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

by Orit Kent

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

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

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

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