

## TEACHING AND TEACHER DEVELOPMENT

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Jewish tradition has expressed an interest in teaching and learning from the biblical dictum “teach your children diligently” to rabbinic narratives about the nature of the relationship between teacher and student, from the emphasis on hevruta learning (a special kind of learning partner relationship) to ideas about what subjects can appropriately be taught at given ages. This abiding interest is the impetus for this special issue of the *Journal of Jewish Education*, devoted to issues of teaching and teacher development. As in ancient times, the interests of our authors are very broad. This issue includes articles that present both conceptual and empirical studies; each sheds light on a specific challenge; each challenges us to think more carefully about the core of educational practice—the interrelationship of students, teachers, and knowledge.

In his article, “A Pragmatic Pedagogy of Bible,” Edward L. Greenstein introduces a phrase (which he attributes to Norman Gottwald): “angles of vision.” I would like to appropriate this phrase to introduce the articles in this issue: Each article investigates our theme from a different angle of vision emanating from the problem it addresses and the mode of inquiry it employs. Yet, all look at the questions: a) What do teachers need to be, need to know, and need to be able to do and b) how does the context of their work support or constrain their capacity to be effective?

Daniel Pekarsky’s, “Excellence in Teaching – Here, Too, it Takes a Village”, takes as its starting point the conviction that high quality Jewish education depends heavily on high quality teaching. As a society and as a Jewish community, we publicly espouse this sentiment, but in reality we honor it in the breach. Grounding his article in an exploration of the ideas of three Jewish philosophers – Hartman, Heschel, and Buber – Pekarsky suggests a list of characteristics for thinking about the nature of excellence in teaching and its defining characteristics. He then discusses some of the policy implications that might flow from possible and actual conclusions concerning these characteristics. While not suggesting that his list is definitive, he suggests that grappling with excellence in teaching is a worthwhile endeavor and one that he hopes will bear fruit. The article concludes by highlighting the indispensable role of communities in fostering excellence in teaching in Jewish education and begins to identify some of the key qualities of communities that are working on these issues.

Miriam Raider-Roth and Elie Holzer also examine the question of excellence in teaching by positing the idea that teachers must exhibit “presence”. Their article explores how one professional development setting, a week-long Summer Teachers Institute (STI), endeavored to create a learning environment in which teachers could explore the fundamental relational dimensions of teaching and learning. Through the use of text study, hevruta practices, as well as focused attention on teaching/learning relationships, STI set the stage for teachers to develop dispositions and practices that grow their capacity to be present to themselves, fellow learners, and the text. The authors trace the theory, practices, and experiences of learning embedded in the seminar, describe their data collection strategy, and report their findings, which suggest that hevruta learning can be a powerful form of professional development because the intensity of experience with the relational dimensions of the learning process allows teachers to assume a new stance of presence.

But it takes more than a vision of the good teacher, thoughtful professional development and communal support to develop and nurture teachers. “Developing Comprehensive Induction in Jewish Day Schools: Lessons from the Field,” by Sarah Birkeland and Sharon Feiman-Nemser, sheds light on what it takes to induct novice teachers into the field. Recent educational research demonstrates that well-designed induction programs can help improve new teachers’ effectiveness—and that such effort must go beyond individual mentoring of novices. In recent years, much attention has been paid to mentoring as though it, by itself, could sustain teachers in their early years. In fact, the research referenced by Birkeland and Feiman-Nemser suggests that regular opportunities to co-plan with and observe colleagues, regular, transparent performance evaluations, and access to complete teaching curricula embedded in a supportive professional culture are also required. Birkeland and Feiman Nemser describe a three- year study in which they and their team helped six schools create a school based induction system that included the key elements for successful induction. Each school’s process was carefully documented and the findings analyzed to share the lessons learned from the challenges and successes encountered in these different settings.

The last four articles in this special issue address questions related to two core subject matter areas: Hebrew and Bible. What should be taught? Who makes these curricular and pedagogic decisions? What is the basis for the decision making process?

Nitza Krohn’s article introduces student needs assessment as a serious issue in curriculum design. Her study reports the findings of an analysis of the Hebrew language learning needs of students training to become Conservative rabbis. There were two phases to this study. In the first phase a variety of stakeholders were interviewed about the Hebrew learning needs of rabbinical students. The information gathered in the interview phase of the study served as a tool for generating survey questions that were administered in the study’s second phase. The participants included students enrolled in the rabbinical schools and Conservative rabbis in the United States and Canada. Differences of opinions concerning the desired focus of

Hebrew language instruction, its content, and skill emphasis were found both within and across respondent groups. Krohn not only discusses these differences but also some of the curricular and pedagogical implication of her findings.

The last three articles make up a unit that addresses the teaching and learning of Bible. They are a mini-version of a larger discussion about the relationship of the scholar and scholarship to the classroom. The series begins with abovementioned article by Edward L. Greenstein, who brings a Bible scholar's perspective to the questions, but suggests a pedagogy motivated by pragmatic concerns. Greenstein takes us through multiple readings of the account of the Tower of Babel, thereby illustrating the ways in which a given methodology of study impacts the way in which we read and understand the text. Because there are diverse approaches for studying the Bible, each with its own "angle of vision," Greenstein suggests that pedagogic decisions ought to be based on whether and how various approaches might "interest, arouse, provoke and excite students." At the end of the article, Greenstein suggests yet another perspective from which one might make one's pedagogic choice – "the meanings that give significance to our enterprise".

In Barry W. Holtz's response, "Making Choices: Teachers' Beliefs and Teachers' Reasons," he alerts us to a variety of ways that Greenstein, as a scholar of the subject matter, contributes to the ways that educators conceptualize their work. He mentions a variety of issues, including framing goals for learning and the multiple interpretations of a given text. The latter perspective can help a teacher react to students' varied responses with deeper understanding based on the notion that there are indeed multiple readings of a given text.

Jon A. Levisohn invites us into a virtual reality—one in which a person enters a room with no assumptions or preconceptions. In the room, this avatar finds a table, a chair, and a Bible. Levisohn invites us to imagine what sense might be made of the biblical text. He poses four major questions related to claims made by Greenstein using the avatar as a way to get a particular perspective on these issues: (1) Do we select among methodological approaches to Bible according to our desired interpretive outcome but not according to any internal criteria? Is it merely a matter of "choice"? (2) In what sense are interpretive approaches usefully compared to equipment like x-rays or ultrasounds? (3) What does it mean for a methodology to generate a solution that "works"? Works for whom and for what? (4) What are the questions that educators ought to consider, in constructing a "pragmatic pedagogy?"

The articles in this issue of the Journal speak to the complexity of teaching and the interplay between teacher, learner, content, and environments; we hope that they spark conversations about the issues and questions raised by the nine educational researchers whose work is presented here.