denominational affiliation does not, as previously suggested (Lehmann 2008), determine pedagogy?

Shimon and David, two Orthodox Jews, fundamentally disagree about the "resources of the [Jewish] culture" (Wells 1999, p. 137). Of course, David agrees that following Jewish law is important, and Shimon accepts that participating in the dialogism and the discussion of questions that goes on in Talmud is appropriate (at least for advanced students). But they disagree about the core cultural resource of Judaism. For Shimon, mastering the performance of Jewish observance is the key to living Jewishly, for David, participating in the activity of Jewish learning is the key.

This study suggests that the ways teachers talk about pedagogy are deeply shaped by their own vision of legitimate participation in adult community (Lave and Wenger 1991). In this study, two teachers, who taught the same subject and identified as members of the same religious community, nonetheless, had different visions of what legitimate adult participation in that community looks like. Each made explicit reference to the ways he hoped his students would participate in Jewish communal life as adults. And each saw his approach as the only authentic one.

But there is no reason that this should be the case. We could ask Jewish studies teachers to explicitly reflect on their conception of legitimate adult participation. Teacher education for Jewish studies teachers, and all religious educators, could facilitate teacher candidates through a process that would encourage them to articulate, and ultimately, interrogate their vision of who their students will be once they have completed their education. In asking these questions, teacher candidates would be pushed to consider a much broader range of pedagogical approaches.

The focus on a particular religious community in this study illuminates an aspect of Vygotsky's argument that often goes unnoticed. Many researchers hold Vygotsky up as a champion of student

inquiry in the classroom (see e.g., Alexander et al. 2002; Alvermann et al. 1990; Blanton et al. 2001; Shargel 2013). But Vygotsky himself is explicit that the balance between teaching mechanics and teaching self-expression in writing is relative to what constitutes adult writing. As sociocultural conceptions of adult writing change, the balance between mechanics and self-expression in education will also change. Neither student inquiry nor direct instruction is a good in and of itself. Rather, they are approaches designed to produce adults with certain capacities. In Vygotsky's sociocultural context, everyone wrote by hand. Vygotsky, therefore, spent a lot of time talking about tracing letters. For Vygotsky, mechanically fluent handwriting was an essential adult skill. At the same time, he feared that teachers, in overemphasizing mechanics, were giving short shrift to expression. Today, more and more children grow up as digital natives, typing on computers from an early age. No doubt, Vygotsky would acknowledge that for adults today, the mechanics of handwriting may have reduced importance.

The teachers in this study, driven by different conceptions of legitimate adult participation, unsurprisingly, differed in their approaches to pedagogy. This phenomenon is a clear case of the very process Vygotsky tried to articulate. In all education, religious or otherwise, the pedagogical choices teachers make cannot be determined solely by a general list of best practices for teaching across the curriculum, or by a subject specific pedagogy. Ultimately, teachers and teacher educators must consider the conceptions of adult activity for which they hope to prepare these students. These considerations form an essential, and perhaps underemphasized, dimension of pedagogical decision making.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Appendix A. Description of the Program

In the winter of 2014, I led a professional development program titled, *Pedagogy Lishma*, through the Jack, Joseph, and Morton Mandel Center for Studies in Jewish Education at Brandeis University. The program brought together seven experienced Jewish studies teachers from Orthodox and Community Jewish day schools, who had been teaching for at least three years. The program consisted of six one-hour online (videoconference) study sessions. Each session centered on discussion of an article on pedagogy that the participants prepared (and wrote about) in advance. Four of the articles discussed pedagogy specifically as it related to the teaching of Jewish texts, and two of the articles discussed pedagogy in the context of general education (one from math education and one from literacy education). Four of the articles were empirical, while two were conceptual. All of the articles modeled pedagogical investigation and pushed teachers to think about how they teach and how their students learn. As a small study group, the seven teachers engaged in discussion of the six articles and their application to their teaching of Jewish studies. I facilitated the online sessions, corresponding with the teachers between sessions, reading their responses and sending excerpts from each response to the group. Professor Jon Levisohn served as an advisor and participated in the sessions as well.

Appendix B. Academic Articles

Table A1. Readings from the Small Study Group.

Article	Summary
Kanarek, J. 2010. The pedagogy of slowing down: Teaching Talmud in a summer Kollel. *Teaching Theology and Religion* 13(1): 15–34.	In this article Kanarek describes a pedagogy she employs where she helps students read rabbinic texts carefully with an eye towards ambiguity and multiple interpretations.
Kent, O. 2010. A theory of havruta learning. *Journal of Jewish Education* 76(3): 215–245.	In this article Kent makes the case that havruta learning is a pedagogy that requires careful and thoughtful instructional practice to implement successfully. She suggests the necessary instructional practices.
Holtz, B. W. 2003. *Textual knowledge: Teaching the Bible in theory and in practice* (Vol. 1). New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America.	In this chapter Holtz outlines a number of different orientations a teacher could take in teaching Hebrew Bible and explores the pedagogies and instructional practices involved in each orientation.

Table A1. *Cont.*

Article	Summary
Levisohn, J. A. 2010. A menu of orientations to the teaching of rabbinic literature. *Journal of Jewish Education* 76(1): 4–51.	In this article Levisohn outlines a number of different orientations a teacher could take in teaching Rabbinic texts and explores the pedagogies and instructional practices involved in each orientation.
Aukerman, M. S. 2007. When reading it wrong is getting it right: Shared evaluation pedagogy among struggling fifth grade readers. *Research in the Teaching of English* 42(1): 56–103.	In this article from literacy education, Aukerman explores a student-centered, constructivist pedagogy in which students generate and discuss their own interpretations of the text, however close or far they fall from the standard understanding of the text.
Ball, D. L. 1993. With an eye on the mathematical horizon: Dilemmas of teaching elementary school mathematics. *The Elementary School Journal* 93(4): 373–397.	In this article from math education, Ball writes about a number of dilemmas of practice she experienced in her efforts to teach math.

Appendix C. Codebook for Aukerman Article Study Session

　　Coding Rule:

1.　A single episode could, within it, receive either a "receptiveness" code or a "resistance" code.
2.　The same single episode would also receive either a "religious justification" code or "general justification" code.
3.　An episode that did not fit into the above codes received the code "neutral."

Table A2. Codebook.

Code		Description	Example
Receptiveness	REC	A teacher comment that expressed receptiveness to the possibility of incorporating constructivist pedagogy in their classroom.	"The moment we can change to see teaching in a different way, it's actually very interesting the article... When I understood that I have a certain image of a teacher and I have to change something, it was really, really interesting."
Resistance	RES	A teacher comment that expressed resistance to the idea of incorporating constructivist pedagogy in their classroom.	"It's not valuable for them to spend the time . . . This isn't how I would run a class."
Justification-Religious	JR	This code refers to time where a teacher invoked a religious rationale for explaining their resistance or receptiveness to constructivist pedagogy.	"As a Jewish text teacher, or teacher of theology, it [the article] raises a really huge question, like what is the nature of knowledge, especially as we're teaching Torah . . . this then effects the practices that occur in classrooms."
Justification-General	JG	This code refers to time where a teacher invoked a general, non-religious rationale for explaining their resistance or receptiveness to constructivist pedagogy. Usually, this had to do with logistical considerations or a philosophical conception of teaching and learning.	"This would just not work in my classroom."
Neutral	N	This code refers to a teacher comment that did not touch on their teaching or the article.	"Can you say which paragraph it is?"

Appendix D. Teachers' Responses to Aukerman Article

Table A3. Teachers' Responses.

Teachers	Written Reflection	Study Session
Jane	Receptive/Not Jewish	Resistant/Jewish
Moshe	Receptive/Jewish	Receptive/Jewish
Tamar	Resistant/Jewish	Resistant/Mixed
David	Receptive/Jewish	Receptive/Jewish
Shimon	Resistant/Jewish	Resistant/Jewish
Saul	Resistant/Jewish	Resistant/Jewish
Yael	N/A	Receptive/Not Jewish

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