

ABSTRACT

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.