

**The Mandel Center
for Studies in
Jewish Education**

Brandeis University

Interactive Text Study: A Case of Hevruta Learning

Orit Kent

Beit Midrash Research Project

Working Paper, August 2006

This is a preprint of an article whose final and definitive form has been published in the Journal of Jewish Education Volume 72, #3 © 2006 Taylor & Francis

The Journal of Jewish Education is available online at:

<http://journalonline.tandf.co.uk/openurl.asp?genre=article&issn=1524-4113&volume=72&issue=3&spage=205>

I. Introduction

How do students work together to make meaning when studying in *hevruta*¹? The process of *hevruta* study is a black box in Jewish education. We know that people study this way,² but we have little understanding of how they engage with each other and the texts, and we- researchers, teachers and students alike -do not even have a common language for talking about this kind of learning. This study will explore the multifaceted process through which people make meaning of texts in *hevruta*. It will help us develop a language for talking about this kind of learning and make more visible its complexities in order to inform future research into its use in the classroom.³

I have come to define *hevruta* as a Jewish interpretive social learning practice. It is a historically Jewish practice that involves interpretive and social elements and provides those learning in *hevruta* with opportunities to develop their interpretive and social skills and habits. This practice includes moves⁴ made in response to the text and to one's partner, particular norms of interaction and interpretation, and particular patterns for developing interpretations. I have also come to see *hevruta* as an instance of student work (Allen (ed), 1998). While the term "student work" often conjures up images of written work, the largely verbal interpretive work that students do while studying classical Jewish texts in *hevruta* is no less worthy of being described, discussed and questioned.

For the last three summers, I have been collecting data from a modern *beit midrash*⁵ that I co-design and co-teach in the summers in a program called DeLeT, a pre-service teacher education program for students studying to be elementary school teachers primarily in liberal Jewish day schools. The DeLeT *Beit Midrash* for Teachers (DeLeT *beit midrash*) emphasizes exploration of Jewish texts

¹ *Hevruta* is a term generally used to refer to a pair of people studying Jewish texts together or one of the partners in such a pair. The plural of *hevruta* is *hevrutot*, referring to multiple pairs. Through the course of the paper, I use the term *hevruta* in the following ways: 1. *hevruta* as a noun, referring to the pair as in "the *hevruta*" 2. *hevruta* as a noun referring to one study partner as in "Susan's *hevruta*" 3. *hevruta* as a noun referring to a process of study 4. *hevruta* as an adjective, highlighting the particular mode of engagement as in "*hevruta* learning," "*hevruta* study," "*hevruta* interactions," "*hevruta* session," "*hevruta* partners," and "*hevruta* discussions." I also use the phrase "in *hevruta*" as in "to study in *hevruta*"—meaning, to study in a pair.

² For ideas about the history of *hevruta* study, see Yeshayahu Tishbi (1979), *Yeshivot Lita*;; Shaul Stampfer (1995), **ha-Yeshivah ha-Lita'it be-hithavutah**; Moshe Halbertal and Tova Hartman Halbertal (1998), "The Yeshiva;" Norman Lamm, (1989), **Torah Lishmah**;" and Aliza Segal (2003), **Havruta Study: History, Benefits, and Enhancements**.

³ This paper is based on my dissertation research and parts appear in my dissertation entitled, "*Interactive Text Study and The Co-Construction of Meaning: Hevruta in the DeLeT Beit Midrash*". My research is part of a larger collaborative research and teaching effort, the *Beit Midrash* Research Project at the Mandel Center for Studies in Jewish Education at Brandeis University. I wish to thank my colleagues in this project, Sharon Feiman Nemser and Elie Holzer for their ongoing contributions and insights into our "design experiment" and for their comments on this paper. Thank you also to Jon Levisohn and Meir Lakein for their feedback on an earlier draft.

⁴ In this 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.

⁵ The term literally means "house of study." Its plural is *batai midrashote*. Traditionally, this denotes a particular kind of learning environment in which men study Talmud in pairs/*hevruta*. In liberal *batai midrashot*, one can find both men and women with various Jewish backgrounds, beliefs and affiliations studying a range of texts. In the Brandeis DeLeT *beit midrash*, students study biblical, rabbinic and medieval Jewish texts.

related to teaching and learning as well as metacognitive⁶ reflection on the process of interpretation and learning with and from others. My study of *hevruta* learning in the DeLeT *beit midrash* is intended to help develop a conceptualization of this often used but seldom studied form of learning.

This paper is exploratory. I use the opportunity to look closely at one *hevruta* interaction to highlight certain patterns, develop conceptual ideas about *hevruta* study and text interpretation, and raise questions for further research. Studies of sociocultural activities make the case for using an event or an activity as the unit of analysis (Rogoff, 1995). I have chosen to zoom in on one event- one session of one pair –in order to allow for a close look at the intricacies of this complex practice and advance my efforts to develop our conceptual understanding of it. In future papers, I hope to broaden the lens of analysis to look across pairs and multiple sessions.

In the paper, I detail the *hevruta* under study, and present an analysis. The following section, Section II, is a brief review of the literature and section III is a discussion of *hevruta* in the DeLeT *beit midrash*. Section IV provides background to Judy and Susan’s *hevruta* and talks through the research methodology. Section V provides a glimpse of the overall *hevruta* session by discussing the particular steps that Judy and Susan go through. Section VI includes a detailed discussion of some of the features of their *hevruta* interaction. Part A discusses the use of moves and norms and part B discusses two different modes of interpretive discussion—interpreting through opposition and co-building, providing examples of each.

In the conclusion, I revisit the analytic categories of moves, norms and modes of interpretive conversation to highlight the ways in which they have helped us gain greater insight into this particular *hevruta* session and point to *hevruta*’s potential to foster students’ critical thinking and deep listening skills. I also raise the need for future close up empirical studies of *hevruta* learning to help us understand this widespread practice and make its use increasingly educative.

Note that through the course of the paper, I use the term *hevruta* to refer to both the study process, as well as the partners involved in the study. The process and its participants together comprise this practice.

II. Review of the Literature

Before turning to a discussion of *hevruta* learning and our case, I offer a brief review of the literature on which this study is implicitly built. There is little empirical research analyzing students’ experiences studying in *hevruta*. Samuel Heilman’s study (1983) of learning circles in *The People Of the Book* takes a close look at people studying classical Jewish texts, but he does not specifically study *hevruta* interactions. A growing body of research examines the teaching and learning of classical Jewish texts; however, these works do not analyze *hevruta* study or students’ moment to moment learning processes.⁷ Aliza Segal’s monograph (2003) mainly focuses on the theoretical connections between *hevruta* study and cooperative learning, highlighting some of the cognitive and social advantages, but does not analyze actual *hevruta* interactions. Susan Tedmon’s doctoral dissertation (1991) uses a variety of educational theories to analyze one *hevruta* interaction between two Orthodox teenage boys in a yeshiva high school. Her analysis highlights the ways in which students can complement each other’s learning in a *hevruta* interaction and the ways in which *hevruta* learning in the yeshiva high school reflects

⁶ In this context, I use the term “metacognitive” to refer to “thinking about thinking.” See David Perkins (1992), *Smart Schools*, p. 100-102. See also J. D. Bransford, A. Brown, et al. (2000). **How People Learn, Brain, Mind, Experience and School.**

⁷For example, see the following conceptual works: Holtz, B. W. (2003). **Textual Knowledge Teaching the Bible in Theory and in Practice** and Rosenak, M. (1995). **Roads to the Palace, Jewish Texts and Teaching.** For studies conducted in the classroom, see for example Wohl, R. (2000). “Entering the Historical Conversation: Torah Teachers’ Reading and Teaching of Text.” Diss: MSU and Blecher, M. S. (1997). “Sacred and Secular Texts: Interpretive Communities and the Teaching of Literature.” Diss: Stanford University.

larger Orthodox values and beliefs. My analysis will build on Tedmon's. and among other things, further examine how students work together in *hevruta* interactions.

Underlying my work are assumptions drawn from sociocultural theories of learning and studies of group and peer learning, which, drawing on Vygotsky's work (1978), highlight the situated and social nature of learning, that is that what we learn is impacted by the context in which we learn (including whom we learn with) and by learning through interaction with others. Barbara Rogoff's research (1990) on how people develop in social contexts underscores the potential for peer learning to function as a cognitive apprenticeship, fostering productive cognitive conflict, perspective taking, the exploration of new ideas, and enhanced motivation.

Finally, my study is informed by the work of scholars who conceptualize and study students reading literary texts. Judith Langer (1995) and Elisse Earthman's (1992) studies of students interpreting literature highlight the reader's active role in the interpretive process. Sophie Haratounian's (1991) work focuses on the elements in classroom conversations that make for rich and textually grounded "interpretive discussions." Literary theorists such as Wolfgang Iser (1978) and Robert Scholes (1985) call attention to the difference between reading a text and interpreting it and the role of "gap filling" in both reading texts and communicating.

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 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." (p. 169) While this statement refers to how we interpret text, it is no less relevant for how we think about two people communicating with each other, as they try to interpret a text. Just as there are elements in a text that are revealed and concealed, *hevruta* partners reveal and conceal ideas as they study together. We can never fully understand what is in another person's head; neither can we ever fully express what is in our own head. During the study process, we as 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, as we will see, the role of questions and norms of interaction play a particularly important role in helping *hevruta* partners communicate their ideas about the text and move the interpretive process forward.

III. *Hevruta* as a Jewish Learning Practice in the DeLeT *Beit midrash*

Jerome Bruner writes that "education is a major embodiment of a culture's way of life [and] not just preparation for it." (1996, p. 13) *Hevruta* learning in the DeLeT *beit midrash* carries with it important cultural messages. This kind of study inducts students, in this case, student teachers, 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 in spirited engagement in which students both listen closely to one another and actively challenge one another and themselves.** This mode of study highlights the cultural value of engagement with text and with colleagues, a value that is perhaps held in higher regard than "right answers." It highlights the value of knowledge being something that is communally held and constructed, as opposed to individually held and constructed. It also highlights the value of looking for multiple 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:⁸

- That learning occurs inside an individual

⁸ For a discussion of these issues, see J. D. Bransford,, A. Brown, et al. eds (2000). **How People Learn.**

- 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 *hevruta* study in the DeLeT *Beit midrash* is that learning is an ongoing sociocultural activity in which participants work together to actively construct knowledge. In this idealized form of *hevruta* study, the *hevruta* partners must 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 *hevruta* 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, 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 listen to themselves, the text and each other, they can find this process to be personally and professionally transformative.⁹

Through analyzing a case of *hevruta* study in close up fashion, the current study will make public the complex work it entails and will enhance our understanding of studying in dyads and interpreting Jewish texts. This paper is a first step in my research. Further research will help us better understand the conditions that enable pairs of students to engage in rich interpretive discussions of Jewish texts in which they listen closely to the text, each other and themselves and develop a deeper understanding of all three.

IV. A Case of Hevruta Learning

To begin to build a theory of *hevruta* study as an interpretive social learning practice with intellectual and social dimensions, I ask the following questions: What can we learn about interactive text study in pairs and students' meaning making through a close examination of teacher candidates studying classical Jewish texts in the DeLeT *beit midrash*? In this paper, I will explore the following subcomponents of this larger question: What are some of the features of one *hevruta* interactions? And, how does this *hevruta* develop interpretations together?

Who are the learners?¹⁰

In this paper, I analyze a learning session of one *hevruta*- a forty minute *hevruta* between Judy and Susan. Judy and Susan, two female students in their twenties, are in their 2nd and last summer of classes in the DeLeT program. These particular learners were paired together in a heterogeneous grouping for the course of the *beit midrash*. Judy has a lot more experience studying Jewish classical texts and studying in *hevruta* and has a better command of Hebrew. Susan has limited exposure to these kinds of text, *hevruta* study and Hebrew, although she was enrolled in an Ulpan and working hard to improve and practice her Hebrew. This *hevruta* session is the second time these two 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 *hevruta*, and they have reported liking working together.

What is the task and what is the text?

In order to understand any learning situation, it's important to understand the task, which guides the learning. Susan and Judy's *hevruta* was not a completely open-ended discussion but was framed by an educational task.¹¹ Students were given copies of the 4th chapter of Maimonides' Laws of Torah study. The text was given to them in both Hebrew and English. They were also given a study

⁹ This idea will be further explored and developed in future work.

¹⁰ In this paper, I do not address the significance of the learners as teacher candidates or the ways in which study in a *beit midrash* and learning in *hevruta* are a form of teacher education. For a discussion of some of these ideas, see Sharon Feiman Nemser's article and Elie Holzer's article in this journal.

¹¹ Educational tasks play a key role in how learning unfolds by framing the task and providing scaffolding to learners. While in the future it will be important to do a task analysis to fully understand the role that this task played in the pair's learning, this kind of analysis is not the focus of the current paper.

guide which instructed them to do the following in *hevruta*: “1. Read the text 2. Point to something in the text that resonates with you and explain why 3. Point to something in the text that appears strange and/or challenging to you and explain why and 4. Explain how you come to terms with these strange and challenging statements.” Students were also instructed that *hevruta* partners did not have to agree about these points and that this study time was an opportunity to practice being a *hevruta* partner by engaging in careful listening and asking probing questions. This study guide provided students with scaffolding in how to read the text and in how to interact with each other while studying in *hevruta*.

Data collection and analysis

Each summer, three *hevruta* in the DeLeT *beit midrash* were purposively selected. Each pair was video and audio-taped. In addition, copies of teacher lessons and assignments and student written assignments were collected.

The audio-tapes were transcribed. The transcripts from the first summer were read through a number of times, with a few questions in mind: What do the interactions of students studying in *hevruta* look like? What does the interpretive process of *hevruta* learning look like? And, what kind of meaning are students making of the content of the text?

Informed by concepts from research on the teaching and learning of reading and literature, research on cooperative learning and research on classroom discourse, I analyzed six particular transcripts for patterns and themes. The first step involved dividing the transcripts into segments in order to *examine* the different foci of the sessions and follow the development of interpretations. Then, I wrote memos about how the pairs in three of the transcripts were working together and generating ideas. The second step involved coding for students’ “moves” that seemed to contribute to their process of working together.

I pursued a more thorough analysis of Susan and Judy’s interaction because their interaction provides a rich example of *hevruta* learning and brings to the fore some key issues underlying this learning practice. In addition to analyzing their learning transcript, I also 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 Susan and Judy’s transcript and the partial video, I conducted a close analysis of the following: moves they made, ideas in the content that they found interesting and challenging (this part of the analysis does not appear in this paper) and how they went about developing ideas. I also coded for different kinds of utterances (e.g. questions, paraphrase, etc.) and the focus of their talk in order to further develop a picture of what occurred in these interactions and how they might be similar to or different from traditional classroom discussions about texts. In addition, I made notes about the various issues that arose that seemed to raise an interesting idea or question about the nature of text interpretation in *hevruta* and might be the subject of further inquiry in later research.

V. Overview of Susan and Judy’s *hevruta* session

My structural analysis of Susan and Judy’s *hevruta* session yielded nine different steps, outlined in Table I and discussed below.¹²

¹² In addition to the structural analysis, my analysis of their talk yielded three main foci of their talk: the text, their process for working together and interpreting the text, and actually reading the text. These foci appear in different combinations through the course of the transcript. Another analysis would help us further understand these talk patterns and their particular pedagogic uses.

Steps

Table 1

Steps
1. Negotiate how to work
2. Read text
3. Engage in interpretive discussion
4. Discuss interpretive problems with teacher
5. Check time and assignment
6. Continue reading text
7. Engage in interpretive discussion
8. Continue reading text
9. Engage in interpretive discussion

Discussion

[1] In the very beginning of the *hevruta*, Judy and Susan negotiate how they will work together, with particular focus on what language they will read the text in.

[2] They then start reading the first section of the text from the 4th chapter of Maimonides' Laws of Torah Study:

"Instruction in Torah should not be given except to suitable well-behaved pupils, and to the simple-minded. If one has followed a path which is not good, one must be brought back to the better way, conducted in the path of righteousness and examined and after that one may be admitted to the school of instruction and be taught... Likewise, we must not learn from a rabbi who does not follow the good way although he be a great scholar and all people need him, until he returns to better ways. The sages said that if a teacher arises who is like a messenger of the Lord of Hosts, then they should seek the Law from his mouth but, if he is not, they shall not seek the Law from him."

In this part, they also continue to negotiate the process, deciding that they will stop to summarize different parts of the text as they read.

[3] After having read the entire first section¹³ in the Maimonides' text, they begin their first interpretive discussion.¹⁴ They spend at least half their time together working through this section of text. In this segment, they each offer interpretations of the text and work through their interpretations. Judy initiates the first part of their conversation by suggesting that the text is talking about the importance of moral behavior to both teach and learn, as opposed to intellectual greatness. Susan initiates the second part of their conversation by asking what Maimonides means by the term "the good way." These two issues are central to their discussion. Their content talk has a smattering of process talk as well. In addition, they very explicitly talk about how they are going about interpreting the text and talk about what both the text and the author are "doing." They move in and out of *being in* the text and *being in* their discussion and making comments *about* what they and the text do.¹⁵ They continually revisit the

¹³ I refer to each halakha as a "section."

¹⁴ In this paper, I intentionally use Sophie Haroutinian's (1991) term "interpretive discussion" to highlight the times when Judy and Susan are meeting the conditions for "interpretive discussion." That is, they are following particular norms of discussion, providing textual evidence, listening carefully, responding to what has been said and generating new ideas. *Ibid*, p. 53-69. I also use this term to distinguish their mode of conversation from simply reading the text. For a discussion of the difference between reading and interpreting, see Robert Scholes (1985), **Textual Power, Literary Theory and the Teaching of English**.

¹⁵ For a similar finding, see J. A. Langer, J. A. (1990). "The Process of Understanding: Reading for Literary and Informative Purposes."

text, explain their interpretive processes and work through their interpretations. Throughout the discussion, their voices rise and fall, rising with excitement especially when they have a new idea.

[4] While trying to make sense of the idea of the “good way” and whether the text is referring to moral and/or ritual excellence, Judy and Susan engage the teacher in their conversation, drawing on his background knowledge of Maimonides to further make sense of Maimonides’ use of “simple-minded” and “the good way” and learn from the teacher about Maimonides’ understanding of the middle path.

[5] At this point they regroup and revisit their process and the assignment. This is spurred on by finding out that they only have a few minutes left before the *hevruta* will end. Their content discussion speaks directly to the assignment. They ask each other to share things in the text that either resonated with them or challenged them and also talk about their interpretive process for dealing with challenges. Both Susan and Judy have identified challenges. Judy has also identified something that resonates with her but Susan still has not.

[6] They read through section 2 (which talks about how students and teachers sit) and section 3 (which talks about the role of the interpreter) without stopping to interpret the text. Their reading is interspersed with comments about their process, what they like about the text and it’s possible use in the form of posters in their respective classrooms.

[7] They stop once when Susan notes that something in section two resonates. This section is about how teachers and students should sit. This turns into a longer interpretive discussion focusing mostly on exploring possible meanings of the metaphor in the text which describes students surrounding their rabbi like a crown.

[8] They read through the rest of the sections, without stopping to interpret them. Their reading is interspersed with comments about their process, what they like about the text and it’s possible use in the form of posters in their respective classrooms.

[9] They stop after they have read the last section, which deals with proper etiquette in the *beit midrash*. They engage in their third interpretive discussion, trying to figure out whether Maimonides is trying to make the point that you shouldn’t spend all of your time in the *beit midrash* so that you end up falling asleep there too or whether he is just talking about not falling asleep during class. They link this discussion to their earlier discussion about the middle path.

VI. Features of a *Hevruta* Interaction¹⁶

Part A: Moves and Norms

What makes a *hevruta* different from two people who happen to be studying together? In many ways, a *hevruta* interaction shares many features of conversation between two people. Like conversations, *hevruta* interactions are based on interdependence; the learners jointly participate in decision making and interpretive activity in order to accomplish a shared purpose—deeper understanding of the text in front of them. Another way of thinking about the interdependence of *hevruta* interactions is to view the learner’s actions as “mutually contingent”—each learner orients her reactions in accordance with her own plan, the moment to moment reaction of her partner, and the new information revealed in the text. This requires close listening, holding multiple possibilities on-line and being able to adapt one’s own line of thought. This is highly complex work! What this means is that when one listens in on a *hevruta* interaction, one cannot predict what will come next. As in the course of a conversation, *hevruta* discussions have an open-ended quality, as each partner must constantly adapt in light of the other partner and the text. The partners often talk at the same time with an almost breathless quality, as if they feel a need to verbalize their idea before it vanishes into the

¹⁶ Here I use the term “*hevruta* interaction” to refer to one *hevruta* session. Use of the term “interaction” instead of “session” highlights the interactive nature of these kinds of study sessions.

shifting stream of their conversation.¹⁷ We will see examples of this further on in the paper when we discuss how they build interpretations.

In order to appreciate what makes this particular *hevruta* distinct from a regular conversation, I analyzed all of the different moves that Judy and Susan make in their *hevruta* (table 2 & 3). Their multiple moves that fall into two categories: (a) moves made in relationship to the text and (b) moves made in relationship to each other.

Table 2

Moves in relation to each other
Proposes language for reading
Proposes looking at directions
Proposes way to keep track of what they read
Invites the partner to read and proposes where they should read
Takes notes on what partner says
Checks for partner's understanding
Listens to partner's ideas
Questions partner's interpretation
Probes partner's interpretation
Builds off of partner's interpretation
Directs partner's attention back to the text by asking a question
Explains one's own idea/elaborates on an explanation
Explains method of arriving at an idea
Draws on partner's content knowledge
Asks partner for help understanding something about the text
Makes "back channeling" or "acknowledging" comments like "interesting" "right"

¹⁷ For ideas about the nature of conversation, I draw on the work of psychologist and applied linguist, Courtney Cazden. See C. Cazden (1988/2001), *Classroom Discourse*. For a similar comparison of *hevruta* to conversation that draws on philosophical hermeneutics see Elie Holzer's article in this volume.

Table 3

Moves in relationship to the text
Reads the text
Points to the text
Underlines the text
Re-reads the text
Cites evidence from the text
Closely analyzes certain words
Looks to see the length of the entire text and/or how the text is laid out
Discusses each section separately and in order
Draws on outside knowledge to make sense of text
Forms mental images to make sense of text/draws a diagram of the text
Connects text to issues in professional life
Re-interprets text to make sense in context of personal or professional life

When we look at the list of moves, we can see that what makes this particular *hevruta* distinct from a regular conversation is that it is governed by two particular categories of norms. A norm is an overarching rule followed by participants in a social interaction. Norms are sometimes explicit and very often implicit. They help participants interact with each other by providing some structure to the interaction and thereby, some degree of comprehensibility and predictability. The two categories of norms in Judy and Susan’s *hevruta* are: (a) Learning is collaborative and (b) Interpretations are grounded in the text. Each of these overarching norms contains subnorms listed out in the chart below (Table 4).

Norms of Interaction and Interpretation

Table 4

Learning is collaborative	Interpretations are grounded in the text
Read together	Read and re-read the text
Plan how to learn together	Point to and underline the text
Use questions to engage with each other	Closely analyze words of text
Explain thinking out-loud and clarify ideas	Cite evidence from the text
Ask for help	
Make acknowledging comments like “interesting,” “yes,” or “right” in order to indicate to partner that she’s “in” the conversation	
Break into each other’s words	
Take on complementary roles depending on particular expertise at a given time	

Learning is collaborative: Norms of social interaction

The initial discussion between Judy and Susan is a negotiation about how they will go about their learning. In order to get their learning underway, they must decide the language in which they will read the text, whether or not they will read together or silently, if they read together, who will read what and how they will analyze what they are reading. Susan begins by asking that they reflect back on their previous experience:

Susan: Remember how last time you wanted to read the Hebrew?

Judy: Yes.

Susan: That didn't work for me –

A bit later, Judy responds: I don't know what I want to do. I'd like to read the Hebrew but I don't want to do it separately, you know. I want to do it together. So maybe we should just do the English...

Judy and Susan ultimately decide to read the whole text out-loud. An unstated norm of their interaction is that **working together includes reading together**. Judy compromises on the language issue for the sake of working together. They take turns reading out-loud in English, starting at the very beginning of the text and slowly working their way through the first paragraph. Judy follows along in Hebrew and reads the Hebrew out loud to Susan when they have a question about the English translation.

Their initial negotiation allows the *hevruta* partners to explicitly establish norms about their interactions. Their norms are not self evident and different *hevrutot* will choose different routes. There isn't necessarily one best route to follow. What is key is that an initial negotiation and agreement take place. This agreement enables the partners to begin the process of reading and interpretation from a common starting point. The initial norms will be added to as the *hevruta* is underway and may be changed.

As Susan and Judy begin to read through the text, they establish more implicit norms of interaction. As each offers an opinion, the other often makes an **acknowledging comments** such as, "right," "yes," or "interesting." These kinds of comments indicate either "yes, I heard you" or "yes, I agree with you" and provides a transition to either an elaboration of the idea or to a new idea or question. As Judy and Susan read and discuss, they constantly **break into the other's words**, sometimes finishing each other's thoughts or taking the conversation in a different direction. Susan even breaks into Judy's space, by reaching over to point at Judy's text when she is trying to make a point.

The partners are in a sense guiding each other's participation in this activity, helping each to develop a stronger foothold in the text and in the *hevruta* relationship. Their ability to take on **complementary roles** and their **use of questions** is particularly helpful in this regard. They take on complementary roles, depending on their expertise. For example, in the beginning of the *hevruta* interaction, Susan makes most of the process moves. Other times, Judy uses her content knowledge to explain something to Susan or Susan draws on Judy's content knowledge and asks her an explicit question. In the example that follows, we see Susan asking an overall question about the text and then explicitly asking Judy for help translating a term:

Susan: Well, well, well. Here's what I'm wondering. What does this mean, "the good way"?

Judy: Right.

....

Susan: Is the derekh y'shara the righteous way?

Judy: Yashar, that's their translation.

Susan: Okay.

Judy: Right. But yashar just means straight. It doesn't. It could mean righteous. They're adding extra meaning. Okay. So let's say- I'm going to put good in quotes. Whatever "good" means. I think that's an open question.

Susan's questions have pushed Judy to look more closely at the text and sparked her continued thinking. Susan isn't the only one to ask questions about the meaning of text: Judy does this too. We see over and over again in their *hevruta* that talking about ideas out loud and asking questions slows them down so that they need to re-think, look and stay engaged. In addition to asking what the text means, they check in with each other to clarify understanding:

Judy: All right. So the emphasis is being placed on moral fortitude. A nice big word. Do you know what I mean?

Susan: No. What do you mean by that, Judy?

Judy: Oh, thanks for asking. You're such a good *hevruta*. That even if it's a good teacher, you're not going to learn from him or her if that person is not a good person.

Here we see Judy stating an interpretation of a piece of text and then "checking in" with Susan to see if she understood Judy's explanation. This is not something she would have to do if she were studying on her own. While there is something almost formulaic about this exchange, it gives Judy and Susan a chance to make sure they are on the same page, and it gives Judy an opportunity to talk through her ideas and develop them further. Here we have an example of the way *hevruta* interactions, in this case, a partner's questions, are a catalyst for developing and expanding on interpretations. Their learning is being impacted by the norms of social interaction.

Interpretations are grounded in the text: Norms of Interpretation:

In addition to their norms of interaction, Susan and Judy operate under guiding assumptions about how to develop interpretations. For them, interpretation must somehow be grounded in the text. Both spend a lot of time **looking closely at the text**. Susan and Judy read the text out-loud to teach other, look to the text and read it to make claims, and relook at the text and read it to try and unpack the claims on the table and further refine their understanding of the text. In the video footage, we see them literally scouring the text as they talk through their idea, often only making eye contact after they've made a point and want to elaborate in further detail. They also spend a fair amount of time **underlining their text**.

We see the idea of **grounding interpretations in the text** most explicitly stated towards the end of Susan and Judy's *hevruta*:

Susan: Can you cite evidence to support your thinking because I can cite evidence to the contrary.

Judy: Okay. Well, cite evidence to the contrary.

Susan: Okay. He makes his point and then he says- I mean to back up his point he gives one sentence, one is not allowed to sleep, and let me tell you a quote that's going to support this.

"Solomon said drowsiness shall clothe a man in rags." Drowsiness. Not a restful night's sleep.

Judy and Susan are engaging in a classical mode of textual analysis. During the ensuing conversation, Judy offers a contrary interpretation, that Maimonides is talking about sleeping in the *beit midrash* in general, as opposed to falling asleep during class. She comments on her use of evidence: "I'm getting my evidence just from previous stories or whatever that -- that people used to sleep in the *beit midrash* or in shul..." Her evidence is not based in the text in front of them but in the fact that she is familiar with other stories of people in the Talmud falling asleep in the *beit midrash*. To her, this must have been a common phenomena and must be Maimonides' reference point. Thus, it seems that what counts as evidence is not only the text in front of them but other related texts too.

In addition to finding evidence in the text, Susan at least one time provides an interpretation and refers to it as the connotation that she gets from the text. Early on in their *hevruta*, Susan offers an alternative interpretation to Judy and pointedly states, "I know I can't give you evidence from the text. It's just the connotation I get from simple-minded." In this instance, Susan can't point to a particular phrase or word in a text for evidence. Given the norm that interpretations are grounded in the text, Susan feels the need to acknowledge that she can't point to particular evidence in the text, implying that a connotation from the text is less strong grounding for offering an interpretation than pointing to a

particular word as evidence. However, it is important to keep in mind that Susan's "connotation" is still to a degree grounded in the text since it derives from her understanding of the word "simple-minded."

The link between norms of interaction and interpretation

The idea that norms of interaction are closely linked to norms of interpretation and that each impacts the other is made explicit in an earlier part of Judy and Susan's discussion. While reading the first paragraph of Maimonides, Judy skips over the first few sentences and starts to discuss a later part of the text:

Judy: Then because it says "likewise," and in Hebrew it's v'khen -- it's on the second page --

Susan: Uh, ha.

Judy: So I think it's just saying in general it shouldn't be taught except to suitably well-behaved pupils or to the simple-minded. I think it's placing an emphasis on how they are inside. Like a well-behaved student is somebody who is- and I'm getting this, what I'm about to say, from likewise and from the rest of it.

Susan: Do you want to just stick to what the top part is saying first?

Judy: I can't because the top part relies on the second part.

Here we have an example of how, in Judy's eyes, the norms of interaction and the interpretive process are inextricably linked. In this case, the general norm of how they will study the text is trumped by the fact that the language of the text seems to call for another kind of norm. For Judy, a norm of interaction- what part of the text gets read -becomes a norm of interpretation. This is one example of the way that norms of interaction and interpretation are interlinked. We have already seen above examples of how a norm of interaction like asking a question can also serve an interpretive purpose. Other issues that exemplify this link is the language in which the text is read and the amount of text that gets read. Depending on the context, both of these could be either a norm of interaction or interpretation. Thus, the social impacts on the intellectual and vice versa.

B. Modes of Interpretive Discussion

Susan and Judy's *hevruta* demonstrates two different ways that *hevrutot* go about developing interpretations together. One way, I call *interpreting through opposition*. The second way, I call *co-building*. Both of these modes of interpretation share certain features. In both modes, the partners generate ideas through exploratory talk and reformulate their points in response to each other's questions. However, in the first mode, each partner works on developing her own idea and refines her idea through the process of defending it. The end result is two separate but more fully developed ideas. In the second mode, neither partner has an allegiance to a particular interpretation and through building off of each other's ideas, refine them. The end result of this mode of discussion is a jointly constructed interpretation. It is important to note that both modes require that the partners have a sense of investment in each other that draws them to engage with each other's ideas and not just ignore them out-right.¹⁸

Despite the different modes of discussion, the two pieces of conversation excerpted below exemplify some similar features of this *hevruta*'s interaction. They exemplify that each partner helps the other generate and refine ideas by asking questions and insisting that each explain and back up her point.

¹⁸ In analysis of other sessions, I have noted what might be two other modes of discussion. One is parallel talk in which each partner talks through her ideas without engaging her partners ideas in any way. The other mode is a kind of brainstorming, in which the partners jointly develop a lot of different first impressions but don't ever further develop one idea further. In addition, there is another form of Interpreting through Opposition in which both partners argue for their own idea but at the end of the discussion, one partner concedes to the other person's idea.

They exemplify that the first ideas that Judy and Susan have in each conversation- even if they aren't fully thought out -become the subject of that conversation and that they continue to work them through, through the course of the conversation.

Interpreting Through Opposition

In the first example, Judy and Susan work on different ideas. Their discussion in many ways mimics elements of a Talmudic discourse, in which one side brings an example to prove his argument and the other side challenges him by offering a different interpretation of the same example and adding another example of his own to prove his side of the argument. While Judy and Susan start and end their discussion disagreeing, each one's point has been significantly refined by her need to explain it and defend it.

Susan reads: "Instruction in Torah should not be given except to suitable well behaved pupils, and to the simple-minded. If one has followed a path which is not good, one must be brought back to the better way, conducted in the path of righteousness and examined and after that one may be admitted to the school of instruction and be taught. The sages said, 'He who instructs one who is unfit is like throwing a stone to Hermes.' The verse in Proverbs 26:8 says 'As he that bindeth a stone in a sling, so is he that giveth honor to a fool.' There is no glory except in the Torah..." Judy comments about having learned about Hermes and Susan continues to read: "Likewise, we must not learn from a rabbi who does not follow the good way although he be a great scholar and all people need him, until he returns to better ways..." Susan pauses to ask Judy if she wants to read but Judy encourages Susan to keep reading. "The sages said that if a teacher arises who is like a messenger of the Lord of Hosts, then they should seek the Law from his mouth but, if he is not, they shall not seek the Law from him."

Judy then offers an interpretation of the text:

Judy: All right. **So the emphasis is being placed on moral fortitude** [1st formulation of Judy's idea]¹⁹. A nice big word. Do you know what I mean?

Susan: No. What do you mean by that, Judy?

Judy: Oh, thanks for asking. You're such a good *hevruta*. That even if it's a good teacher, **you're not going to learn from him or her if that person is not a good person.** [2nd formulation of Judy's idea]

Susan: **If you're not in the right place to learn.** [1st formulation of Susan's idea]

Judy: That's not what I got...

In this short excerpt, we immediately see that Judy and Susan are focusing on two different ideas. Judy declares that the whole text is about moral fortitude. Rather than simply affirming that vague claim, Susan asks Judy what she means (a question Judy welcomes), pressing Judy to clarify her claim by explaining that one can only learn from someone who is a good person.

At the same time, we see that Susan is focused on an idea about learning requiring one to have the right frame of mind ("being in the right place") to learn. Judy is very up front about the fact that she has a different idea than Susan. Not all *hevrutot* are so quick to make their differences clear. Judy could have ignored the difference or she could have acquiesced on her position and followed Susan's idea. She does neither. Her acknowledgment of the difference is fruitful since it forces work to further clarify the ideas on the table.

Another minute into the conversation and Judy is still busy re-reading the text:

Susan: There are only a couple of different types of people that the Torah should be given to. Even the best Torah teacher in the world, if it's not-

Judy: Well, there are two parts, one is who it should be taught to and one is who should teach it. So I was kind of focusing on who should teach it.

¹⁹ I've included my notations to help the reader keep track of the development of their ideas.

Susan: Okay. Shall we start at the beginning where it says who it should be taught to?
 Judy: Hold on... "Likewise"
 Susan: That's the first point where it breaks.
 Judy: I don't know if that's the first part where it breaks but-
 Susan: Oh yes, "likewise"-that's where it shifts.
 Judy: Right, it shifts to be about the teacher.
 Susan: Uh, ha.
 Judy: Then because it says "likewise," and in Hebrew it's v'khen -- it's on the second page –
 Susan: Uh, ha.
 Judy: So I think it's just saying in general it shouldn't be taught except to suitably well-behaved pupils or to the simple-minded. I think it's placing an emphasis on how they are inside. Like a well-behaved student is somebody who is- and I'm getting this, what I'm about to say, from likewise and from the rest of it.
 Susan: Do you want to just stick to what the top part is saying first?
 Judy: I can't because the top part relies on the second part.
 Susan: Or is it the other way around?

We see through the course of the two excerpts above that not only are Susan and Judy arguing for different interpretations of the text but they are also having a debate about what part of the text they should discuss and how the parts are connected. This small excerpt contains a number of debates:

Judy and Susan's debates

Table 5

A debate about the meaning of the content of the text.	Susan and Judy each advance claims that support their own argument. For Judy this is that the first part of the section is about moral qualities of students and the second part is about moral qualities of teachers. For Susan this is that the first part of the section is talking about students' receptivity to learning and that this is not contingent on the quality of the teacher.
A debate about how to learn the text.	They debate by debating what they should debate. Susan believes that they should begin by focusing on just the first part of the section, the part that discusses students. Judy believes that they should look at the entire halkha, including the later section about teachers. Each person's structural approach supports the content of her argument. It is not clear whether Susan wants to make her argument about students and therefore focuses on the first part of the section or that Susan wants to proceed methodically through the section and therefore focuses on students. Either way, her focus on the first part of the section supports her content claim. Judy is very clear that, for her, content and structure are intertwined and that this is her reading strategy; Judy's claim only makes sense by linking what is later written about teachers to the earlier section about students.
A debate about how to understand a single word in the text.	Judy seizes upon the word "likewise" to prove her case, that the sections about students and teachers should be linked and that we should understand the section about students through the lens of the section about teachers. In classical Talmudic fashion, Susan agrees that the word "likewise" is important, but instead interprets it to be a "shift," separating the two parts and thereby buttressing her structural argument.

Susan's question at the end of this section "Or is it the other way around?" is another attempt to challenge Judy's structural point by trying to show that Judy's reasoning is not full-proof.

Their discussion continues as follows:

Judy: Well, I understand the second part very well, I feel. The second part to me is saying only learn from teachers who are good people. "Likewise we must not learn from the rabbi who does not follow the good way although he be a great scholar and all people need him." So it has to be a moral person. This is what I'm understanding from my first read and so "likewise" what's a suitably well-behaved pupil? What does that mean that the pupil is well-behaved? That he has some sort of innate goodness or like he's respectful, he is morally there. And then it continues, "if one has followed the path which is not good"- it's kind of contrasting well-behaved with the path which is not good -"one first must be brought back to a better way conducted in the path of righteousness and examined and after that one may be admitted to the school of instruction and be taught." **So I think it's saying in order to teach and in order to learn, you have to be an intrinsically good person.** [3rd formulation of Judy's idea] That's what I think.

Susan: That's interesting. I was really put off by the simple-minded and then I was wondering if it's along the same notes as what we learned about Heschel, be prepared to be changed or don't and it's going to happen anyway. So is this, **the well-behaved pupil, the one who goes to class seeking the change and the simple-minded is the guy who doesn't see it coming but is ripe for it all and the same** [2nd formulation of Susan's idea], do you know what I mean?

Judy: Yes

Susan: I know I can't give you evidence from the text. It's just the connotation I get from simple-minded, extraneous types of learners in the classroom-

Susan's opposition to Judy's argument- "or is it the other way around?" -challenges Judy to elaborate on her thinking and explain its derivation. Judy is forced to talk through her idea one more time, again asserting that linking the two sections proves her point and contrasting the terms "well behaved" and "and if one has followed a path which is not good" to further support her point. As she talks through her interpretive process, she slightly further refines her main idea: "So I think it's saying in order to teach and in order to learn, you have to be an intrinsically good person. That's what I think."

Susan acknowledges Judy's point but does not indicate agreement or disagreement. Instead, she returns to the first part of the text. Her discomfort with the term "simple" has led her to make a connection with a modern source, Heschel, in order to make sense of the term in a more palatable way. Her strategy for making sense of the text is to look at another text, as opposed to Judy's which is to interpret backwards. In figuring out an interpretation of "simple- minded," she supports (consciously or unconsciously) and refines her earlier idea about needing to be in the right frame of mind to learn: only those who want to learn and be changed or are "ripe for it" should be taught Torah.

While Judy does not dismiss Susan's idea but rather affirms it with a "yes," her focus is not on developing Susan's idea but on returning to defend her own idea. Specifically, she works to further explain her process for interpreting "well behaved" and "simple minded." She stumbles when she tries to explain simple-minded from the Hebrew, realizing that she's not exactly sure about the sense of the word. Since "simple-minded" seems to indicate intellectual capacity (with its focus on "mind"), it poses a challenge to her interpretation of the overall text. Both Susan and Judy work together to interpret the word "simple," bringing in another outside text (the Haggadah). Susan seems to work hard to engage with Judy's idea, but as the discussion ends, both hold on to their own separate, but more fully developed, ideas:

Judy: So maybe they're saying well-behaved and simple are paired together in that way [like the wise son and simple son in the haggadah]. I don't know. That's the connotation I get when I read Tam, that he's eventually going to become a wise son.

Susan: Right. This would be- in that sense, this guy is wise.

Judy: Yah.

Susan: And this guy has the potential to be wise.

Judy: Right.

Susan: So you want to make the wise guy wiser.

Judy: I guess so.

Susan: And the **guy who is ripe for wisdom, to give it to him.** [3rd formulation of Susan's idea]

Judy: Right. So. But. Yeah. **So I think the whole thing is to learn and teach, you need to be a good person.** [4th formulation of Judy's idea]

At this point in the discussion, Susan and Judy continue to acknowledge the other's point while each works on her own interpretation. For Susan, the text has something to do with the idea that being "ripe" for learning is key to being able to learn. For Judy, the text is about needing to be a moral person in order to both teach and learn. In response to questions from their *hevruta* and needing to make their case to their *hevruta* they have reformulated their points a number of times. The end result is that they have two separate but more fully developed ideas on the table. Judy and Susan's interpretation through opposition does not match the stereotype of people tearing each other and their arguments to shreds. Each continues to allow the other's ideas to exist, while still positing her understanding for the sake of uncovering greater meaning.²⁰

Interpretation as Co-Building

In the second example, we see Judy and Susan working very much in sync to develop an interpretation of a later passage. The starting point for this co-building is Susan finding something that resonates with her, noting this and explaining why.

Judy reads section 2: "How does one teach? The rabbi sits at the head.' Oh, here you go. You're going to love this one. 'The rabbi sits at the head and the pupils surround him like a crown in order that all may see him and hear his words. The teacher does not sit on a seat and the pupils on the ground, but either' -ooh, I didn't expect this – 'but either all sit on the ground or all on seats.' I think this is different than other things he said. 'Originally, the teacher sat and the pupils stood. From the destruction of the second temple, it was customary to teach with the pupils seated.'"

Judy then continues to read on in Maimonides. After she reads another section, Susan breaks in: Susan: Okay, I found something that resonated with me in number two.

Judy: Yes.

Susan: This notion of the rabbi as having more authority and yet. I picture it sort of proceeding like this. Like how we sit upstairs.

Judy: Hm. I pictured it

Susan: Teacher is in one spot, but we're all around that table and I started that way in tenth grade in literature and I still do not understand why students have desks even in day schools. It's beyond me why we don't always sit like this.

What is important to notice at this point is that Susan has formed a mental image of what Maimonides is describing and that image matches how she's actually sat in class. She could have easily stopped thinking about the text at this point, simply equating it with her own experience, but Judy directs some questions to Susan about a metaphor used in the text and Susan must respond.

²⁰ This follows in the path of Hillel's famous arguments with Shamai made l'shem shamayim, for the sake of heaven. When the House of Hillel argued with the House of Shamai, it would still cite the House of Shamai, even when they were in disagreement. Since the point was seeking a greater truth as opposed to winning, there was no need to destroy the other's opinion. See Ethics of the Fathers 5:20 and commentaries on that verse.

Judy: Cool. What do you think it means that it says the pupils surround him like a crown? What's that? What is that? What does that make you feel like?

Susan: Well, there are a couple of different ways to look at that, I think. Either as a- like what does a crown normally surround? Like the authority. Or like together they make the crown. Like they're all their own unique circle.

From here on in, the excitement is palpable in their voices. Judy picks up on some of Susan's ideas and talks them through, in the process, explicitly verbalizing the idea that it is the students that make a teacher. Susan did not state this. She merely said that the students and teacher make the crown. But in Judy's echoing of Susan's words, she reformulates them into this idea, one that Susan continues to build on.

Judy: Cool. I have another idea. [?Let's do another one.] What makes a king? His crown. That's the symbol that makes him a king. If he doesn't have his crown, then he is no longer a king. So if the teacher- the students kind of make the teacher the teacher because without the students he won't be the teacher.

Susan: Won't be the rabbi, in this case.

Judy: Right, and the rabbi- like what we were learning- a rabbi is only a rabbi really, especially like these days because people accept his authority. If people don't accept his authority, then he won't be a rabbi anymore. It's not like God chose him or anything. You know?

Susan: Do you feel like it's more than just authority? A rabbi is not, rabbi without people seeking to learn from that person?

Judy: Right, exactly.

Susan: Because even nowadays there are so many rabbis without congregations, but (inaudible word) learned a lot from him.

Judy: Right. As long as people accept that person as an actual rabbi.

Susan: Is it just acceptance or actually seeking out knowledge from that person?

Judy: I think they go hand in hand. I think it's- I agree with what you're saying. I think at a certain point it's semantics. Yes.

Susan presents two ideas: that the crown symbolizes authority and that together they actually make a crown. At this point, it is not clear whether she means to suggest that "together" refers to only the students or to both the teacher and the students. Judy helps refine these ideas by synthesizing them and extending them further and suggests that since the crown gives authority and the students encircle the teacher like a crown, the students "make the teacher the teacher." Judy also links the conversation to contemporary discussions about the nature of rabbinic authority. Susan then questions the basis of rabbinic authority and perhaps implicitly the nature of authority being presented in the text. She challenges Judy's idea that rabbis are rabbis merely if people accept their authority and proposes that perhaps for a person to be considered a rabbi, people must seek knowledge from him. This statement links the conversation back to the Maimonides' text, which describes the students surrounding the teacher in order to learn from him.

Through their conversation, the text has gone from being about seating arrangements in classrooms, to being about the relationship between teachers and students to being about what makes a rabbi a rabbi. As opposed to interpreting through opposition in which there were two streams of ideas, in this case, there is one stream of ideas. Both Susan and Judy contribute to this stream in which one idea leads to another and then another and then another. The end result is that one can't point to either partner and claim that the final reading of the text is based on just her idea; rather, this is a process of co-building.

Even here, where it is clear that they are working through ideas together, it is still apparent how hard it is to listen closely to another's idea. Susan raises a question about whether the rabbi is constituted by his authority or by the fact that people seek knowledge from him. She raises this issue a number of times but Judy seems unable to really hear the distinction. While at the end, she comments that these two issues are interconnected, her last comment that "at a certain point it's just semantics" belies a lack of listening or understanding of the point Susan is raising.

In both of the examples above, we see the subtle and not so subtle ways that different partners' ideas spawn questions and other ideas. Sometimes, these ideas merge to form a larger whole and sometimes they remain distinct. One is left to wonder why at certain points the *hevruta's* project seems to be about co-building, while at other times, it seems to be about developing individual interpretations. Does this have to do with the nature of the task, the particular piece of text under discussion, each individual person's relationship to the text and ideas on the table, the relationship between the partners or some combination of all of these things and more? It is also clear from listening into these conversations how hard each partner works to develop her own ideas and simultaneously listen to her partner. Even in *hevrotot* that have some very clear norms of interaction, listening can be a challenge. When one studies in text study in *hevruta*, one must be ready to make claims while at the same time being open to and listening carefully to one's partner's ideas and to the text. What kinds of things can teachers do to help further foster these skills in their students?

VII. Conclusion

While *hevruta* has a long history of use as a way to learn Jewish texts, until now, we have had little idea of what this learning actually looks like in practice. It has been a black box in Jewish education. In public education, the need to better 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, Magdeline Lampert's study of the practice of teaching (Lampert, 2001) and the Reggio Emilia's studies of early childhood learning (e.g. Rinaldi and Krechevsky, 2001) have helped us unpack complex teaching and learning practices in public education.

The goal of the research reported here is to learn more about a particular form of Jewish learning- *hevruta*. Following the lead of research in public education, I have conducted a close up study of one such interaction. Zooming in on a *hevruta* session as it occurs in real time, I generated analytic frameworks which have helped me see more deeply into the structure and dynamics of this *hevruta's* learning.²¹ Close study made it clear that this session was not just a chaotic stream of words and gestures. Rather, there were rules and patterns, which enabled and constrained the learning.

Through this close examination of text study in *hevruta*, we have seen that Judy and Susan follow particular *steps* that organize the overall structure of their session. Through the course of these steps, they make many different *moves* in order to make meaning of the text in front of them. In this one interaction, Judy and Susan make at least twenty-eight different moves. These moves help them interact with each other and the text and highlight for us that to study in *hevruta* 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. We have also seen that these moves follow explicit and implicit *norms*, with both social and intellectual dimensions.

We have also seen that Judy and Susan develop interpretations through different modes of interpretive discussion. In one mode, *interpreting through opposition*, they work interactively but their stance towards one another is one of opposition. They challenge each other's ideas and each continues to work on refining her own initial interpretation. In the second mode, which I call *co-building*, they seem less wedded to a particular idea and build off of each other's ideas an interpretation that is an amalgam of both of their ideas.

Finally, we saw through the close analysis, that engagement in this practice gave Judy and Susan an opportunity to hone critical thinking skills, such as looking for textual evidence, to develop metacognitive awareness of their interpretive processes, and to cultivate the dispositions of deep

²¹ I draw on Magdeline Lampert's (2001) language of "zooming in" for close study.

listening and working to understand others. These skills and dispositions are not just important in Jewish education but are at the core of a liberal arts education.²²

This case analysis has generated a number of questions that can be asked about other *hevruta* sessions.

- To what extent do *hevruta* follow a general pattern of steps? When, why and how do they deviate from these steps?
- Are the moves and norms used by this pair used by them in other interactions and by other pairs? What other moves and norms are drawn on in other *hevruta* interactions? What are some of the specific ways that the norms enable and constrain learning?
- What other modes of interpretive discussion do we see examples of? To what extent do the individuals in a pair see their task as proving and refining their individual arguments and to what extent do they see their task as co-constructing a shared argument? What is the nature of controversy that occurs in *hevruta* interactions? When does it occur and why and what role does it play? And how do partners come to listen deeply to and understand each other's understanding?

There are also many important issues to consider that have not specifically been addressed in this paper. For example, this paper has specifically looked at how the interaction between two people impacts their learning. Also important to consider is how the task structure and the text influence the learning process. Furthermore, this paper has focused on how meaning is constructed but has not examined how the *hevruta* actually understands the text they are studying. This too is an important next level of analysis in subsequent studies. Finally, the students in this study are teacher candidates. Further studies will consider how *hevruta* learning helps prospective Jewish educators develop and practice habits that are important to teaching.

As educators, we believe in the power of *hevruta* study to help students make meaning of their own and each other's ideas and the texts in front of them and cultivate important skills and dispositions. If we value students' talk about the text and talking about the text in *hevruta* (and in other formats, like class discussions) is a core activity in Jewish education, then we need to develop the analytic tools for examining this form of student learning and learn how to best create learning environments to support this kind of talk.²³ In order to build a fuller picture and a deeper understanding of text study in *hevruta* and develop a language for talking about it, we need close-up, empirical studies that use, refine and extend the categories developed in this paper. Ultimately, building a theory of text study in *hevruta* can help teachers, students and researchers understand this Jewish social learning practice and make it truly educative.

²² See, for example, David Perkins (1992) and J. Bransford, A. Brown, et al (2000) for a discussion of the importance of metacognition.

²³ In addition to the challenge of developing the analytic tools for examining students' talk in *hevruta*, there is an even more basic challenge that we face. Capturing students' conversations in *hevruta* is technologically challenging. We have found that a combination of video, audio and field notes provide the best data but we are still working to refine our data collection techniques.

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