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Video Investigation #2
Seminar 4

The video I used for this assignment was "Learning Torah through Partnership," by Allison Cook and Orit Kent

In a fortuitous opportunity of practicality, I had wanted to introduce hevruta learning experiences into some of our older grades (3, 4, 5) in the next year, and I am also beginning a process of curriculum review with the School Committee which will proceed during the course of the upcoming school year.

This plan made for two natural viewing groups: the teaching staff and the School Committee. While it would have been ideal for both groups to view it together, the timing did not work so this was done in two separate sessions.

In the teacher session, the context was a staff meeting with about 10-12 colleagues. We mentally revisited the hevruta experience we had shared together before the start of the school year, and the positive responses to that experience, both a learning opportunity and an interactional experience. We revisited the concept of the instructional triangle, this time incorporating the visual of the triangle with two partners and the text.

For the School committee session there was more detailed explanation and conversation about the process, clarifying what hevruta learning is and its place as a both an ancient and modern, uniquely Jewish study experience which empowers both the learner and the text to bring new insights and depth to the learning encounter. I also described the teachers' earlier experience with hevruta, though did not have time to explore the actual text used with them (Rabbi Nechunyah).

For both groups, the additional mission of curricular review, starting with the topic of Torah, brought a timeliness to the discussion which was useful to all participants.

Each group then had a chance to watch the video. As happened with us, in preparation for the MTEI phone session, the initial intrigue around the use of index cards to prompt the student conversation was noted!

In both groups, the focus did not stray to any judgment or critique of the educators in the film but rather remained on the process and methodology portrayed. They were mindful of the interaction between the students, the absence of teacher-centrism (in a positive way), the possibilities' for bigger picture learning such as interpersonal listening skills, the thoughtfulness of the dialogue, and the way in which the students saw the "life" within the text.

In the teacher group, while we did not resolve this at the time of viewing, teachers began to think about grade levels where hevruta learning could succeed, as well as what segments of

their areas of Torah learning would be most amenable to hevruta experiences for their students.

School Committee members saw opportunities to perhaps reduce some of what they perceive as less essential learning experiences (some open to question) to enable teachers and students to have more time for this approach. Basically, they felt quite positively about it.

In the best of all possible worlds, and with hindsight, a joint meeting of the School Committee and teachers to partner on a chevruta experience and/or curriculum review would have been a very positive experience. We will have another opportunity for a joint meeting in January and will hope to plan for such a session at that time.