

Tammy Kaiser – Assignment 2: Text Study

Lesson Plan:

Text used: Rabbi Nehunyah's Prayer

1. Distribute Text to havruta partners
2. Read text aloud (leader)
3. Have havruta partners tell the story in their own words
4. Ask each other what in the retelling they agree with and what parts they don't agree with
5. Try to find a common ground if able
6. Come together as a group and ask the following questions:
 - What do you think Rabbi Nehunyah looked like, sounded like, smelled like at the threshold (because I have a teacher who is visually impaired, I make it a point to include more ways of perceiving a situation than just sight)?
 - What do we learn from the first line?
 - What was so unusual that the students asked him their question?
 - What do you think Rabbi N meant by "mishap"?
 - Why do you think he gave thanks for his lot?
 - How do you understand the text?
 - What do you think Rabbi N's emotional state is as he enters and exits the Beit Midrash?
 - What changed about his emotional state?
 - What do you think the learning environment was like in the Beit Midrash?
 - How could that environment have affected Rabbi N's intention?

Journal Entry:

The text study went better than I expected. I was worried that maybe my faculty would not be ready to study a Jewish text as 60% of my staff are not Jewish. I was surprised when they absolutely loved it. As a matter of fact, the text study was the highlight of the meeting. During the last meeting I held, I did not allow time for text study. Teachers complained afterwards. They missed the study. I learned that I need to make time to study text.

Another aspect of the study that surprised me was the use of other senses beside sight. Asking the teachers to imagine seeing Rabbi N standing in the doorway is great. But what if you have never "seen" a doorway, or a rabbi, or a classroom?

In my head I imagine a rabbi clothed in black standing, shoulders bent at the threshold of a room. The light is slanting through a window somewhere outside of my image frame. There is dust dancing in the light as Rabbi N lowers his head into one hand and mumbles a prayer. He is old. He is tired. There are bags under his eyes. He looks as if he has not slept in days. The room is dusty and old. Young men sit around antiquated tomes, staring intently at their master.

My educator who is visually impaired however would not see these things. She would experience this scene differently. So, when I asked my faculty to observe the scene with all of their senses I really got a picture of what they “saw” as truth.

- The Rabbi smelled like laundry detergent
- The air tasted musty, like the sea
- The school smelled of sweat, sauerkraut, pizza
- The sound of crickets, pages turning and even seagulls
- The feel of the tables, wood, metal

So many interpretations of the scene were offered to me and each interpretation brought a different context. If the tables or desks were metal and the Rabbi smelled of Tide we can extrapolate that the scene is quite modern. If the air smelled of salt and there were sounds of seagulls, the beit midrash must be on the coast. The setting of the situation changed how we view the situation and how we spoke about it. This one small change to the way we interpreted the text resulted in a very memorable faculty meeting and an educational experience.