

**MTEI COHORT SEVEN**  
**Post-Seminar 3 Assignment**  
*Attentive Listening, Supporting & challenging*  
**as Interpretive Practices**

We would like you to try out some of the moves and ways of talking that we've explored in this seminar. The goal of your assignment is to practice teaching active listening, supporting and challenging as *interpretive* practices.

**1. Getting Ready**

*Who might you invite to this workshop?*

Two or more individuals, preferably teachers, not necessarily from your institution.

*How to select a Jewish text?*

Choose a text which seems to lend itself to more than one compelling interpretation. Narratives are usually particularly useful for this purpose. Think about the people you've invited to this workshop and the time you'll have. You may also want to consider any pre-knowledge that this text requires as well as its length.

You are welcome to choose one of the texts we've studied in our seminars.<sup>1</sup>

*How would you present supporting/challenging to the participants you've invited?*

Resources you might want to use :

- Norms of conversation vs. our approach to challenging and supporting (See seminar PPT handout)
- "Text as Partner" and the work to "make it speak" (See seminar handout)
- Guidelines for Supporting and Challenging (TAB #3 in your binder).

You might want to introduce the participants to the language provided in the guidelines.

*What reason(s) would you provide for learning these practices?*

One suggestion about how to introduce this activity to the participants is to say something like the following: *"I'd like to work on a way to study text which is different from the way we usually talk. I want us to learn a language and a way of approaching the text that focuses on careful listening, challenging one another and*

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<sup>1</sup> For additional considerations for selecting texts, see the attached file. Source: Elie Holzer with Orit Kent, *A Philosophy of Havruta: Understanding and Teaching the Art of Text Study in Pairs*. Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2014, 208-211.

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*supporting each other as we explore the meaning of the text. Learning to study together in this way is not only beneficial for text study. It can also help us develop ways of talking and thinking about our work that will help all of us improve our practices as teachers in a lot of different ways. And it also is an engaging pedagogy to use with our students."*

**2. Studying the Text**

*Generate interpretations*

Decide how you'd like to have participants come up with interpretations of the story, based on textual evidence. Some examples: You might ask them to study together and come up with at least two interpretations; you might join in the study and also add an additional interpretation ; you might want to say that it's ok to come up with a "half-baked interpretation," as this is often what happens in the early stages of such learning experiences.

At one point, you might want to have everyone write an interpretation for her/himself by using the prompts:

- a. "According to my understanding, this story is about ...." [please be as specific as possible]. "The story is trying to tell us that ..."
- b. "The following sentences, words, emphasis, omissions, images, symbols etc. provide strong textual evidences for my/our interpretation(s)..."

Please make sure to have an interpretation of your own!

*Experiment with interpretive practices*

We encourage you to use the language provided in the guidelines, for listening, supporting and challenging.

You may also want to make your moves visible by saying aloud: e.g. "Let me now challenge your interpretation: ...." Or "first, let me paraphrase what you just said so I'll make sure I understood you."

Consider also modeling: "Give me some quiet time to look again at the text and to think about what I want to say".

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*Your Role*

Your role is to model as well as to monitor the participants' use of the practices. Here is an example of what this might look like:

*You to participant 1:* Would you share your interpretation with us as well as the evidence that supports it?

Participant 1 shares.

*You:* I first want to make sure I understand your interpretation of the story. So let me practice attentive listening ....

*You:* I believe I can support your interpretation by ...

What do you think?

*You to participant 2:* Would you share your interpretation with us as well as the evidence that supports it?

*You to participant 1:* I invite you to practice attentive listening regarding the interpretation of participant 2. You might want to use the language in the guidelines to do that.

*You to participant 1:* How might you support the interpretation of participant 2?

*You to participant 1:* Examine the text again. How might you challenge the interpretation of participant 2, even if you find it compelling?

Participant 1 challenges.

*You to participant 2:* What do you think?

Etc.

At some point, share your own interpretation (if it isn't well fleshed-out, say "I am still working on this interpretation. Your support and challenge might help me figure out if I am actually on to something.")

*You to participant 1:* How might you challenge my interpretation? Please use the language provided in the guidelines.

Etc.

Conclude by providing time for everyone to summarize where they're at in terms of their best understanding of what the story is about.

If they feel somewhat confused, let them articulate the causes of the confusion.

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*Feedback*

Provide each other feedback- how did it work?

Did your ideas about the text change in this process?

**3. Journal Entry**

After the session, create a journal entry (which will be shared at the June Seminar) in which you discuss:

- What happened? (Describe the workshop)
- How did you (or did you not) use the prompts and language that were provided in the guidelines for the assignment?
- How did this compare with what you assumed or hoped would happen?
- Were there aspects of what happened that surprised you?
- Were there aspects that pleased you? Why?
- What did participants report about their experience and/or learning?
- Read the Journal entry you wrote on your learning of these practices during our last seminar:

Anything new you've learned?

Any new question or insights you have about your learning of these practices?

Any new question or insights you have about teaching these practices to colleagues?