

MTEI Text Study Assignment Nov. 2015

I chose to use Rabbi Nehunya's prayer to study with my teachers at our first faculty meeting/training session which took place two weeks before school began.

I wanted to study this text particularly at that faculty meeting because I feel it lends itself to discussions that are so pertinent and timely to beginning a new school year, and it is so rich and multi-layered.

I wanted my teachers to think about and reflect on the work they do- what it means to them, why they have chosen to be a religious school teacher, how they feel at the beginning of the year, what fears and concerns they may have, what are their hopes for the new year, what might they be grateful for, etc. My hope was that it would help them recognize all that they do as teachers, how challenging and tricky it can be at times, how even very experienced teachers have trepidation and often need to reach out to others for support. The sharing of all of this in a group setting can help the group to bond, and I was hoping for that as well.

Honestly, I feel that it all worked quite well, again, due to the nature of the text. Analyzing the word 'makom' brought in yet additional layers to the discussion. It introduced the concept of God into our work, the physical spaces within which we teach, and the concept of sacred spaces. It shifted the conversation to a spiritual level. It enhanced the discussion and the learning. (I realized that my lesson plan had included this topic in the beginning, but I actually had decided to discuss it after we had addressed most of the other questions).

There was a difficult moment for me when one of the teachers said that she felt R. Nehunya was quite self-centered; that it is not always about **us**. While I agree that it is certainly not only and always about us, I didn't at all feel that R. Nehunya is self-centered, and that that would change the intention and understanding of this text. I felt a bit caught between saying that and not wanting to shut down the teacher. So I did express myself but wasn't so comfortable doing so.

In order to learn about my teachers' experiences in this session, I created a very short de-briefing form that I asked them to complete before we moved on to our next topic (I cannot take credit for this- Thank You Gail and Miriam for your help!).

Their comments were great! They expressed a lot of what I had been hoping they would gain from our learning. They commented on the group bonding, comfort in knowing it's okay to feel anxious and nervous before teaching, trying your hardest and best is important but forgive yourself if you are not great every class, the importance of both mentally preparing oneself before heading into the classroom, and for reflection after teaching, that both students and teachers are constantly growing and that that growth is often inter-dependent, being grateful for ALL of the experiences, even for the 'stumbling' (our own and our students') for they are all learning opportunities.

Thankfully, I do not feel I faced any challenges in setting up this session, and the teachers were incredibly responsive to this learning.

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