USING A PROTOCOL TO SURFACE MENTOR TEACHERS’ KNOWLEDGE ABOUT TEACHING BIBLE

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Abstract

In the author’s study, a protocol that asks a teacher to think aloud while observing a video recording of his or her teaching was used with two mentors working with a cohort of pre-service teachers. Mentors revealed much about their overall approaches to teaching Bible as well as some more detailed craft knowledge for novices. However, novices found the videos with transcripts of mentor-teacher think-alouds not entirely satisfying, both because novices became preoccupied in evaluating the teaching they saw and because mentor comments did not address what most struck the novices about the teaching episodes. The paper concludes with a discussion of how this technique surfaces not only knowledge about teaching, but more subjective assertions, beliefs, and orientations for discussion, which may be perceived differently by different audiences.

Setting

This study was conducted in the spring of 2004, in the first year of a program of teaching fellows in a Modern Orthodox day school in the northeastern US. The program included ten months of a teaching internship with mentoring by veteran teachers. The internship was supported by seminars that strove to give fellows tools and insights to help prepare for and reflect on their classroom experiences, as well as a deeper understanding of the content they were teaching and the issues in teaching that particular content. (Although mentors and their fellows taught Talmud as well as Bible, this research focused on the teaching of Bible.) Prior to the fellows’ arrival, the program selected mentors who were considered effective instructors and who wrote reflectively about their teaching, and invested in two years of preparation of these mentors in sharpening their own teaching practice and making it more explicit as well as developing mentoring skills.

Participants in this study were in two categories. There were two mentor teachers: One, whom I will call Ms. Alter, a teacher with a master’s degree and several years’ experience, taught the book of Samuel to middle school students. Another, whom I will call Rabbi Kaufman, also with a master’s degree and more than 15 years’ teaching experience, taught the book of Leviticus (among other texts). The six fellows enrolled in that first year of the program were the other study participants.

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The mentors in this study may be more skilled than most veteran teachers at articulating their knowledge about teaching. Because they have worked together as a group to investigate and improve student learning in their own classrooms, they have encountered terms (through contact with academic literature on teaching) essential to verbalizing their observations, and have had practice doing so. Loughran (2002) found that veteran teachers engaged in such inquiry groups developed such a facility. Doing research with teachers in professional practice schools is consistent with the promise of such schools (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999).

**Motivation**

Two motivations led to this study. First, helping mentor teachers surface their practical knowledge about teaching helps them make it accessible to novices. (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, see this surfacing as a goal of teacher research; Stewart, 1997, makes the more general case for ferreting out such knowledge among professionals so it can be valued, examined, and shared.) I was interested in the extent to which the protocol described below, tested in the teaching of language, science, and social science, would function in our context. Second, this study might contribute to the knowledge base of what experienced teachers know about teaching Bible, with an eye toward thinking about teacher training in this particular context. My assumption was that mentors had knowledge that fellows could learn, and that this protocol could help them learn it, by revealing teachers’ reconstructions of their thoughts and decision-making (Calderhead 1981)—that is, that the fellows’ (novice teachers’) participation in this study would have immediate teacher-education benefits for them as well.

These motivations led to the following research question: When selected mentor teachers engage in the “Making Explicit and Gaining Access to the Thinking Underlying Expert Practice” protocol (Ethell, 1999), what knowledge about teaching Bible do they reveal to novice teachers who observe their use of the protocol, and to researchers?

One limitation of the study is that there were only two mentor teachers, and they were perhaps atypical insofar as they had prepared for two years to become mentors. Also, mentors and fellows had been working together closely for most of a year when the study was conducted, so fellows already had strong opinions about mentors and may have felt they had little more to learn from them. Nonetheless, what participants did say was revealing, and is evidence for the protocol’s utility in this discipline.

**Method**

The stimulated recall procedure of Ethell (1999), later extended by Meijer, Zanting, and Verloop (2002, see also Meijer, Beijaard, & Verloop 2002), asks teachers to share all they were thinking, a retrospective think-aloud, in response to a videotape (the stimulus) of a recently taught lesson. They found this technique an effective way to find interactive cognitions. In this study, after a lesson was videotaped, the mentor teacher watched it that same day or the next, using the protocol (see Appendix) to stimulate them to share what they were thinking. These sessions were audio-recorded and later transcribed. It is important to note that the appended protocol was used in full only with
Rabbi Kaufman. With Ms. Alter, a modified version was used that asked her to reflect only on the teaching issues that were Bible-specific.¹

During separate sessions, the videos of Ms. Alter and Rabbi Kaufman were shown to the novice teachers. After each viewing, they were asked in writing:

1) Focusing on this lesson, write a paragraph describing something that strikes you about the way this teacher teaches this content (you may wish to relate to the teacher’s objectives, lesson structure, theories, methods, teaching moves and adjustments, or orientation). iv

Once fellows had written these answers, they read the transcript of the mentor’s comments on the lesson and responded in writing to the following prompts:

2) Now that you have heard the mentor’s comments, still focusing on this lesson, does anything new strike you about the way this teacher teaches this content (you may wish to relate to the teacher’s objectives, lesson structure, theories, methods, teaching moves and adjustments, or orientation)? If so please elaborate. If not, please say so.

3) Does anything you heard in the teacher’s comments cause you to see what you wrote about in response to question 1) in a different way? Explain. v

Table 1 shows the data sources for this study.

Table 1: Data and its analysis vi

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Record</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Video of mentor’s teaching</td>
<td>2 (one for each mentor)</td>
<td>Digital video</td>
<td>Watched repeatedly by researcher and Dr. Jon A. Levisohn, consultant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentors’ comments on what they were thinking</td>
<td>2 (one for each mentor)</td>
<td>Digital audio</td>
<td>Transcribed. Read repeatedly by researcher and Dr. Levisohn.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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¹Because I was most interested in teachers’ reflections on their use of pedagogic content knowledge—that is, strategies for teaching Bible, rather than generic classroom skills—in consultation with colleagues, I elected to narrow the focus of my instructions to Ms. Alter. This instruction constrained the interview unnecessarily; in retrospect, I would have done better to let her reflect more widely, including topics like classroom management skills, and then weed out the responses that were relevant for my purposes.
**Teacher Reflections**

Ms. Alter’s recollection of her thoughts while teaching addressed several themes. Despite instructions, which the researcher later regretted, to focus on the Bible-specific, two comments went to the issue of student attention, the struggle to gain it at the outset and her doubts about whether students’ coughing was genuine. In another comment, she articulated the value she places on discussion and her willingness to invest time in it. Later, she wondered about the level of direction in her note-taking guide, which she believed was perhaps too constraining. All these might be issues for novices to consider that might not be immediately obvious from observation.

A frequent theme from Ms. Alter was a focus on student understanding. These comments often related to the needs of individual students in the class with respect to the content. Who needed review or repetition? How did she repeatedly check for understanding as the lesson proceeded and adjust accordingly? She made explicit her moves to surface and address prior student conceptions (as advocated by Driver, 1987). An observer might have noticed these (although an observer of this class could not have known details Ms. Alter shared about students’ absences the day before or connections to what they are learning about verbs in Hebrew class), but again, a novice might benefit from the explicit thinking of the teacher on this theme.

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1. And it came to pass, at the return of the year, at the time when kings go out to battle, that David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the children of Ammon, and besieged Rabbah. But David tarried at Jerusalem. {8}

2. And it came to pass at eventide, that David arose from off his bed, and walked upon the roof of the king’s house; and from the roof he saw a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful to look upon.
In response to watching the video, Ms. Alter articulated a general approach to teaching navi (Prophets) and how it plays out in this context:

I try to focus on the details, but also to keep the bigger picture in mind. So in this section I’m focusing a lot on the details because I think that they are, they’re significant in sort of laying the, especially in these first five psukim [verses], in laying the groundwork for what happens, because this is the chet [sin]. I mean the whole rest of it until perek kaf [chapter 20] is the onesh [punishment]. But I think that the details are important because, that’s all we have. Because they’re there, it’s very short, and they’re there for a reason so... But the problem is that it’s focusing on the details. They want to get, they want to go ahead, and focusing on the details is sometimes hard for them, so that’s the challenge. One of the challenges.

Ms. Alter’s stated approach here in trying to see the forest and not just the trees in the Bible departs from the norm Lapian (2003) describes for Orthodox day schools. On the other hand, the need to ground exegesis, even of the forest, in the trees, echoes Kugel—“Ancient biblical interpretation is an interpretation of verses, not stories” (p. 28) and “[F]rom the standpoint of biblical interpretation, it is most important not to lose sight of the trees for the forest.” (p. 29)

Ms. Alter’s remaining comments relate specifically to the teaching of this text. She draws the listener’s attention to how in class she is trying to relate form and content, show the literary structure in this “framed story”, explain why David is in Jerusalem, explain the relevance of archaeological evidence to understanding David’s ability to see the woman, and teach students interpretive skills such as searching for key words and attending to verb forms and verb roots. (All but the last of these were already explicit in the teaching.) Some of the things she asks students to note are “patterns, either literary patterns or just things that we learned about the characters”, “milot manchot” (keywords), “verbs”, and “verb patterns”. In doing so, she avoids the dichotomy that many novice teachers (as well as some more experienced teachers) create between teaching “skills” and “content”, instead embedding the learning of skills where they relate to understanding content.

Three of Ms. Alter’s comments go to the challenge of teaching this particular text in a coeducational seventh grade. This group finds the racy contents at the end of verse two distracting. In this particular class, Ms. Alter notes she forgot to anticipate that, with deleterious consequences. She said, regarding verse one:

So then I thought there, that, well I guess this is in retrospect, but maybe there we should have talked more about the idea of why David was staying back from Yerushalayim [Jerusalem], Because then I realized that once we got into pasuk bet [verse two] that we couldn’t go back and talk about that anymore. So I realized that too late in this class. Although I have taught this before, but I seem to have forgotten from year to year how the students react to it. So we probably should have dealt, and I should have had on the note-taking guide at that point why they think that David stayed back from Yerushalayim [Jerusalem], because then that could have been part of that discussion also, instead of saving it for later when it was too late to have that discussion.
And as the teaching turns to verse two, she commented:

So as she’s reading it I realize that it probably was not a good idea to have someone read the pasuk [verse] because it goes into many of the other details that I didn’t want to talk about yet. So [pause], so what we should have done is just taken it word by word, and not have, I should have not had someone read that pasuk [verse]. [The researcher asked if that was her thinking now or at the time.] Actually as she was reading it I was thinking that, but I hadn’t thought about it enough beforehand to remember that – that that’s what happens when we read the whole pasuk [verse]– then they start focusing on the end of the pasuk [verse] and not, not on the beginning of it.

And further:

And we’re told a lot of information in this pasuk [verse], and then I tried to refocus it on the beginning. So, some of them were already focused on the end, but I tried to refocus it back to the beginning.

The challenge of teaching mature content to potentially immature students is noted by Ms. Alter, as is a very specific approach regarding how to sequence the teaching in these verses, where to pause, and when to raise which issues. In the observed lesson, she regrets not doing so and the consequences for the classroom atmosphere, but she notes that in her parallel sections of the same course, she remembered that this approach and class went more smoothly.vii I was struck by how detailed this knowledge about teaching is, and how text-specific.

Fellows Respond

Four novice teachers viewed the video of Ms. Alter’s lesson and were prompted to react in written form. First, without hearing her own analysis, they wrote about what struck them regarding the way she taught this content. Three of the four remarked on her literary approach and attempts to relate structural analysis to content, including attention to verb forms and cantillation marks.viii

It’s interesting to see the literary terms she uses with this seventh grade class, and the visual designs she uses to organize the information for them. I wonder how the literary concepts (structure/content, and sippur b’toch sippur [story within a story]) relate or don’t relate to mefarshim [exegetes], and how she chooses which approaches to present. I wouldn’t have expected a seventh grade class to be introduced to the relationship between form and content, though if they can handle it, it might be useful. I do think literary perspectives might help students focus on the text and keep track of what’s going on, since it allows them to look actively at whole chunks of pesukim [verses], rather than simply reading pasuk-by-pasuk [verse by verse] and thinking about the mefarshim [exegetes] more than the story itself.

Two also wrote they were struck by student “misbehavior” and that it went “unpunished.” One wrote: “Perhaps their annoyances are due to being bored with grammar and text-focused learning.” And the other, perhaps less forgiving than the others of the inevitable lack of smoothness at times
in beginning teaching, wrote: “I can’t really tell how she’s teaching the content – classroom management issues are too distracting. It’s hard to even figure out what the specific content is, or piece together how she’s organizing and teaching it in between asking students to be quiet.”

Fellows then heard and read the transcript of Ms. Alter’s stimulated recall exercise. They were asked what struck them now and whether her comments caused them to reconsider their answers to the first prompt. Three of the four did not say that her comments caused them to reconsider their reaction (two explicitly answered “no” to the question). In particular, the two who focused on student misbehavior were not swayed by Ms. Alter’s attribution of it to text-specific considerations of where to pause for discussion in these verses.

All four fellows were struck by Ms. Alter’s reflections on the issue of details of the text, and three of four relate these to her discussion of the big picture. One writes:

Ms. Alter is cognizant of the importance of knowledge of both, details and of the “big picture,” and that sometime depending on the class or lesson, one would have to decide and even choose carefully how much of one or the other to focus on. This is not apparent to me from the lesson itself but only from what Ms. Alter says.

And another writes:

Seeing/hearing Ms. Alter’s comments made me think more about the question of details vs. big picture, and about how to look at a story as a whole and think about how to approach the beginning in order to achieve goals for the end and for the whole unit. The former is an issue I’ve thought about in the past, and relates to what I mentioned above about the risk that students learning pasuk-peirush-pasuk-peirush [verse-exegesis-verse-exegesis] will lose sight of the big picture and get caught up in the mefarshim [exegetes], possibly almost in isolation from the pesukim [verses] on which they comment. I think Ms. Alter is trying to avoid that, but she is aware that her approach still carries a risk that the class will get caught up in details and lose sight of the big picture as she works with them to set up the background for the story.

And one challenges her fidelity to her intention:

I’m surprised that Ms. Alter thinks that she is helping the students get to a “bigger picture” of the material at this point in the lesson. In 28:32 [time counter], she admits that she becomes engrossed in teaching the details “because that’s all we have,” but that she then tries to tie it into a bigger picture. I think that the bigger picture has yet to be painted in this class. Presently, Ms. Alter seems to only be interested in having the students know the details cold, be it through the traditional way of coming up with perushim [interpretations] for new words, or through her more nouveau way of examining a pasuk’s [verse’s] structure.
Discussion
The video, and Ms. Alter’s note taking guide⁸ that was shared with fellows, revealed to these novice teachers a literary approach to teaching Bible, especially the interplay between form and meaning, and expanded their thinking about what is possible in a seventh-grade classroom. The video also raised for some of them issues about classroom management. The value added from sharing Ms. Alter’s own reflections is that fellows focused, within the literary approach, on the dialectic between forest and trees. This tension, with which all teachers of Bible must contend, becomes a more conscious issue for them. Both the video and Ms. Alter’s own reflections pushed fellows to think about how to approach teaching Prophets.

I wonder why these novice teachers were not struck by many other elements in Ms. Alter’s transcript. Ms. Alter highlights many moves she makes to check for student understanding and plan for diverse student backgrounds and current conceptions, but fellows do not perceive or take note of these moves, either in the video or in her reflections. Furthermore, fellows are not struck by Ms. Alter’s text-specific considerations in teaching these verses to students of this age, and the behavior issues that arise when (as she describes it in the transcript) she forgets to apply what she has learned by experience before (and re-learns here)—that is, to pause and set the context before Bathsheba’s bath. Also, it seems they are quick to judge harshly, to criticize the classroom management or to question Ms. Alter’s construction of events. We shall see even more acerbic responses as we now turn to the case of Rabbi Kaufman.

**Rabbi Kaufman Teaches the 7th Grade about Sukkot [Tabernacles]**
In the recorded lesson, Rabbi Kaufman taught a non-honors coeducational section of 14 7th-graders the following text from Leviticus 23: 40-42:

| לֹֽאְכֹתֶ֥ם לָכֶם בִּים ֹֽבְּרָ֖שׁוֹן, פָּרִֽיםּ, לֵֽךְ בָּֽתַּרְבֵּֽבָּו, לְֽעָרָֽבָּו, יָרֹֽהְךָלָֽהָֽוִים, שְׁמַחְתָּֽהָֽוִים, לְפָֽנִי, בְּיִֽם, שְׁבָֽעָֽתָֽו, לְֽפָֽנִי, בְּיִֽם. | 40 And ye shall take you on the first day the fruit of goodly trees, branches of palm-trees, and boughs of thick trees, and willows of the brook, and ye shall rejoice before the LORD your God seven days.
| וּמָֽקְרַֽהֲתֵ֥ם אֵֽתּוֹ הֵֽלֹהָֽה, שְׁבָֽעָֽתָֽו יֵֽמִים, נְשָֽׁעֲתֵ֥הֶם, כְּכַֽהֲתֵֽהֶם, לִֽרְדֵּֽכ֎רִיתֵֽהֶם, לְֽפָנִי, בְּיִֽם, שְׁבָֽעָֽתָֽו, לְֽפָֽנִי, בְּיִֽם. | 41 And ye shall keep it a feast unto the LORD seven days in the year; it is a statute for ever in your generations; ye shall keep it in the seventh month.
| יְמִֽים, כָּל-הָֽאוֹרִֽחַ, בֶּֽשָׁבָֽעְתֶּֽהֶם, בְּשָׁבָֽעְתֶּֽהֶם. | 42 Ye shall dwell in booths seven days; all that are home-born in Israel shall dwell in booths;
Teacher Reflections
Rabbi Kaufman’s recollection of his thoughts while teaching addressed several themes. In contrast to instructions given to Ms. Alter, Rabbi Kaufman was asked to share his recollection of what he was thinking without direction to focus on the Bible-specific teaching issues. A wider variety of thoughts emerged.

Classroom management
Rabbi Kaufman mentions two strategies with respect to student distraction that allow him to maintain momentum. One is to use physical proximity (Saphier and Gower, 1997, p. 17); in Rabbi Kaufman’s words: “There were probably one or two students that were talking or not focused, and I moved next to them as a way of getting them to pay attention and stop talking without actually disrupting the flow of the class.” Another time, he tells us he was aware of students’ being enamored by the video camera, but chose not to make a bigger issue. A novice watching might have thought Rabbi Kaufman did not see the student misbehavior, when in fact he makes a conscious choice to plow ahead. Not every battle is worth fighting.

In three comments, Rabbi Kaufman notes his repeating student questions and answers. Once he even gives a complete rationale: “I’m repeating her answer back to the class assuming students cannot hear each other. Particularly girls when they talk are rather soft, and if it’s anything significant, you want to repeat it yourself in public so that everyone will hear it.”

This method flies in the face of conventional wisdom. Johnson (1982, p. 10) and Posamentier and Stepelman (1999, p. 7) advise teachers not to repeat student answers. That way students learn to listen to each other and not see the teacher as the only person whose ideas count.

This disparity, though, illustrates another potential use of the protocol. It may expose cases where the practice of veteran teachers contradicts conventional wisdom. Moreover, it is not the case that Rabbi Kaufman has not had the benefit of learning teaching methods or has not reflected on a common practice; there is a conscious rationale for his approach. A teacher educator could at the very least use this disagreement as a site for exploring the relative merits of Rabbi Kaufman’s approach and those of the methods books.

To the observer, Rabbi Kaufman’s pattern of calling upon students to answer questions might appear random. But his transcript three times turns to why he called on a particular student. He discusses motives for calling on students as an attention-getting move when a student is not concentrating, as a way to enlist a student who had just returned to class, and as a way to match an easy question to a struggling student to build his self-esteem. Such considerations might create for a novice the possibility of a thought-out practice of when to call on whom.

Teaching Bible
Two comments make explicit the importance in Bible instruction of directing students into the text, somewhat noteworthy given Rabbi Kaufman’s reputation as a storyteller. “So I am asking them to find the phrase in the posuk [verse] about hadasim [myrtle]. Something I learned from Rabbi [Da-
Eliach is that you want to encourage them to go back to the text, to look in the text rather than just knowing it by heart.” Rabbi Kaufman returns to this theme later in saying, “I want the students to focus a little more on the text of the posuk [verse] itself.” In these comments he makes explicit two values: close reading of the text, and refining teaching by learning from others.

Like Ms. Alter, Rabbi Kaufman makes explicit his move of eliciting student misconceptions as a necessary step toward restructuring them (see Driver, 1987). He also draws the listener’s attention to areas of the text that are potential trouble spots for students. Thus, he reveals not only a general approach to teaching, but also specific knowledge about a potential trouble spot in teaching Bible:

This was a homework assignment they had to think about. We had learned it yesterday that you take the lulav [4 species] one day in the mikdash [temple], seven days outside the temple. Both words appearing in the posuk [verse 40], bayom harishon [on the first day] and shivas yamim [seven days]. I was confident there would be some confusion about their responses – that they would, some would think it was one day some would think it was seven. This would be a good chance to help them realize where they were confused, and we could clarify any misconceptions they had gotten at the end of yesterday’s class.

Five of Rabbi Kaufman’s comments touch directly on what one can typically expect of students in this particular grade level, track, and school, and of particular students, especially where student responses surprise him. Three comments are about times at which students surprised him with a lack of response or inaccurate responses, and two about greater precision in translation or insight than he would typically expect. Other comments, too, fill in background on the particular students, and what one might expect of their questions and responses. This background helps him see more closely where he might aim his teaching for this group, and, with caution, might generalize to other seventh grades in similar settings.

One sees some of Rabbi Kaufman’s pedagogic values in his comment, which he conceded was offered in hindsight, that “the environment in the class allows for the freedom of making a mistake.” Similarly, he talks about taking time to “allow the students to speculate” in order “to develop [a] theme from them”. Novice teachers often wonder whether to follow a student-introduced area of content that had not been in their plans. Rabbi Kaufman explains that he values such input, a value he made explicit to the fellows at other times, explaining that whereas they may fear not knowing an answer or going off plan, he finds such moments are what he enjoys most in teaching. Within the protocol, he states about one student’s comment: “It’s a good example of a student asking a question that I hadn’t considered, and I thought it was important for the whole class to think about. And I repeat the question publicly for everybody to hear the question and begin to focus on it.” He noted that he behaved similarly in incorporating a distinction that a student raised that “I hadn’t actually considered teaching the class, but once she had mentioned it [in class] we presented it [in detail].”

In the observed lesson, Rabbi Kaufman focuses the class on the words of verse 41 “ye shall keep it in the seventh month”, which appear to add no new information, since we know from verse 34 that the text places the holiday in the seventh month. The lesson proceeds with Rabbi Kaufman asking
the students what these words add to our understanding, then parrying in response to their suggestions. Eventually he offers the interpretation that these words represent a pro-Judean polemic, anticipating the events of at the end of I Kings 12 in which the Israelite King Jeroboam I institutes a parallel holiday on the fifteenth of the month, but in the northern kingdom and in the eighth month. Readers hearing verse 41 then and after would understand this verse as a condemnation of Jeroboam I. This notion that the meaning of the text can remain open until later developments make it clear is then amplified by a discussion of a passage in the Babylonian Talmud (Pesachim 2a) about stars that emit no light, foreshadowing—in this analysis—modern astronomical objects.

Rabbi Kaufman’s assertion about textual interpretation was made explicit in his teaching to the class—that is, continuing generations may understand more of a given traditional text than their predecessors, in light of the progression of history and science. His transcript amplifies this point, though he concedes that the particular way in which he taught it developed somewhat on the fly (with respect to the Talmudic passage, he says “I decide [note present tense] to tell the students”), despite having generally planned to share it.

I knew I wanted to tell them the new interpretation. I don’t know that I had thought it through as fully as when I presented it. I actually liked the idea of giving them the feeling that they wouldn’t understand psukim [verses]; in some generations one could not understand a posuk [verse] clearly until the event actually occurs that’s perhaps alluded to in the posuk. As I started teaching it, the theme was developed a little more sharply, and I was actually quite glad to have brought up that interpretation. It’s good for them to know that not everything can be understood all the time. Good lesson.

The transcript also draws attention to two methodological points in Rabbi Kaufman’s teaching of this passage. First, Rabbi Kaufman explains his purpose in telling students they need not remember Jeroboam’s name, so they can “focus on the main part of the story.” Second, he describes how and why he asks questions in a particular situation before offering his own new interpretation.

I usually find it quite enjoyable when you ask a question, “Who can find something new in the posuk?”, and you know that they won’t be able to find anything new, and you sort of pique their interest by presenting it as a challenge, and they’re unable to overcome the challenge, it sort of heightens their interest in the activity of learning, which is a fun, fun thing to have. Then when they hear the answer, it’s a nice feeling of accomplishment.

The motivational strategy made explicit by Rabbi Kaufman here is “indicate a void in students’ knowledge” (Posamentier and Stepelman, 1999, p. 86). Posamentier and Stepelman (p. 87) advise: “The more dramatically you do this, the more effective the motivation.” Rabbi Kaufman also makes explicit that he is laying groundwork for a future lesson he intends to teach about how initially in these verses the text does not mention the commandment to dwell in a sukkah [booth] despite calling the holiday Sukkot [booths]. We will see later that novice teachers did not consider either of these as possible techniques to add to their teaching repertoires.
The lesson closed with Rabbi Kaufman’s drawing the attention of the class to the word *ezrach* [home-born] in verse 42. The reading he wants students to arrive at, according to his transcript, is that *ezrach* (translated by Rabbi Kaufman as “citizen”, its meaning in modern Hebrew) signifies that “even if you’re wealthy, or particularly if you’re wealthy, you need to get out of your houses and move into a smaller dwelling.”xiv The transcript reveals that Rabbi Kaufman is aware of, but chooses not to teach, halachic interpretations of this word (for example, about to which adults “ezrach” refers), preferring this moralistic interpretation he had seen “the previous evening.”xv At the same time, Rabbi Kaufman tries to value student suggestions for what significance “citizen” has (“some of their answers I think were quite good, too”), but needs to push them to get “what I was hoping to”, by, “on the spot” appealing to historical times (feudal and revolutionary war) where citizens were free and landed so they would “come up with the correct answer.”

The tension which the transcript raises between valuing student answers and trying to teach what is in one’s plan, preferably via student inquiry, is one with which good teachers always struggle. It is related to another issue: whether one believes there is a single, correct answer, and what constitutes a warrant for an interpretation. (That is, even if there is not a single correct answer, why a teacher gives his endorsement to some interpretations as more satisfying, even “more correct”, than others).

Another tension between Rabbi Kaufman’s two views is fruitful for teacher reflection on when one applies which orientation. That is, there are two views reflected towards reading the text: for some verses the understanding appears to remain open, and is enriched by historical developments, but for others it is important to understand the text in its historical context (in this case, what it meant to be a citizen in those days—although as one fellow pointed out, his motivating examples are from later historical times, so the connection is “tenuous”). All these issues are raised by the transcript, although it is perhaps a limitation of the protocol that one is not afforded the opportunity to follow up with Rabbi Kaufman and ask him to be explicit about these issuesxvi.

**Fellows Respond**

Four fellows viewed the video of Rabbi Kaufman’s lesson and were asked to react in written form. As with Ms. Alter’s video, they wrote about what struck them about the way Rabbi Kaufman taught this content, without having access to his own analysis. Two fellows took note of the unspoken midrashic-style assumption that “every jot and tittle of the Torah has a meaning.” Their reaction is to the invisible, unspoken—and perhaps unconscious—aspect of the curriculum, inducting students into a particular way of reading text without their consent or knowledge. One fellow criticizes different parts of the lesson: “He leaves them guessing and doesn’t tell them how to get to the answer… [his goal is] to inspire but not necessarily how to get to those insights.”

All of the fellows described the theological messages embedded in Rabbi Kaufman’s teaching and his motivation for choosing a particular way to present the text as attempting to inspire students. Some were themselves inspired by this message as teachers. Sample reactions follow:
“He answers his own question with an answer he considers inspiring. Do the students?” (Whereas this fellow appears to think not, another is impressed with students’ connection to the theme of rich people needing the message of Tabernacles.)

“I feel that a theological approach is driving his exegesis. His need to assign theological mut-sar [ethical] type meaning to verses causes him to interpret them in the way that he does. For example, he inserts an ethico-theological message about sukkot [Tabernacles] into his translation of the word ezrach [citizen]. I feel that at a certain level, he is actually undermining the meanings of the text by making them accord to a theological/halachic agenda.”

“I very much liked the way in which he said that there can be verses which even Moshe didn’t understand, but that can be understood in later generations. It could foster excitement that the students could potentially understand an aspect of the Torah which was never fully appreciated beforehand.”

“First of all, he doesn’t just teach the pesukim and their meanings, he also teaches messages that one can glean out of the pesukim. His goals reach beyond teaching content but he aims to inspire, to give meaning and to learn lessons.”

Additionally, two fellows noted Rabbi Kaufman’s movement around the room, describing it as a subtle management strategy, although one questioned why he always moved to the right of the room. One fellow also articulated a theme that will be amplified as we turn to their responses to the transcript: “I believe his questions are tricky.”

When fellows heard and read the transcript of Rabbi Kaufman’s stimulated recall exercise—again, as with Ms. Alter—they were asked to write what struck them now and whether his comments caused them to reconsider their initial answers. Though they took note of the new ideas, the “secrets of teaching” that they gleaned, fellows were primarily united in the feeling that reviewing this transcript helped them express what had been bothering them about Rabbi Kaufman’s teaching.

One fellow notes that what now struck him was that “I didn’t realize that he had thought ‘not everything can be understood all the time’ as a broader goal. I was interested in that part of the lesson, because I think it’s an interesting approach to chumash [the Pentateuch]. It didn’t occur to me that he was pleased with it in a broader sort of way.” Another picked up on his comment about telling students to avoid the detail of Jeroboam’s name, saying:

Another thing that I was reminded about when I read his comments is that I noticed he tries to help the students focus and organize their notes. For example, he’ll tell them to write something down or he’ll tell them you don’t need to know this name, just the main point of the story.

Most striking in fellows’ reactions at this juncture, though, was that they all were struck, largely unfavorably, by Rabbi Kaufman’s questioning and their observations of where it led.
I noticed that sometimes he is looking for a particular answer and he will try to lead the students to say what he wants them to say. He noticed this himself with regard to his interpretation of the word *ezrach* [citizen]. [Fellow 1]

Perhaps posing questions which they will be unable to answer, and that they require you to tell them, makes them into more passive learners, who learn to not bother trying to think of answers. [Fellow 2]

Asking unanswerable questions good???? [Fellow 5]

I am struck by the way that he talks about asking impossible questions. Since the beginning of the year I had problems with the way that R. Kaufman would ask students questions that they could not really answer. I thought that it was always unfair. Now I see that he has a whole philosophy to asking impossible questions. This philosophy is articulated in 30:34 [time in transcript] where he says most notably that students’ encountering impossible questions ‘heightens their interest in the activity of learning, which is a fun, fun thing to have. Then when they hear the answer, it’s a nice feeling to have.’ I disagree almost totally. I cannot see how asking a student a question when ‘you know that they won’t be able find anything new... when they’re unable to overcome the challenge’ could be anything but supremely frustrating and off-putting. I am not saying that challenging questions are a bad thing, but impossible questions are a different story. [Fellow 4]

Only two of four fellows responded to the question regarding what the transcript caused them to reconsider. One noted the spontaneity in the lesson, which before reading the transcript seemed to this fellow more deliberate and planned. Another noted the strategy from Rabbi Eliach regarding driving students to investigate the text, but then challenged whether Rabbi Kaufman’s use of it is consistent:

He provided a new perspective about wanting students to get into the text and really look at it. He articulates that goal when he says that “I want the students to focus a little more on the text of the posuk [verse] itself.” This would seem to be at cross-purposes with a Talmudic approach to Bible wherein the exegete may ignore certain elements of the text so as to arrive at a desired conclusion. It is worthwhile therefore noting that he is actually using both trying to engage students with text and also being less than fair in his classroom exegesis.

**Discussion**

We began with the question: When selected mentor teachers engage in the “Making Explicit and Gaining Access to the Thinking Underlying Expert Practice” protocol (Ethell, 1999), what knowledge about teaching Bible do they reveal to novice teachers, and to researchers? In our observations and analysis here, several kinds of knowledge were surfaced, and this protocol is worthy of further exploration in the context of teaching Bible and educating teachers of Bible.
First, the protocol elicited knowledge about general pedagogy—for example, proximity as a way to maintain student attention without losing momentum, questioning techniques, checks for student understanding, the need to direct (but not overdirect) students’ note-taking, and the deliberate attempt to elicit and address student misconceptions all emerge.

Second, teachers reveal pedagogic content knowledge about connecting form and meaning. Moreover, specific pedagogical content knowledge about what students this age are capable of in their thinking about the content, and strategies for that type of content, are evident. So too is the technique of directing student attention to the specific words of the text.

The use of the think-aloud transcript enriches the record of teaching practice. The viewer of the video learns more about the individual students, the prior knowledge and future direction of the class, teacher thinking in patterns of calling on students, and the strength of teachers’ commitments to beliefs about Bible—for example, Rabbi Kaufman’s notion that more of the meaning is revealed over time.

What also emerges from the data is that teaching practice, and the practice of teaching Bible in particular, is tied up with individual teacher beliefs (about both Torah and pedagogy), pedagogic content knowledge, and teaching contexts. One person’s motivational strategy of asking the unanswerable question is disempowering anathema to another. One person’s focusing of student attention to a soft-spoken peer’s good idea by repeating it is another’s management blunder. The values of some joint teacher and student direction of the lesson, and balancing the big and small picture, are presumably universal, but questions of where to strike that balance and how well it is done in a given lesson are unlikely to result in consensus positions. Some values, such as prioritizing inspiration as a goal of Torah instruction, or the notion that every word counts, will not be universally shared as pedagogic principles. The protocol nonetheless remains valuable in foregrounding all of these as real issues with which many teachers grapple.

A personal note: I was struck at many points by the difference between the fellows’ reactions and my own. They were more ready than I was to be critical of a teacher’s fidelity to his intentions, classroom management, or asking ultimately unanswerable questions. They also focused less than I did on what teachers revealed about their teaching knowledge in working with individual students, surfacing prior conceptions, or checking for understanding, and seemed more interested in evaluating how well the teacher seemed to be doing.

I suspect that novice teachers approach teaching with a deficit model (in other words, they often think they can do it better), while I deliberately try to view what I see less critically and even defer more (perhaps sometimes too much) to the wisdom of experienced teachers. Also, the mentors are my friends and colleagues, so I am more biased to view things in their favor than fellows are. Also, it is my experience that, in analyzing classroom dynamics, and the specifics of teaching and learning, novice teachers tend to be more teacher-focused (emphasizing teachers’ actions in their observations) than are veterans, who are more student-focused in their thinking (emphasizing students’ reactions, work, and learning). Since I have more background knowledge in methods and terms to
attach to what the teachers describe, I am more ready to notice recognizable strategies (whether I agree with them or not) when they come up on the video or in the transcript. As a tool for teacher education, the video and transcript will likely work best with teachers who have more formal background in pedagogy, methods, education theory, and/or teacher research, or in the hands of an experienced teacher educator.

**Conclusion**

Through videotaping veteran teachers of Bible, and then using the tape as a stimulus for them to think aloud about their teaching, we can generate rich records of teaching practice. These in turn reveal sometimes tacit knowledge about teaching in general, about Bible in general, about teaching Bible in particular, and pedagogic content knowledge about teaching Bible including teaching particular parts of the Bible. However, we must reject transmissionist and even naïve constructions (including my own original one) that from this fount of knowledge, the dew of wisdom would be showered on novices. Novice teachers will not view all new knowledge as something worth learning, and are not necessarily always ready to notice the possible lessons. Furthermore, often what is revealed in a close examination of teacher practice and thinking is not simply “knowledge” but a complex tangle of teacher beliefs intertwined with the complex decisions that arise in real classrooms. The richness of such records, and even their messiness, are necessary, but likely not sufficient, to engage novice teachers in thinking deeply about teaching. Further work in the theory of pedagogy, as well as the assistance of experienced teacher-educators, would make this protocol and its enriched records of practice a more useful tool in the continuing education of novice teachers.
REFERENCES


**APPENDIX: MENTOR INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

(Adapted from P Meijer, D. Beijaard and N.Verloop, 2002, p. 170)

_Verbal instructions to introduce the stimulated recall interview._

Thank you for consenting to participate in this study. I appreciate the time you are taking to help me learn about what good teachers of Bible know so that we can think about how to build up that knowledge in others.

We are going to watch a video recording of the lesson you have just given. The purpose of this interview is to stimulate you to remember what you were thinking, or what was “on your mind”, during this lesson. Of course, in a 46-minute lesson, a lot of thoughts have gone through your head, and it would be impossible to remember them all without some help. I hope that the video-recording of the lesson will help you to recall what was on your mind during the lesson. Try to “relive” the lesson when watching the videotape. Stop the videotape every time you recall what you were thinking during the lesson, or what was on your mind. Try to say everything you can remember thinking during the lesson, without asking yourself whether these thoughts are important, “strange”, etc.

So, I want you to tell your thoughts while you were teaching this lesson. I want you to clearly distinguish these thoughts from the ones you will have while watching the videotape. These last thoughts are not the focus of this interview. Of course, sometimes it is hard to distinguish between these two kinds of thoughts. In case I have doubts about whether a thought you report concerns one you had during the lesson or one which arises now that you are watching the videotape, I will ask, “Were these your thoughts during the lesson, or are you thinking this right now, while you are watching the videotape?”
Sometimes teachers become absorbed in watching the videotape of their own lesson and forget to report their thinking during the lesson. In case this happens, and you let the videotape run for more than 45 seconds without reporting your thoughts, I will stop the tape, and ask whether you can recall your thoughts at that moment in the lesson. In case you cannot recall your thoughts, you can say so, and start the tape again. In general, however, I will not interfere during the interview: You will be the only one talking. I will just listen and write something down every now and then. Perhaps I will ask some short questions.

It absolutely does not matter whether the lesson we are about to watch was a “good” one or not, whether there was a marvelous atmosphere or not, etc. For this interview, which is focused on what you were thinking during the lesson, this is not of any interest. I do not intend to evaluate the lesson.

To preserve your thoughts, I will be tape-recording our session now. Your name will not be shared in any public forum resulting from this work (and unless you request to the contrary, the work will not be attributed to you). The fellows will be watching the video and listening to your comments. Remember that you have the right to stop at any time.

Do you have any questions? [When done answering them, start the tape]
My premise that teachers have practical, but not always explicit, knowledge about teaching covers over divisions of nomenclature including what counts as knowledge. Polanyi (1958) would not count what the teacher possesses as knowledge until, through reflection (cf. Schon 1987) the teacher makes it conscious. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) disagree, counting teacher knowledge, even if not explicit, as knowledge, and they see bringing that knowledge to light as a motivation for teacher research. Feiman-Nemser and Beasley (1997), too, see this wisdom of practice as knowledge, albeit knowledge-in-action, situated or tacit. Spiro et al (1991) argue that in complex domains (like teaching, I would argue), simple declarative propositions are difficult to make; rather, knowledge and issues are best explored in cases in a context.

Other methods could be to ask them to identify decisions (and roads not taken) or what surprises them (Feiman-Nemser & Beasley, 1997), but for this study I adopt the method of Meijer, Zanting, & Verloop. I do so primarily to replicate their study but in a new discipline, without introducing other unnecessary sources of variation. It should be noted that Meijer, Zanting, & Verloop (2002) also made extensive use of concept maps, which, for simplicity, the present study does not. That might well be an interesting follow-up, as would be the large-scale application of both the stimulated recall and concept mapping techniques to the teaching of Bible. The present study is as more preliminary, small-scale exploration.

If more time had passed we would likely get reconstruction, not recall, of what they were thinking at the time.

The idea of orientations to teaching Bible comes from Holtz, 2003.

The request to reflect before and after teacher comments were revealed was to assess the added value of the transcripts for learners, but in a non-research setting could well be structured in one stage.

A more formal treatment of these data might be revealing. For example, one might try to classify teacher knowledge or data from the videos using software designed for that purpose. Ideally, more than one rater would classify these, and a high inter-rater reliability would be demanded. For this study, with its limited resources and scope, my method was less formal.

Ms. Alter shared that the following year she had students pre-read the entire chapter at home, which also tempered the classroom tittering.

Formally, the cantillation marks are not a part of the text’s structure, but represent a Masoretic interpretation.

This guide gives prompts such as: “[For verse 1] How does the structure of this pasuk reflect the content?”

For a Talmudic approach to the repetition, see Talmud Bavli, Tractate Chagigah 9a.
In their responses, fellows note the taken-as-shared, unstated assumption that repetition must teach something rather than being merely lyrical. In the interview, the assumption is stated as an instructional goal, when Rabbi Silver says that “It’s a good example of showing the students that even things that seem obvious, when they’re repeated there could be some deeper meaning.”

One could question Rabbi Silver’s equation of the Bible and the Talmud in this respect. Also, one fellow challenged his assumptions about science and the Talmudic rabbis: “I lean more towards the rabbis having received a lot of their scientific knowledge from contemporary gentiles as opposed to having had any kind of independent traditions (although I heard an interesting approach which claims that they did have traditions, but only in those areas where it was necessary for Halakhah. I think that that resonates with me.).”

Rashbam’s commentary is along these lines, that the commandment is even to those who have a house, as a message of humility that all is through God’s help. Rabbi Silver’s reading, though, extends Rashbam’s to say especially those who have a house.

For a fuller discussion of a teacher’s spontaneous selection of interpretations the night before without an explicit plan for the selection criteria and fit with overarching goals, see Jon A. Levisohn, “A Plea for Purposes,” *Jewish Educational Leadership* (2005).

Or perhaps not. To begin challenging the views expressed, or even exploring deeper in a way that could be interpreted as challenge, might undermine the participating teacher’s willingness to share, and would violate the instructions’ reassurances that the lesson need not be a good one, the teacher need not worry about whether what is said appears strange, and that it will not be evaluated.