

### **Supporting and Challenging Chavruta Learning**

I asked my friends Mearyl and Ariella to participate in this workshop with me. Mearyl teaches 1st/ 2nd grade general studies and Ariella teaches middle and high school Judaic studies. I think they are similar types of teachers in general and I knew they would be willing to participate and help me and be willing guinea pigs. I also felt like this could really be a useful way of learning within their classrooms for their students so it is something I wanted to expose them to and encourage them to try. Both teachers encourage debate and dialogue with their students and the texts so I knew they would be interested in this method.

I used the prompts a lot to set the stage for what I was trying to accomplish. I told them they would be creating an interpretation of a text and then listening and replying to each other's thoughts, questions, and attitudes. We talked for a few minutes about active listening and created just a few norms for how this would work (no talking when someone is speaking, you may ask clarifying questions, nodding doesn't necessarily mean you agree but rather is just an attentive listening reaction, and you can say anything in this room without being judged). We didn't use the exact prompts for supporting and challenging but variations on them. Because we are all friends we felt that the prompts were too formal and scripted.

I was not surprised with how well the learning went with these two women. I chose to have us learn Tractate Taanit 9b about Rav Shimi and Rav Papa from seminar 2. I felt comfortable with the text and it wasn't too long for our limited time. I think this went well because both women naturally ask their students for evidence from the text to support their claims. This is a practice they are familiar asking of their students, but I was happy to see that they are able to do it themselves, although maybe not as easily as they thought. I felt like both teachers were great at supporting each other, but that the challenging part came more naturally to Ariella than Mearyl. I think that has to do with what ages they teach. I found referring them back to the script helped them challenge each other more. It gave them the language to use without being accusatory or judgmental of the other.

Both women seemed to like this method of learning. Mearyl said she can see herself using this as a higher level method to help with differentiation in her classroom. She said she also liked this as a pre-writing assignment. She felt like she could bring in a text and have the kids interpret what it means and then have them write their ideas after flushing them out with their Chavruta partner. Ariella uses text study in her room already but has been struggling with Chavruta learning. She said she wants to come up with key language that will work for her students, their age, and classroom structure and then create a poster to scaffold this kind of learning for the kids to refer back to when needed. She really liked the script provided because she finds that her students have the skills to interpret the text but not to speak to one another properly or productively.

I think the key to this type of practice, and teaching it to others, is stressing to teachers that they must find the language and structure of the method that works best for them and their students.