

Sikkum – Seminar 4
June 28, 2015
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This seminar launched our second year as a cohort. Our 4th meeting - we are past the halfway mark.

We began with a *kavanah*. *Od yavoh shalomaleyenu*. With the shadows of Orlando cast over us, we sang, “May peace one day come to us all.” Our first session focused on relational awareness, becoming better at noticing connection, disconnection, and repair. Can such awareness help us lean in toward this *kavanah*? After 3 months of separation from one another, we reconnected, sharing our own experiences of connections, disconnections and repair, considering the dynamics of relationships in the Hawkins triangle.

We reconnected with our work from seminar 3 by sharing our *havruta* text study homework, and we considered the “best” question we have about *havruta* text study.

In the chilly basement ballroom, we dined with MTEI graduates, to hear a bit of their experiences in their cohorts. Seymour updated us on the ways of the Mandel Foundation, and to shed light on the ways that the MTEI leadership team works. Nonhierarchical leadership, he taught us, is the key to successful schools.

We then studied together about Moses’ moral leadership. How can an unintentional leadership error lead to wickedness? Can we ever recover from this or are we punished forever? Gulp. How can we take responsibility for the mistakes that I am aware of? Elie posed the question: “Where is the inner moral self-evaluation for educational leaders?”

Some ended the evening with *shira*, with the metaphor of a bonfire, the heat is in the middle. Daniel taught us that we need to come to the center, join the heat.

Bright and early, now on the top of the building, Monday morning, we began by revisiting the principles - MTEI principles 2.0. What did you notice was different? It’s a recursive process, these principles.

Gail then launched us into the case of Gabe. A collective case study that would help begin to weave together many of the strands that we learned in our first year together. And we would work with a new strand, with a texture all its own – that of curriculum investigation.

In order to understand the “it” the “text” of the curriculum, we needed to understand the big picture, looking at a birds-eye view of what it means to teach *t’fillah*, to teach siddur? Barry told us “You can lead a horse to shul, but you can’t make him daven.” There’s a difference, he told us, in thinking about the siddur as a

text to be studied vs. the siddur as a text to be prayed. It's the difference between *prayer* and *praying*. The intersection perhaps is when "its words become our words" (one of Barry's forgotten quotes)

With our five *siddur/tfillah* orientations in hand, we were ready for our first viewing of Gabe teaching about *k'dushah*, a core *bracha* in the *Amidah*.

Jenny set us up with a new food metaphor. From the back kitchen to the raw ingredients. Can you cook an excellent meal without sharp knives?

We viewed the video of Gabe and his students, and let it wash over us. And for the first time in MTEI history, we tweeted our observations, #Gabevideo.

What were the categories of our observations? What did the text do? Where is the text? What are the content needs for teachers? What does it take to build teachers' capacity to expand content knowledge for teaching? How can our schools be sites for teaching and learning of content that is connected to what teachers need in their teaching? How do we facilitate learning in our schools to this end?

After lunch, a stretch in the heat, and some emailing, we gathered to study the concept of *K'dushah*. We were told to read *Vayikra* and Isaiah "medium" speed to glean the core concepts. We read Rambam and Yehuda Halevi to help us deepen our "tachlitic" and other worldly reading of the biblical texts.

With these understandings in hand, we learned the process of Curriculum investigation. In what ways could the commonplaces help us unpack the point of view of the curriculum? As Gail told us, all curricula have a point of view.

Our day finished with homegroups, checking in and thinking about ways that investigating curricula can be relevant in our home settings. Your feedback cards, and homegroup responses taught us that this particular text helped some people form connections and for others triggered disconnections. We experienced first hand the power of text in forming relationships.

In our optional free night, half of us joined Elie in studying. Language is like a window. If it becomes a screen, we have to reject it. Is it a screen, or a shade? Porous or a barrier?

The sun rose on Tuesday with a break in the heat here in Chicago, But the day would end on fire in Turkey. We continue singing *Od Yavoh Shalom Alyenu*, with the *kavanah* for our work, for the world.

And our work continued. Revisiting mentoring, meeting Lori Helman, and considering her essential question "How can we pass on teaching knowledge and promote autonomy and creativity?" Observing a middle school teacher and her mentor we studied three mentoring stances:

1. Probing the Teacher's Thinking
2. Direct Teaching/Suggestions
3. Promoting Accountability

Quoting Bruner, Sharon taught us that as a mentor we hold the consciousness for two. How do we stay genuine in our stance? We "don't want to be a false prober"

After lunch, with the delightful and dangerous chocolate cake, we studied in *havruta*, *Hokheach tochiach*. Elie guided us to "meet our partner, our vulnerable partner. When we have the text say whatever we want it to say, we cause a disconnect. Interpretive practices are intended to help the text speak."

Barry asked us "What happens when we need to rebuke someone else?" This is one kind of hard conversation, one that holds the possibility for connection, disconnection and repair. What is the nature of the wrong that calls for the rebuke? It may make a difference in how you respond. What if Howard doesn't recycle his glass bottles? What if someone insults you?

"I want to do *hocheach tochiah* with you." It gives me a stomach ache. It's a mitzvah.

It was a good time for a walk and talk.

We returned to having hard conversations, to the *Crimson Tide*, to Denzel Washington and Gene Hackman. Disconnections are inevitable, Kathy reminds us, and the key is how we reconnect.

Disconnections can lead to heightened emotion can happen around a child's snack, just like an impending nuclear attack.

Preparing for hard conversations requires finding our core values, staying centered, considering a request that is not a demand. Imagine hearing a "no" to your request. When you feel steady and clear about your values, then you can consider the other person. What might have been going on for them in the best possible interpretation?

Scary honesty. Scary honesty.

Consider the luxury of 10 minutes of support

With the last drops of our energy, we shared our observation and video assignments, considering Jenny's charge to play the believing game, if only a for a little while, to see what learning possibilities lay before us. Believing and doubting, *na'aseh v nishmah*, *emunah v emet*.

Waking up, to world rocked again by terror, we sing *Od Yavoh*, with a little more urgency, and we echo the words of Psalms where we may not easily find our own, *Esa Enai*. We lift our eyes.

Through a guided meditation we take the glass elevator down and travel to our home-work spaces, and imagine what working with our colleagues, our faculty can look like. We put pen to paper, using loop writing, to imagine our goals and foci for next year. Underlining, highlighting, circling, writing some more, comparing with the MTEI principles, our ideas unfold.

We “backchannel” our ideas and discover that we are building capacity, that collaboration, teaching and learning fill our minds. We launch ourselves into the next year, our plans, thinking about the different grain sizes - from the big ideas to the particular events, from finding the time to finding the money.

While we head off in cars and planes, we accompany one another to imagine the year to come. And we pray *Oseh Shalom*.