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### CONCEPTIONS OF THE STUDY OF JEWISH TEXTS IN TEACHERS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Elie Holzer

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The proliferation of the study of Jewish texts in settings of teachers' professional development poses a challenge for teacher educators. What is the study of these texts to provide for teachers? What would be ways for these texts to be studied in order to contribute to the education of teachers? This paper presents four conceptual approaches of current practices and discussions as to the role of the study of Jewish texts in teachers' professional development. Three approaches are mainly concerned with the questions of *at* teachers should know and do not pay enough attention to, and, one of the key questions of teacher education, *at* teachers may learn. A fourth possible approach is therefore presented. It draws on recent development in the field of teacher education, calling for the investigation of teaching and learning by teachers. It describes what would be the conditions so as to have the study of Jewish texts become a "site" for the investigation of teaching and learning. This approach seeks to integrate some of *at* teachers should learn with *at* they may learn it and attempts to show what might be a role of the study of traditional texts in the context of professional development.

The study of classical Jewish texts occupies a crucial place in Jewish religious tradition. Throughout the centuries, these texts have served a variety of purposes, for example as sources of legal religious behavior, moral guidance, or spiritual inspiration. Moreover, the e

to be an implicit assumption that the study of Jewish texts will provide types of knowledge that will have an impact on the teachers. In this paper, I intend to present and discuss one possible conceptual map of ways teacher educators conceptualize the role and the purpose of studying Jewish texts in the context of teacher education.<sup>2</sup>

To do so, I will organize the discussion of the various conceptualizations around three questions that a teacher educator might ask in planning professional development for teachers.

The first question pertains to the *at a e a d*,<sup>2</sup> the underlying the study of Jewish texts in the context of professional development. Why Jewish texts at all? For what purpose are texts studied? What is it that can make the study of Jewish texts beneficial in the context of professional development? What is it that teacher educators hope teachers will learn from text study?

A second question pertains to the choice of Jewish *te t*. Which *g e e* of texts should teachers study? What knowledge do these texts hold that is important for teachers to study? How is the study of these particular texts meant to serve the purposes that were identified?

A third question pertains to what I will call the *edax a* of teacher education, which refers to the ways teachers may learn in the context of professional development, and more specifically, ways they learn to teach. How are the teachers to be engaged in the study of these texts in the context of professional development? These would be ways of learning that would not only facilitate the intellectual assimilation of these texts but would also engage the teachers in ways of thinking and learning that will promote good future teaching.

Looking at the work of teacher educators in the field and examining some of the literature produced by Jewish educators of Jewish education, there seem to be three different models to the study of Jewish texts in professional development.

Model 1: “Jewish texts for *T a L a* study.” Teachers study texts in order to be engaged in the activity of study and in order to add to their general Jewish knowledge.

Model 2: “Jewish texts for subject matter knowledge.” Teachers study texts in order to increase their knowledge of the discipline they are expected to teach. This is not a simple idea. I will present three variations on what it means to know more content knowledge.

<sup>2</sup>In this article, “teacher education” is to include both pre- and in-service education.

Model 3: “Jewish texts for meta-educational knowledge.” Teachers study texts in order to deepen their knowledge of goals of Jewish education and the normative values that should be embedded in the practice of Jewish education.

Although each of these models contributes to the education of teachers, none of them places the pedagogy of teacher education at the center of Jewish text study. I will therefore offer a fourth model, the study of “Jewish texts for investigating teaching and learning,” which attempts to integrate the study of Jewish texts with some important elements of teachers’ learning to teach. Finally, I will conclude with a few critical reflections inviting further research.

For each of the models that I will describe, I will present the way it addresses the three questions outlined above. The following chart is a representation of the way we will organize our discussion:



Why should the study of Jewish texts take place in the context of teacher education? Often, the teacher educator will offer the following rationale: lifelong study is a central Jewish value, therefore every member of the community should be involved in Jewish study. The same applies to teachers; each time they gather they should dedicate time to some Jewish text study, no matter what the professional agenda of their gathering. The purpose of the study is to foster this important Jewish value among Jewish educators. Teacher educators will also stress the purpose of the study of Jewish texts as a way for the teachers to become more Jewishly knowledgeable.

Since in this approach the study of Jewish content for its own sake is what drives the study, the question of what Jewish content a *teacher* needs to know is not specifically addressed. Consequently, no explicit thought is given to the *genre* of texts that should be studied.

Sometimes a teacher educator will incorporate the study of a text that is related to the theme of the teacher education program. For example, if the program deals with the education of special needs children, one could begin with the study and discussion of a text about the value of providing learning opportunities for each child. In such a case, the text that is studied is not meant to be taught by the teachers, nor does it necessarily help teachers think about their practice of teaching.

In these settings, a variety of pedagogies might be used, although *Hebata*, study in pairs, seems to be very much in vogue. It seems that the main reason for the popularity of *Hebata* study is that it encourages interaction among the participants. It is not because of any specific way in which this form of text study contributes to the learning of *teac e* in particular. That is, no serious reflection is invested in the question of what sort of learning is this intervention fostering and what may be its relevance to the teachers' work, which is about helping others to learn.

To summarize: in the "*Tala*" model, the study of Jewish texts is not explicitly thought of through the lens of professional development, i.e. that it should make a difference in the teachers' practice. We will find this very premise at the heart of the second model.<sup>3</sup>



In this model the teacher educator thinks of the teachers' study as making a difference in the teachers' actual teaching. It assumes: a) the more Jewish subject matter teachers know, the better they will teach, and b) Jewish subject matter is learned through the study of Jewish texts.

There are at least three variants as to what to “*e*” could mean: a) to know more content knowledge, that is, to know the subject matter that the teachers will be expected to teach, b) to know substantive and syntactic structures of the discipline, that is, to know the subject matter in different ways, and c) to know more methods to teach the subject matter.

### C

In this approach the teacher educator's rationale is that teachers need to know more of the subject matter they teach. In this case, to know more means first and foremost to know more about what are considered to be facts and important concepts of the subject matter.<sup>4</sup> One of the typical reasons given for this rationale is that teachers need to be able to provide answers for questions students ask. As Lee Shulman has shown, this was a widely accepted conception of teacher education in the 19th century (Shulman 1986).

In this case, the texts that are studied directly connect to what teachers are expected to teach. At the very least, the teacher educator will consider that a particular area of content is to become a part of the teachers' knowledge base even if it is not meant to be taught in the near future. For example, teachers who are to teach the book of Genesis may have a study session on only one portion of Genesis, learning some classical interpretations they might not have known beforehand.

As in the *T a L a* model, in most cases, the teacher will be a scholar or a Rabbi, not a teacher educator. This is because the scholar and the Rabbi are perceived as those who have greater content knowledge. The pedagogy of teacher education will not be the focus of their concerns. In the minds of the scholar or the Rabbi, as in the teacher

<sup>4</sup>I allow myself to use the general expression “knowledge of subject matter” in the context of this short summary only. For an example of what the expression may entail, see Wilson (1991).



grasps the subject matter is no less critical for teaching than his or her level of content knowledge. Therefore, the need for teachers to know more does not include only content knowledge but also certain types of knowledge *about* the subject matter.<sup>6</sup>

This school of thought emphasizes the need for teachers to learn the various paradigmatic approaches to the discipline they are teaching, assuming that these will have an impact on the ways they teach, the ways they think about teaching, and the ways they might help students to learn these disciplines (McDiarmid et al. 1989).

If we are to apply this view to the context of our discussion, in addition to help teachers gain content knowledge the purpose of the study of Jewish texts in professional development is to have teachers learn different ways to teach Jewish texts.



investigate ways of learning these various approaches to the subject matter that would itself produce an impact on the teachers' teaching. However, the approach conventionally used is grounded in an academic view, which stresses the importance of multiple approaches to each discipline. Yet, it seems that if this is not to become a survey of different subject matter approaches only, there is a need to pay more attention to the ways teachers may learn, so that the knowledge of various substantive and syntactic forms of the subject matter will effectively impact their teaching of the subject matter. This impact might be experienced in teachers' ability to listen and understand students' question as well as in their ability to represent difficult concepts in a variety of ways. One should therefore not underestimate the question of transfer of theoretical knowledge to the practice of teaching.

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Sometimes, a slightly different conception of knowing more subject matter is found in professional development. To the question "what

future *teacher* of these very same texts creates a particular way to engage the teachers in the study of these texts, namely, through the modeling of methods by which these texts might be *taught*.

In a first analysis, it seems that this view does take very seriously the question of the pedagogy of teacher education: “what kind of study will lead to good *teaching*.” We found a first attempt to take this question seriously in the “substantive and syntactic knowledge” view, but we recall that the answer that was offered took the form of a different type of *content* knowledge, namely the knowledge *about* the subject matter. In the “methods knowledge”

teachers study various paradigmatic approaches to the study of Bible.

- In the *et d ede* view (model 2c), teachers study teaching methods appropriate to the specific Bible content.

The third model, about to be described, will find also attempt to have the study of Jewish content influence the teaching practice of the teachers. But, unlike the second model this is not specific subject matter related knowledge but what I am calling “meta-educational knowledge.” In this model, we can find two distinctive types of Jewish content that function as meta-educational knowledge:

1. Ethical norms and ideas to permeate the practice of teaching and learning in Jewish education.
2. All encompassing philosophical educational goals guide and permeate the way teachers teach as well as the ultimate educational goals they are aiming for.

*E*

Here teachers study texts that describe the behavioral norms of the





The Role of Jewish Texts in Professional Development

At this point, the different conceptualizations of the study of Jewish texts in professional development can be summarized in the following chart:

We have pointed to three different ways of conceptualizing the role played by the study of Jewish texts in the context of Jewish educational professional development. Clearly, these different models are indispensable for the professional development of teachers. The second and the third models both seem to address a very important aspect of what will ultimately lead to better teaching, namely, the

	1. <i>To the</i> <i>study of</i>	2. <i>The</i> <i>study of</i>	3. <i>The</i> <i>study of</i>
<i>well:</i> <i>the</i> <i>for</i>	Study of <i>Torah</i> for its own sake	Not specified	Not addressed
<i>0.</i>	a) <i>To</i> for its own sake		

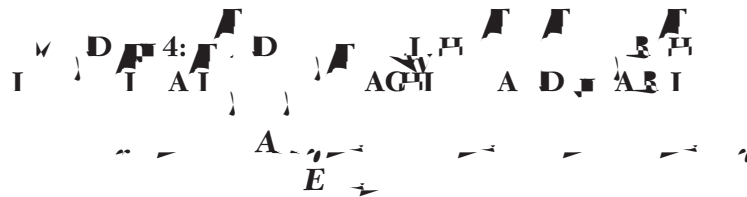
different types of teachers' knowledge that are important for better teaching.

However, as we can see, the question of the pedagogy of teacher education is not addressed, or at least, is not central in these different models. These approaches do not ask questions like:

sociological, philosophical, etc.) assumed to relate to their practice, are not relevant and helpful for the practice of teaching.<sup>12</sup> The link between what and how teachers learn on the one hand and their practice of teaching on the other hand remains a major challenge for teacher educators and needs therefore to be carefully examined.

At this point in our discussion, one strategy could be to go back to each of the models I have described and to explore what pedagogies could possibly be useful in each of these models in order to create bridges between what teachers learn and their practice. However, in this article I will develop a fourth model for the role of the study of Jewish texts in professional development. Drawing on some of the features of what is sometimes called the new paradigm of professional development this model strives to integrate a pedagogy of teacher education with the study of a specific *ge'ele* of Jewish texts so that some of the features of the study will be integrated with a larger rationale of teacher education.

Cases of this approach were developed and used in the context of the Teacher Educators Institute (T.E.I.), a program for the professional development of teacher educators who work in Jewish education (Holtz et al. 1997). In the context of this article I will essentially offer a theoretical presentation followed by a short example only. I will first briefly introduce the theoretical approach to professional development upon which it draws, highlighting the elements that are relevant to our discussion. Then I will articulate the rationale and the purpose of the study of Jewish texts in this fourth model. As I will show, it is interesting to note that both the content and the pedagogy of teacher education are embedded in this model's rationale.



The new paradigm of professional development considers the practice of teaching as requiring knowledge to be used in particular situa-

<sup>12</sup>About the lack of investment in the thinking about this issue see Barone, Berliner, Blanchard, Casanova, Mc Gowan (1996). As to the fragmentation of the knowledge in both coursework and field experiences see Ben-Peretz (1995).



tions and in complex interactions with students, the subject matter and the environment. Teaching is, in Lampert's terms, "a thinking practice" which integrates reasoning and knowing with action (Lampert 1998). Teaching is an intellectual activity that depends on what Zumwalt (1982) has called the "deliberative" ability to reflect on and to make intelligent decisions about practice. As we said earlier, the theoretical knowledge that one might have about the subject matter and teaching does not translate directly to the practice of teaching. On the contrary, the teacher is expected to monitor the different kinds of theoretical knowledge that he has (about the subject matter, about learning, about the students) while being engaged in the interpretation of the particular, complex and unpredictable situation in which he finds himself.

This need for ongoing interpretation is one reason that using these various kinds of knowledge is so complicated in the practice of teaching. There is no one fixed reality in which the teacher finds himself. Rather, the teacher's perception of the situation, together with different types of theoretical knowledge he has, will guide the actions he will take (McDonald 1992); (Schon 1983). Therefore, the ability to be engaged in the interpretation of what is taking place is an important element of good teaching. It requires a certain openness on the part of the teacher and, even more so, an investigative orientation, an attempt to try to interpret the teaching situation in which he finds himself. As Ball and Lampert put it:

What one should do next always *de p, d* on where one is in the content, on who is engaged, on what they are engaged in, on how tired or interested the class is, on whether students are 'getting it', and so on.<sup>13</sup>

What are the consequences of this conception of teaching for the education of teachers? Conventional professional development for teachers builds on experts who teach new methods of teaching or diverse forms of content knowledge. Teachers are offered few opportunities for meaningful interactions and for using this knowledge as a part of a fruitful learning process. It is therefore unlikely that their learning will affect their teaching practices (Feiman-Nemser 2000). In response to this state of affairs, a new paradigm of professional

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<sup>13</sup>Lampert and Ball (1998) 29.

development has emerged. Conceptually, it takes as its starting point

Teacher education will therefore have to foster, develop, and build on these abilities.<sup>17</sup> This approach advocates for teacher's learning these abilities by the *experiential* of teaching and learning in given contexts, starting from practice and considering what is embedded in the practice of teaching to be the "subject matter" to be investigated, analyzed, and reflected upon.

The analytical and reflective work on the practice of teaching is to contribute to the teachers' ability to monitor the various types of knowledge in the concrete context of teaching. Or, in other words, using Donald Schon's language: the assumption is that an after the fact, systematic reflection about what may have taken place during a lesson ("reflection on action") should make a difference in the teacher's ability to be a reflective practitioner in the course of his teaching ("reflection in action") (Schon 1987).

In order for reflection on action to be possible educators need records of practice upon which to reflect. These records of practice (Lampert and Ball 1998) are documents, texts, and images collected in the course of real life in classrooms. Studying records of practice such as these can help teachers become more aware of the characteristics of teaching, promote analytical and reflective thinking about the complexities of teaching and learning content, and ultimately improve practice.

In recent years, teacher educators have been developing different records of practice in order to engage teachers in this kind of work. The case study approach is an example of a record that is meant to have teachers learn *from* practice and *in* practice by engaging them in the investigation of teaching and learning in the context of concrete cases. More recently, Lampert and Ball developed a range of materials like videotapes of real classroom teaching, the analysis of students and teachers' materials, curriculum materials, etc. (Lampert and Ball 1998).

But, central to this type of learning are the ways the teachers will be engaged in the work of learning to teach. In a way, the practice of

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<sup>17</sup>As Lampert and Ball mentioned, this is in line with the recommendations of the National Commission on Teaching and America's future: "Successful teacher preparation programs aim to develop a foundation for continual learning about teaching - the capacity to analyze learning and examine the effects of contexts and teaching strategies on students' motivation, interest and achievement - rather than only to transmit techniques for managing daily classroom activities," *Teaching Multimedia and Mathematics* (1998) 37.

teaching now becomes the “subject matter” of teacher education. Thus, the subject matter of teacher education consists of the elements involved in teaching and learning: the teacher, the students, the disciplinary subject matter and the dynamic relationships among them. This subject matter calls for an analytical and investigative approach. The stance to be adopted towards this subject matter of teacher education will therefore include the abilities needed for the study and the




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In the context of an approach to teacher education as described, what could be the role of the study of Jewish texts? I want to argue that as the investigation of records of practice can be a vehicle for teacher education, so too can the study of certain Jewish texts. In other words: there would be a way by which we could look at Jewish texts as one particular form of record of practice and therefore approach it as such. For this to be possible one would adopt a similar investigative stance in the study and the exploration of these texts. The investigation of the texts would emphasize in particular the three abilities mentioned above as crucial to the investigation of teaching and learning: methods of interpretation, disposition of inquiry, and new norms of interaction. As in the case of the investigation of videotapes, some of the skills and dispositions of investigation that we would nurture around the study of the texts, would be the same which are believed to central to good teaching.

Moreover, teachers studying Jewish texts using this approach would also take advantage of their own learning experiences at the professional development program in order to reflect and learn about teaching and learning. Thus, we can think of the study of texts in teacher education as having two distinctive and complementary parts: the study of Jewish texts and the teachers' reflections on the teaching and learning that they themselves have experienced during that same study. By doing this, one can hope for more integration of the study of Jewish texts and the overall rationale and pedagogy of teacher education, which is to investigate teaching and learning.









What are the Jewish texts that would best lend themselves to the investigation of the practice of teaching and learning? In this model, the teacher educator planning the study program would need to ask: what elements could make the study of Jewish texts an opportunity for the investigation of the practice of teaching and learning? I identify the following three possibilities:

- The *content* of the text needs to refer to an aspect of teaching and

learning. This would enable us to approach it as a version of a record of practice.

- The *pedagogical* utilized by the teacher educator to guide the learning of the teachers should encourage by the teachers the adoption of an investigative stance. This investigative stance is characterized by: an openness to diverse interpretation; exploring what learners bring to the interpretation as readers of the situation and of the text; being analytical; unpacking and questioning the motivations, intentions and thoughts behind what one “sees”; learning by contrasting one’s approach to others.
- Teachers would engage in a *reflective* about their own experience having just learned these texts. Thus, in addition to reflecting upon the teaching and learning situations expressed in the texts, teachers would examine their learning of these texts, by analyzing an additional instance of teaching and learning.

I will now exemplify this approach to the study of Jewish texts with a brief case. It has been developed and used in the context of the Teacher Educators Institute (T.E.I.), a program for the professional development of teacher educators who work in Jewish education (Holtz et al. 1997). However, given the limited scope of this article I will limit myself to a brief summary of the learning tasks that embodied the ideas I have developed above.

The text appears in the Babylonian Talmud, Tractate *Sanhedrin*, 99b. For the clarity of our analysis let us represent the passage in the form of a chart.

“He who teaches Torah to his neighbor’s son is regarded by Scripture

<i>Author</i>	Resh Lakish said	Rabbi Eleazar said:	Rava said:
<i>Statement</i>	As though he had fashioned him	As though he himself had created the words of the Torah	As though he had made himself
<i>Proof text</i>	As it is written: “and the souls which they had made in Haran” (Genesis 12,5)	As it is written: “keep therefore the words of this covenant and make them” (Deuteronomy, 29,8)	For it is written “and make them” (Dvarim). Render not <i>it</i> but <i>me</i>

Table 3. The text from Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Sanhedrin 99b







tion as a catalyst of content. Gadamer calls “fusion of horizons” the integration of one’s understanding of a text with its relevance to one’s

The new reading of the *Sa'ed* text was now to become for the learners an experience in which they were called to put themselves "at risk," bringing together the insights of their own experiences with the opinions that the text might be expressing.

In this stage of the study special attention was given to alternating working individually and sharing with a colleague. These are two important elements in encouraging teachers to develop a discourse on and about their profession, while relating to their own experiences.

“... ..”

In this type of text study for teachers, to what extent do the learners need to be aware of the purposes and the rationale that are behind

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