

Curriculum Production for Traditional Adult Jewish Education

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Abstract

The aim of this dissertation is to describe some of the key curriculum issues of educating Jewish adults in traditional Jewish studies. It begins with defining the scope and terms under consideration and includes a discussion of the current challenges in the field of curriculum development for Jewish communal organisations.

Five different kinds of curricular contexts for traditional adult Jewish education, which are currently in operation, are then identified and outlined. These are contrasted and recategorised based on a Schwabian model of the experiences required for curriculum making.

The need to root these contexts in the chain of Jewish tradition leads to the identification of a 'Jewish Curriculum Tradition'. The gradual evolution of this ancient tradition is described: from defining a traditional Hebrew word for curriculum, to the learning of Bible, Mishnah and Talmud, to the great ongoing success of two traditional daily study schemes, namely *Daf Yomi* and *Chok L'Yisrael*. Attention is given as to how this tradition has formed, and been formed by, the Jewish People. Various issues of content, pedagogy, ritual and canonisation are also addressed.

A case record of the construction and implementation of one particular curriculum, 'Torah L'Am', is then presented. Lessons learnt from this process are then given with reference to the Jewish Curriculum Tradition and the field of curriculum development.

Finally, based on considerations emerging from the above, and a suggestive comparison with film production, a description of 'Curriculum Production' is presented for traditional adult Jewish education.

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Dedication

For my little Levona Rose.

At first you may just want to eat this, or scribble all over it.

One day though, I hope that you do come to read it.

I only wish that when you do, it will help you to understand,
and to love, your very own, most wonderful, Jewish tradition.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Twenty year ago the late great Joseph Schwab declared the curriculum field moribund. In a recent and masterful description of the field of curriculum, Philip Jackson epitomized it as confused. This at least suggests some progress over two decades. (Pratt, 1994, p.4)

“...all the words that God said to you” (Deuteronomy 9:10). Rabbi Joshua the son of Levi said: This comes to teach that the Bible, Mishnah, Talmud, Tosefta, Midrash, and even what an eminent scholar of the future will say in front of his teacher, were *all* taught to Moses on Mt. Sinai. (Midrash: Vayikra Rabbah 22:1)

The words of Pratt and the Midrash¹ serve as a fitting introduction. Pratt mocks the persistently problematic state of curriculum thinking, while the Midrash – in a typically mythic² fashion – asserts the continuous and integrated self-perception of the Jewish tradition. What happens when these two fields intersect? How does a modern educational discipline interact with an ancient canonical religion? This is the underlying theme which will be addressed in a number of ways in the following chapters.

Background: Why this is important?

This dissertation addresses a pressing issue in Jewish education today. In Jewish communities around the world, specifically in schools, synagogues, community centres, residential retreats, seminars, conferences, educational trips, and other contexts where traditional Jewish studies are taught, educators are currently involved in curricular issues.

¹ *Midrash*, from the Hebrew root meaning ‘seek out’ or ‘inquire’, refers to the classical rabbinical interpretation and exposition of Biblical passages, as well as the name of the collections in which these interpretations were compiled between the first and tenth centuries.

² I use the word ‘myth’ in the non-colloquial sense described by Tillich (Tillich, 1957). i.e. myth is communally-accepted truth based on transcendent faith which can never conflict with scientific, historical or philosophical truth because it is of a different order and represents a wholly different kind of consciousness.

Unfortunately these endeavours are often rushed and half-baked due to a range of inhibiting practical factors such as understaffing, lack of expertise, time pressures, precious little formal handover, the unconsidered use of pre-packaged educational programmes, marketing demands, and the propensity for educators to only teach what they know well.³

So the field of curriculum is very unsure of itself, leading to the haphazard and repetitive replacement of syllabi and programmes. New ideas are tried, briefly lauded, occasionally evaluated, and then often discarded as tolerable ‘failures’ (CJENA, 1991). On the other hand, educational institutions often shy away from the deep and comprehensive review of their curriculum: “William van Til said once, ‘Changing the curriculum is like moving a cemetery’.” (Pratt, 1994, p.321).

What then are the possible underlying reasons for this high turnover in curricula in Jewish education? Why are they so vulnerable to change? Four key reasons may be suggested:

- (i) **No consensus on the nature of ‘Jewish education’** – There are a good number of denominations⁴ within Judaism today, and every one has many subgroups⁵. Each of these has a different perspective on the religious, cultural, ideological and civilisational nature of Judaism.
- (ii) **A reactionary mentality to every new ‘crisis’** – There is a nervous response from one perceived crisis to the next, whether it concerns the latest assimilation figures, worries about the impact of modernity and globalisation, the latest ‘situation’ in Israel, some new damning report about the state of Jewish education, or the recurring fear of falling behind new information technologies.
- (iii) **Undersized institutions** – With few very large population centres outside of Israel, most Jewish communities are small and disparate. Thus there are numerous ‘undersize’ issues affecting their educational institutions such as continual future

³ These factors are culled from personal observations of formal and informal Jewish educational programmes in institution in the UK, Israel and the USA.

⁴ Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, Liberal, Reconstructionist, Secular etc.

⁵ E.g. Orthodoxy includes a wide range of Hasidic sects, Ashkenazi Ultra Orthodoxy, Sephardic communities, Modern Orthodoxy etc.

funding concerns, declining communal interest and commitment, and the limited availability and competence of teaching staff.

- (iv) **Lack of accreditation** – While formal Jewish schooling and academia relies on external accreditation, there is little, if any, accreditation or long-lasting attainment standards in other Jewish educational contexts. This works against the firm establishment and sequencing of curriculum.

In response to these pressing issues, this dissertation will address concepts of curriculum in the Jewish tradition. It will focus exclusively on the field of ‘traditional adult Jewish education’ though it may well be of relevance to many other Jewish educational contexts that have serious concerns about curriculum.

What is ‘traditional adult Jewish education’?

Traditional adult Jewish education, TAJE, identifies a large and diverse category of Jewish education. The term, as it will be used in this dissertation, needs explanation and definition.

Learning is a lifelong Jewish endeavour. Maimonides, the supreme medieval Jewish scholar, stated that study should be a daily habit that lasts a person’s entire lifetime:

Until when is one obliged to study Torah? Until the day of one’s death, for it is written, “*in case they leave your mind through your life*” (*Deuteronomy 4:9*). And when one is not involved in study – one forgets. (Maimonides, *Instructions for Torah Study*, 1:10)⁶

Thus, beyond formal schooling, there is an expectation of some level of continued Jewish education throughout adulthood. The ‘adult’ in TAJE is normally understood as post-high school which, considering the countries where Jews predominantly live, and their average levels of formal education, means above eighteen years of age.

The word ‘traditional’ in TAJE is meant in three senses:

⁶ All translations of Maimonides from the Hebrew text (Maimonides, 1989) are my own.

- (a) **Traditional texts** – Sometimes also called “classic Jewish texts”,⁷ this refers to *Torah*⁸ in its most expansive sense and thus includes Bible, Talmud⁹, Midrash, and the continually increasing library of books of Jewish Law, thought, mysticism and traditional commentaries thereon which build on previous works.¹⁰
- (b) **Traditional methods** – This refers to the range of ways in which these texts are taught and studied. These include the *shiur* (formal presentation of material and ideas by a scholar), the *chavruta* (one-to-one regular study partnership) and the *chabura* (small peer-led study group).
- (c) **Traditional intentions** – This may best be described by the Hebrew phrase “*Torah Lishma*” which literally translates as ‘Torah study for the sake of it’. According to Lamm (Lamm, 1989), *Torah Lishma*¹¹ is to be understood in three complementary ways in Jewish education: (i) *Functional*: study for the sake of the practical knowledge required to fulfill and live by Jewish law; (ii) *Devotional*: study for the sake of Heaven, i.e. to develop a person’s committed relationship with God; (iii) *Cognitive*: study for the sake of the intellectual experience of Torah study.

The word ‘traditional’ in TAJE also implies three limitations in its scope:

- (a) **Non-degree based** – There are many academic courses on Jewish topics in universities throughout the world which are attended by Jews and non-Jews alike. However their purpose and mode of operation preclude them from being labeled TAJE. ‘Traditional’ implies *for Jews, by Jews, and for the sake of Jews* with their particular Jewish beliefs, concerns, culture and civilisation. Of course, some

⁷ A good introduction to classic Jewish texts can be found in Holtz (Holtz, 1984)

⁸ *Torah* is the Hebrew term for the Five Books of Moses. It is the most ancient and important work in Jewish tradition and is held supremely sacred by the Jewish People. Literally, Torah means *instruction, teaching or law*. As well as referring to the five books of Moses, the word Torah is used in a general sense to refer to all the works of traditional Jewish study. Thus the study of Torah can refer to a large body of extremely wide-ranging material.

⁹ *Talmud* literally means ‘The Learning’. Compiled between 2nd and 5th centuries, separately in Palestine and Babylon, it is a vast compendium of law, philosophy, ethics and lore. The Talmud became the fundamental legal text of Judaism which is cited by nearly all subsequent Jewish legal writings. Different opinions on every topic are conserved in the Talmud to allow for the constant development and application of Jewish law and tradition.

¹⁰ This is further discussed in chapter three.

¹¹ Daily morning traditional Jewish prayers open with two blessings for the study of Torah. They end with the words: “*May we and our offspring..., all of us, know Your Name and study Your Torah Lishma*”.

aspects of the academic approach, such as concerns for intellectual rigour, peer review, recognisable standards and accreditation, are also to be found and appreciated in TAJE.

- (b) **Not general Jewish Studies** – Topics such as Jewish history, Zionism, modern Israel and Jewish identity, also do not fall squarely into TAJE although they may be touched upon.
- (c) **Not for training** – Many Jewish institutions are involved with the formal training of school teachers, educators and rabbis and TAJE plays an essential part in their education. However, TAJE per se does not have a training motive. It is a Jewish value in and of itself.

Given this definition of TAJE, how many people participate in this kind of study? Of the approximately thirteen million Jews currently spread throughout the world, nearly half speak English as their first language (Tal, 2004).¹² Although spread out, at times fiercely independent, and not formally integrated, there are more and more frameworks for interaction between English-speaking Jewish communities in the field of Jewish education.¹³ For this reason the investigations into TAJE in this dissertation will be limited to English-speaking Jewish communities.

Based on a recently published survey of North American Jewry (NJPS, 2003), 77% are adults and 24% of those participate, to some degree, in adult Jewish education.¹⁴ There are no direct statistics for TAJE, but from the survey it can be deduced that around 82% of this adult Jewish education was ‘traditional’ as defined above.¹⁵ Thus, of the total North

¹² The main centres of English-speaking world Jewry are as follows: 5,300,000 in North America, 400,000 in Canada, 300,000 in the UK, 100,000 in Australia and 80,000 in S. Africa. Note that a further four first languages – Hebrew, Russian, Spanish and French – collectively account for the vast majority of the rest of world Jewry.

¹³ A number of international Jewish organisations are at work here including: The Melton Centre for Jewish Education at Hebrew University (melton.huji.ac.il); The Jewish Agency for Israel: Department for Jewish Zionist Education (www.jafi.org.il/education); The Lookstein Centre for Jewish Education in the Diaspora at Bar-Ilan University (www.lookstein.org); and the Mandel Leadership Institute (www.mli.org.il).

¹⁴ In the survey, adult meant 18+, and college courses were explicitly excluded from ‘adult Jewish education’.

¹⁵ According to the survey, among participants in adult Jewish education, 63% were enrolled in a class or programme run by a Synagogue, and a further 19% by another Jewish educational organisation. The vast majority of these programmes come within the definition of TAJE.

American Jewish population approximately 15% participate in TAJE. Assuming similar (or higher)¹⁶ percentages among the rest of the English-speaking Jewish communities, it turns out that the overall number of English-speaking Jews worldwide involved in TAJE is approximately 850,000. This shows TAJE to be an identifiable and significant field.

One final distinction is important here. There is a wide spectrum of *learner commitment* for TAJE. At one end there are *yeshiva*¹⁷ students who study TAJE on a full time basis. At the other end there are people who may only very occasionally attend some kind of one-time TAJE programme. In Israel today there are hundreds of *yeshivot* with estimations of between 50,000 and 100,000 students involved in full time TAJE, more than any other era in Jewish history (Birnbaum & Persoff, 1989; Berk, 1999). Though Hebrew is the main language used in these *yeshivot*, there are some English speakers. On a much smaller scale, *yeshivot* can also be found outside of Israel and these are predominantly English-speaking. Since this English-speaking yeshiva world is a small minority of TAJE in terms of absolute numbers and has a distinct holistic expectation of full time learner commitment and passion (Helmreich, 2000), this dissertation will concentrate on *non full time TAJE for English-speakers* which, as mentioned above, has a number of supportive frameworks which bind it together despite those involved being spread across different communities and countries. In terms of numbers then, this field probably contains at least 800,000 participants. The number of teachers involved – assuming small class sizes¹⁸ – is at least 10,000.

Thus in this dissertation TAJE has the following definition:

Traditional adult Jewish education is that education which involves English-speaking Jewish learners over the age of eighteen on a non full time basis who study traditional Jewish texts with Jewish teachers using traditional methods not for academic or training qualifications but in the practice of Torah Lishma.

¹⁶ A reasonable assumption given that N. American Jewish commitment levels (e.g. out marriage, Jewish schooling etc.) are consistently found to be lower than in other English-speaking Jewish communities.

¹⁷ A *yeshiva* (plural *yeshivot*) is a theological academy of higher Jewish learning. See further in chapter three.

¹⁸ Spread out small communities, various levels of qualification, and various levels of teaching commitment all mean that there are many teachers involved in TAJE.

What is ‘curriculum’?

The Oxford English Dictionary definition gives:

curriculum a course; *spec.* a regular course of study or training, as at a school or university.

However, curriculum theorists have suggested a much wider variety of definitions over the years such as: the planning endeavours which take place prior to instruction (Macdonald, 1965), a list of intended learning outcomes (Johnson, 1967), the plan for the education of school pupils (Beauchamp, 1975), the comprehensive set of experiences learners have under guidance in school (Oliver, 1977), the systematic reconstruction of knowledge and experience that empowers learners (Tanner & Tanner, 1980) and, what is successfully conveyed by committed teachers (Schwab, 1983). Universal agreement is unlikely:

The wide differences in these definitions [of curriculum] reflect differences in the vantage points from which curriculum is studied, conflicting educational philosophies, changing societal influences and demands on education, and the enormous difficulty in seeking to define such a complex concept, which, like knowledge itself, is limited only by the boundaries and tools of thought. (Tanner & Tanner, 1980, p.42)

Categorising the ways in which the term curriculum is used is instructive:

...the word *curriculum* is used in three ways: (1) as a curriculum¹⁹, (2) as the name of a system of schooling, and (3) as a title of a field of study.
(Beauchamp, 1975, p.101)

Expanding on Beauchamp, there are three ways in which curriculum will be addressed in this dissertation:

- (1) Curriculum as *syllabus* – subject matter considerations, including ordering and deeper structural issues as well as content.
- (2) Curriculum as *pedagogy* – the teaching and learning methodologies involved.
- (3) Curriculum as *context* – the underlying orientation of curriculum based on philosophical, idealistic and social issues.

¹⁹ i.e. a syllabus of study. Syllabus is normally understood as a subsection of curriculum.

Outline of chapters

Chapter two presents five current contexts in which TAJE takes place. Chapter three discusses the evolution of the Jewish Curriculum Tradition (JCT) over the course of Jewish history and includes issues of syllabus, pedagogy and context. Chapter four reflects on the construction of one particular modern curriculum in light of the JCT, and chapter five concludes with a presentation of ‘Curriculum Production’ using a suggestive comparison from the world of film production.

Origins of curriculum

The challenges of curriculum for general education and for Jewish education are by no means recent. Aristotle stated:

As things are... mankind are by no means agreed about the things to be taught... Again about the means there is no agreement... (Jowett, 1921, p.1338).

And the origin of the term ‘curriculum’ is instructive:

The original derivation of the word curriculum is from the Latin verb *currere*, “to run”; *curriculum*, a diminutive form, came to mean a “racing chariot” or “race track”. Cicero applied the term metaphorically to speak of *vitae curriculum*, “the course of one’s life”, and *curricula mentis*, “the (educational) course of the mind.” Only in the nineteenth century did the term come to be commonly used in educational discourse. (Pratt, 1995, p.5)

Some are worried by the violent context of the term’s origin and imply that the current field of curriculum might be ‘going round in circles’, slave to higher political machinations:

I am terrified by words. Words dominate us more than we dominate them, thus I take etymology tremendously seriously, ‘Curriculum’, for example, is a funny word. It is the arena in the Roman circus on which the chariot (also from curriculum) that is pulled by horses goes around. (Bekerman, 2003)

Conscious of both its troubling ancient origins and yet only recent usage in educational discourse, it is of importance to investigate what would be a suitable term for curriculum in Hebrew. Though “*tochnit limmudim*”, literally, “programme of studies” is the

colloquially-accepted modern Hebrew term it fails to capture a particularly specific or traditionally Jewish understanding of curriculum. This issue will be further addressed and resolved in chapter three.

Personal interest

I am a modern orthodox Jew living in London working in TAJE. I was recently appointed as Director of Lifelong Learning at the London School of Jewish Studies (formerly Jews' College). For the two years prior I studied Jewish educational leadership at the Mandel Leadership Institute in Jerusalem. It is within this context that this dissertation has been researched and written. Much of the information about the current state of TAJE (especially in chapter two) comes from my working knowledge of Anglo-Jewry as well as other Jewish communities around the world. However, little of this information has been formally documented. There is also no doubt that my personal interests and affiliation influence and colour the focus and presentation of the issues in this dissertation.

Methodology

The dissertation employs a combination of methodologies. Chapter two contains a categorisation and report on the five contemporary curriculum models in the field with a theoretical critique based on the writings of Schwab (Schwab, 1977). Chapter three gives the results of historical and conceptual research into curriculum development in the Jewish tradition leading to the drawing up of a number of basic principles in the field. My research here involved a comprehensive search of classic Jewish texts on curriculum-related topics.

In chapter four, I have used specific methods from the field of Action Research to give an account of the work (both in thought and deed) that I did in writing and developing a particular curriculum for TAJE. Action Research offers the practitioner a research stance towards their work by which they become a member of a critical community of educationalists. The field has been defined as follows:

Action Research is simply a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices, their

understanding of these practices, and the situations in which the practices are carried out. (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p.162).

The specific Action Research approach I have employed is that of ‘Critical Trialling’ (McKernan, 1996, p.211) and is an extension of the idea of *trialling* (Davis, 1981) to curriculum materials. Critical trialling involves the ongoing monitoring of a curriculum project throughout its development and implementation phases. Data about the evolution, appropriateness, impact, etc. of the curriculum is gathered while it is being repeatedly field tested through trials so that it can be critiqued and improved. Critical trialling only refers to a general research strategy and thus requires the selection of a specific set of research procedures in order to be applied. Therefore I have chosen a ‘case study’ methodology, in which I will present a ‘case record’ of the ‘Torah L’Am’ curriculum which I created. A case record is:

A cautiously edited selection of the full data available, the selection depending on the fieldworker’s judgment as to what was likely to be of interest and value as evidence. (Rudduck, 1984, p.202)

The case record will then be the basis for a critical trialling discussion about the course which will relate to the principles of the JCT presented in chapter three as well as concepts from the field of curriculum studies.

Finally, in chapter five, the generalisation of what has been learnt into an outline curriculum production approach for TAJE is presented.

My studies for this dissertation have come from five sources: Jewish traditional texts and practices; my own personal experience in teaching, managing and organising TAJE; investigating real examples from the world of TAJE today; presenting my ideas to a number of senior practitioners in the theory and philosophy of Jewish Education²⁰; and various principles and ideas from the academic field of curriculum theory and development.

²⁰ These include Professor Michael Rosenak (Mandel Professor of Jewish Education, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem; Head of Education Department, Mandel Leadership Institute), Dr Howie Dieterich (Director of The Melton Centre for Jewish Education, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem), and Professor Jonathan Cohen (School of Education, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem).

Chapter 2

Traditional adult Jewish education today

Introduction

In what institutions, environments and ways is traditional adult Jewish education (as defined in chapter one) being carried out today and how is curriculum thought about and constructed here? In this chapter I will attempt to classify contemporary TAJE. There are literally thousands of TAJE programmes¹ currently operating in the Jewish world, with a vast range of approaches. The task of classification is further hampered due to the field being in constant flux with new programmes constantly appearing while others are discontinued. Rather than trying to categorise by subject, pedagogy, course length, intellectual level or such like, I take a different approach in order to analyse and understand the whole field of TAJE.

Mindful of the notions of curriculum discussed in chapter one, five *contexts* in which the curricular activity occurs in TAJE today are presented. Of course there is some overlap between the contexts, but I will concentrate on what distinguishes and identifies each one. A number of examples currently in operation are mentioned for each context. Though not comprehensive, the five described are the most sizeable in terms of overall participant numbers, regularity of study and impact in the field. The aim of this categorisation, which might seem unusual even to people involved in the field, is to highlight the essential underlying approaches to curriculum.

It will be argued that *context* is just as important a feature as is *content* when it comes to determining the curriculum for TAJE. The focus here is on uncovering the curricular environment rather than the ordering and selection of subject matter.

¹ See for example judaism.about.com/cs/adultjewished/ for a sample list of some of the better-known programmes in North America.

CONTEXT 1 – The Synagogue

The synagogue – an institution over two thousand years old – has always been more than just a centre for Jewish communal worship. It is also the social and educational centre of Jewish communal life.² Although Jewish Community Centres (JCCs) as hubs for Jewish culture have proliferated in the U.S.A. in the last century, the synagogue continues to be the primary institution for Jewish religious affiliation. As a result, TAJE takes place in this context more than any other. Most synagogues run some form of education programme and many synagogues include a '*Bet Midrash*' (Study Room) which is used for communal education classes and events. The rabbi of the synagogue is centrally involved, giving weekly classes on a range of topics. Also, the synagogue will typically have an education committee charged with organising events and courses. Some larger synagogues are mini-campuses which might include a community centre, junior school and learning centre. Some are centres for outreach with a TAJE component.³

Of central importance here is that people attend TAJE programmes because *they take place in their local synagogue*. Commitment and connection to the community is the underlying motivation. Thus food and opportunity for social interaction are also invariably part of a TAJE programme in a synagogue. A related issue is that of priority: because TAJE is not seen as the primary role of the synagogue it is often not well thought-out and suffers issues of sustainability. However, participants will still occasionally attend in order to 'support' the synagogue rather than because they are excited about the particular educational programme.

In summary, it is the communal centrality of the synagogue that is an all-important context for TAJE. In recent years some other communal centres have become involved in TAJE. There are Jewish Day schools with TAJE programmes for parents, academic Jewish institutions and departments with a TAJE track⁴, and JCCs with some TAJE courses⁵.

² See entry "synagogue" in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Keter Pub. House, Jerusalem (1994)

³ In London for example there is the 'Aish' centre (www.aish.org.uk); the 'Jewish Learning Exchange' (www.jle.org.uk) and 'Keshet' (www.keshet.org.uk).

⁴ For example: Hebrew College in Boston (www.hebrewcollege.edu) organises non-academic 'adult learning classes', the London School of Jewish Studies (www.lsjss.ac.uk) organises a host of 'lifelong learning' programmes (which I direct), and the Australian Centre for the Study of Jewish Civilisation at Monash University in Melbourne has a TAJE programme called 'Darsheni' (www.arts.monash.edu.au/jewish_civilisation/darsheini/).

⁵ For example the JCC in Manhattan (www.jccmanhattan.org) and the Centre Communautaire de Paris (www.centrecomparis.com)

However, even viewed all together, all these other centres do not compare to the synagogue for sheer scope and size of TAJE.

CONTEXT 2 – The Speaker

Many TAJE programmes are built around a ‘speaker’. The speaker will teach in a synagogue or other communal centre or even in a larger specially-booked location. Many Jewish organisations have ‘speaker lists’ from which they choose who to invite. There is a ‘Jet setting speaker circuit’ in the North American Jewish community whereby the most popular speakers fly around the country to teach in various communities, often receiving significant remuneration. One common incarnation is the weekend ‘scholar-in-residence’ in which a speaker is flown in to spend the Jewish Sabbath with the local Jewish community. Another one is the growing phenomena of major Jewish educational events in which a gathering of speakers will attract large numbers of participants.⁶ The modern phenomena of the visiting speaker appears to have its roots in both the Rabbinic and Medieval periods of Jewish history. As Jewish communities grew and spread in the aftermath of the 1st century Babylonian exile, rabbis would visit communities to support them and to inspire greater religious commitment.⁷ Additionally, in the medieval period there were itinerant preachers called *maggidim*, literally ‘ones who relate’, i.e. speakers.⁸

Of central importance here is that the subject matter and approach of these speakers is self-determined. It is the charisma, popularity and knowledge of the person that is the attraction. Their name and reputation will carry the TAJE programme in which they present. Naming this context as the ‘speaker’ is also apt. ‘Who is speaking?’ or ‘Who is worth hearing?’ are two very common questions asked when TAJE programmes are being marketed.

It could be argued that the speaker context is nothing to do with curriculum in that it is a short-lived and often one-time affair. To be sure the curricular effectiveness of a speaker is questionable, but the regularity with which speakers are currently used and their predominance in TAJE programming warrants their inclusion.

⁶ Examples of this in the UK include the ‘LSJS Ellul Programme’ (www.lsjs.ac.uk), ‘Limmud Conference’ (www.limmud.org) and ‘Encounter’ (www.encounterconference.org).

⁷ The Talmud contains numerous stories of such visits.

⁸ See entry “maggid” in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Keter Pub. House, Jerusalem (1994)

CONTEXT 3 – The Package

Some Jewish organisations involved in TAJE acquire a ready-made curriculum. This is a pre-packaged programme, constructed by an enterprising Jewish Educational institution or business, for use in different Jewish communities which provides curricular materials and possibly some teacher training. There are two basic types:

(a) *Crash courses* – These are goal-orientated short courses on the basics of Judaism with an aggressive agenda to significantly increase religious commitment.⁹ These are intended to be easy to coordinate, in numerous community locations, and at multiple times. The courses are a response to the modern fear of assimilation in many Jewish communities.¹⁰

(b) *In-depth courses* – These are one term, one year, or two year, courses that seek to give participants an overview of TAJE through studying and analysing Jewish texts.¹¹ The courses are intended to kick-start a serious interest in Jewish literacy.

Of central importance here is the package itself. The idea of completing a substantial overview of TAJE attracts the participants more than the specific teachers or subject matter. Also essential is the transferability of both types of pre-packaged courses. This is achieved by the local coordinator of the package in a specific community. The coordinator is responsible for identifying competent local teachers, liaising with the package designers, marketing the product, administering the course and evaluating it at the end of the course.

CONTEXT 4 – The Guise of Leadership

Here the curriculum is defined by the need to turn participants into Jewish community (non-professional) leaders often called ‘lay leadership’. Mostly these are invite-only

⁹ For example: The *Discovery Seminar* (www.aish.com/seminars/discovery/) and the *Basic Judaism Crash Course* by the National Jewish Outreach Program (www.njop.org).

¹⁰ See for example: Landy, Y.B. (1996) *Intermarriage Alert*, Judaica Press; Kornbluth, D. (2003) *Why Marry Jewish?* Targum Press.

¹¹ For example: Florence Melton Adult Mini-School (FMAMS), the Meah Programme (HC), Pardes – The OU Torah Project (OU), LSJS Tanach Course (LSJS), and Torah L’Am (UJIA) which will be analysed in depth in chapter four.

programmes that involve a large helping of TAJE based on the belief that greater Jewish knowledge makes better Jewish leaders.¹²

Of central importance here is that the attraction of the course is the promise of leadership skills and empowerment for the individual participants. However, though the TAJE component of such courses is often presented as a method to engender better leaders, the truth is that a leadership course is an enticing hook by which to attract participants to commit to TAJE¹³.

CONTEXT 5 – The Non-Communals

The four contexts mentioned so far all rely heavily on organised Jewish communities. This last one works in a non-communal context and involves small groups of people who choose to get together to learn. This group could be a two-person partnership (called a *chavruta*), or a self-selected study circle, or an informal Jewish book meeting in a private house. Though these groups may be teacher or peer-led, the content and style of learning is chosen and controlled by the group and not by any external authority.

Of central importance here is that the *subject of study* is what brings the group together. So a teacher will be chosen by the group who can teach them what they want to learn and people are invited or join the group because they are interested in the subject being taught. However, in time, the social element involved in any such group becomes as important as its official purpose. Thus people might remain involved even if the choice of subjects, teachers or books becomes less interesting to them because they want to remain in the group. Even so, the long term survival of such groups is predicated on the ongoing commitment to and value of the subject matter.¹⁴

¹² Examples include the UK Adam Science Leadership Course and the USA Wexner Fellows Programme.

¹³ Very little documentation is available on this issue but this point has been confirmed to me by a number of people in the field. Shoshana Boyd Gelfand, a Jerusalem Fellow at the Mandel Leadership Institute (www.mli.org.il) and former Vice President and Acting Director of the Wexner Heritage Foundation in New York City, is currently researching the multiple guises in which leadership programmes are ‘used’ in American Jewish organisations.

¹⁴ This analysis is based on my knowledge of such groups in the Anglo-Jewish community (and beyond), and is borne out in, Heilman, S. (1985) *The Gate Behind the Wall: A Pilgrimage to Jerusalem*.

Framework for analysis

Following is a description of a useful framework with which to analyse these five contexts. Schwab (Schwab, 1977) wrote about the representatives from five different bodies of experience that need to collaborate in order to translate the scholarly materials of a subject into a workable curriculum. He argues that all five are essential for defensible educational thought in the production of curriculum.

The representatives from the five bodies of experience are:

- (i) One who is a scholar of the *subject* of study and is thus an advocate of the field itself.
- (ii) One who is very sensitive to and *familiar with students* who will learn the curriculum.
- (iii) One with *experience of the milieus* of the students learning.
- (iv) One with *experience of the teachers*, knowing their capabilities and limitations.
- (v) One with *experience of curriculum-making*.

Schwab explains that this framework is grounded on his theory of the four fundamental ‘commonplaces’ that must be considered concurrently in any discussion of education. These are the learner, the teacher, the milieu (the society in which education is enacted), and the subject matter being taught. If any one is excluded in educational deliberations then the decisions that result will be skewed and programmes based on those decisions will probably fail.

Clearly Schwab’s five bodies of experience enumerated above parallel concern for Schwab’s four commonplaces in educational thinking, plus a crucial fifth – the curriculum maker. Theirs is a two-fold job:

- (a) to manage representatives from the other four bodies of experience (which parallel the four commonplaces) so ensuring that all hear and value each other.
- (b) to keep the representatives conscious of the practicalities of curriculum planning meaning the need to actually come up with a useable curriculum product.

Critique of the five

Schwab’s framework of five equally essential contributions to curriculum production is a useful tool with which to analyse the five contemporary contexts for TAJE described

above. Interestingly, and admittedly rather neatly, each context emphasises a different body of experience necessary for curriculum production:

Context for TAJE today	Body of experience for curriculum production
Synagogue	Milieu
Speaker	teachers
Package	curriculum-maker
Guise of leadership	students
Non-communals	subject matter

This is not to imply that each of the contemporary contexts for TAJE described recognise only one part of Schwab’s framework at the absolute expense of the other four. However it does show that such contexts, by their very nature, focus on only one part of Schwab’s framework and may not be mindful enough of the other four. Thus, for example, a synagogue cannot expect good attendance at its TAJE programmes just because it has a large membership, and a ‘big name’ speaker is not a guaranteed success in a TAJE programme if the milieu in which it exists, or the learning interests and styles of potential students, are not adequately considered.

Summary and segue

In the discussion of the curriculum for TAJE it is often assumed that the subject matter is of primary importance and that the choice of subject matter is based on ideological, pedagogical, or other such conceptual bases. In this chapter I have tried to show that the actual *contexts* in which TAJE is currently practised challenge the supremacy of subject matter just described. To make the point clearer, it could be said *that the power and importance of these overarching contemporary contexts is that they predetermine and orientate what content can and will be addressed.*

I then employed a Schwabian model of curriculum production in order to reflect upon the various contexts and found that they closely mirror the various bodies of experience required to work on curriculum.

A different approach is taken in the following chapter in which a discussion of the theory and history of the choices of subject matter shed more light on the curriculum for TAJE.

Chapter 3

The Jewish Curriculum Tradition

Introduction

In this chapter an argument is made that there is a discernable tradition of curriculum thinking in the literary and social history of the Jewish people. A number of different aspects of this *Jewish Curriculum Tradition* (JCT) are presented, each of which contains its own internal tensions and challenges. The aim here is to present evidence of the richness of the JCT, its many strands, and how they have changed and evolved in time. The traditional ways in which these were understood and enacted by various Jewish communities over the last two millennia are also mentioned. The material presented here is culled from primary Jewish texts on the subject as well a number of historical works on Jewish education (Asaf, 1924; Fishman, 1944; Scharfstein, 1960; Aberbach 1982; Breuer 2003).

Rabbinic terminology for curriculum

In chapter one the question of a suitable Jewish terminology for curriculum was raised. The exceedingly associative nature of the Hebrew language coupled with the need to ground curricula concepts firmly in the Jewish Tradition make this issue one of conceptual importance. The mostly likely candidate is the root¹ word, סדר *seder*, which literally means ‘order’. Like the word ‘curriculum’, *seder* is used to refer to the ordering of all kinds of objects and ideas but has a particular usage in the context of education. Some key examples:

- (a) The annual educational experience of the first nights of the festival of Passover is called the *Seder* (סדר).

¹ In Hebrew, verbs have a three letter root. In the case of *seder* it is S’D’R. Thus all words with this root have an associated meaning.

- (b) A *siddur* (סדור) is a Jewish prayer book, thus called because it is the prayer syllabus for a Jewish community². In Judaism, prayer includes a heavy dose of regulated learning.³
- (c) The *sedra* (סדרה) is the weekly portion of the Torah that is publicly recited in the synagogue and studied by the community.⁴ Thus the Torah was completed annually.
- (d) Similarly, there was an ancient custom in Israel to complete the Torah every three years. The weekly portions read in this case were called *sedarim* (Mann, 1971). There are in fact *sedarim* (סדרים) for the entire Bible.⁵

The most significant and telling example of the use of *seder* in an educational context concerns the foundation works of the Oral Law called the ‘Mishnah’ and ‘Talmud’.

Written in Hebrew and redacted around 200 CE by Judah the Prince, the Mishnah⁶ is the first compendium of instructions for all aspects of the religious Jewish experience, ethical, legal and social. Considered the first work of Rabbinic Judaism, it is made up of 63 tractates divided into six sections called *sedarim*⁷. Thus, if our understanding of *seder* as curriculum is correct, then the Mishnah could be characterised as the six-part curriculum for how to live a Jewish life.

Rabbinic commentaries on the Mishnah over the next three hundred years were recorded mostly in Aramaic and were redacted as the ‘Gemara’. The Mishnah and the Gemara together form the Talmud. Thus the Talmud is a commentary and expansion of the Mishnah which follows its structure and includes the words of the Mishnah. It is a vast compendium of law, philosophy, ethics, and lore. A very common alternate name which is used to refer to both the Mishnah and the Talmud is *Shas* which is a Hebrew acronym for “*Shisha sedarim*”⁸. Again, following our understanding of *seder*, *Shas* could be translated

² See for example Talmud, Berachot 12a

³ For instance, morning prayers begin with a blessing for learning Torah followed by the study of texts from Torah, Mishnah and Talmud.

⁴ This is elaborated on further in this chapter.

⁵ See, for example, the introduction to, *The Holy Scriptures*, (Koren: Jerusalem, 1984)

⁶ The word literally means ‘repetition [of what one was taught]’, and is used to mean ‘learning’.

⁷ These are different from the Bible *sedarim* referred to above.

⁸ This alternate name for Talmud was already being used in the 12th century (see for example the medieval commentary of Tosafot on Sanhedrin 24a).

as the six-part curriculum of the Oral Law of the Jewish People.⁹ In the Talmud itself one Rabbi briefly outlines the six sub-curricula:

Resh Lakish said: What is meant by the verse, “*The faith of your times, strength, salvation, wisdom and knowledge...*” (Isaiah 33:6)?

‘faith’ refers to *Seder Zeraim* (i.e. the sub-curriculum for agricultural law);

‘your times’ refers to *Seder Moed* (i.e. the sub-curriculum for festival law);

‘strength’ refers to *Seder Nashim* (i.e. the sub-curriculum for laws concerning women);

‘salvation’ this refers to *Sefer Nezikin* (i.e. the sub-curriculum for torts);

‘wisdom’ refers to *Seder Kodshim* (i.e. the sub-curriculum for Temple service);

and ‘knowledge’ refers to *Seder Taharot* (i.e. the sub-curriculum for laws of ritual purity)... (Talmud, Shabbat 31a)¹⁰

The roots of all principles in the Mishnah are understood by the Rabbinic Sages to have been given to Moses at the Revelation¹¹ on Mt. Sinai and are part of an ongoing process:

Moses received the Torah on Mt. Sinai, and handed it down to Joshua; Joshua to the elders; the elders to the prophets; and the prophets handed it down to the men of the Great Assembly. (Mishnah, Avot 1:1)¹²

The Talmud gives a remarkable account of the beginning of this process which features the use of the word *seder* in the way that I have proposed:

Our Rabbis learned: How did the *seder* (curriculum) of *Mishnah* (teaching) at Mt. Sinai actually work?

⁹ This is reminiscent of a ‘religious/holy order’ which is a group of people who join together for religious reasons and live according to particular rules. It might be that this ancient meaning of the word ‘order’ is actually the literal translation of the word *seder*. In other words, a religious/holy order could be understood as a community’s curriculum for conducting a particular religious lifestyle.

¹⁰ Resh Lakish is finding a hint to the nature of each sub-curriculum in each word of the Biblical sentence: ‘faith’ for agriculture because it requires faith in God to sow with the assurance of a crop; ‘times’ for the festival calendar; ‘strength’ is derived from a root meaning to inherit, and thus relates to women, because heirs are created through women; ‘salvation’ for torts because the knowledge of this area of law saves a person from encroaching upon their neighbour’s rights or allowing their own to be compromised; the last two parts refer to the Temple service and ritual purity which are very intricate and require deep understanding, and are therefore identified with wisdom and knowledge.

¹¹ Described in the book of Exodus, chapters 19-24.

¹² Tractate Avot was actually completed slightly after the rest of the Mishnah and is a sustained explanation and justification of the authority of the Mishnah and the importance of education. See J. Neusner, *The Mishnah: An Introduction*, Jason Aronson Inc., 1994).

Moses learned from the mouth of God. Then Aaron (his brother) entered and Moses taught him... Then Aaron's sons entered and Moses taught them... Then the elders entered and Moses taught them... Then all the people entered and Moses taught them. So Aaron learnt four times, his sons three times, the elders twice, and all the people once.

At this stage Moses departed and Aaron taught them. Then Aaron departed and his sons taught them. His sons then departed and the elders taught them. So everybody learnt four times in all. (Talmud: Eirubin 54b)

This account is then used to teach the educational lessons of tenacity, mastery, meaning and responsibility and so shows that *seder* refers to both pedagogic and syllabus issues:

From here Rabbi Eliezer inferred: It is a person's duty to teach their pupil four times... Rabbi Akiva stated: A person should continue to teach their pupil until they have mastered the subject... It is also the teacher's duty to explain the underlying reasoning of the subject... And why did they not all learn directly from Moses four times? In order to give a share of the responsibility to Aaron, his sons, and the elders. (ibid.)

In the Medieval period, the phrase *seder ha-limud*, literally 'the order of the learning', was used to refer to the particular ways in which Rabbinic scholars read Jewish legal texts. However, by the 18th century, some Rabbis were using this phrase to refer to the curriculum in Jewish schools.¹³ One final source shows how a major 18th century Jewish scholar understood *seder* as curriculum. In his classic work, *Derech Tevunot* (The Ways of Reason), Rabbi Moses Haim Luzzato describes the tools of thinking required to study Talmud in depth. He ends this highly systematic work with the concept of *seder*:

We are now ready to discuss *seder*, which is a fundamental intellectual tool, used both in learning and in teaching, to lighten the burden of achieving clear understanding. This is the tool which will clear away all obstacles so that the intellect may proceed towards understanding without impediment. If he is learning, he will grasp the concepts he desires without error. If he is teaching, he will convey what is in his mind clearly, making it easier for the student to understand what is taught... (Luzzatto, The Ways of Reason, chap. 11)¹⁴

Thus it is clear that *seder* is used to describe curriculum in terms of syllabus, pedagogy and context, which was the broad understanding of curriculum posited in chapter one.

¹³ See for example *Megillat Sefer*, the autobiography of R. Jacob Emden (p.46, 1955 edition published by Joseph Waldman)

¹⁴ This translation is from Sackton & Tscholkowsky (1997) Feldheim Pub., p.238.

Major aspects of the JCT are now described in the following five sections which roughly follow a chronological order.

1. Lifelong Learning for All

As introduced in chapter one, Jewish learning is a daily obligation that lasts a lifetime:

Let not this Book of Torah cease from your lips, but study it day and night, so that you may faithfully follow all that is written in it... (Joshua 1:8).

Shammai said: Fix regular times for your study of Torah; say little and do much... (Mishnah, Avot 1:15).

Despite the positive educational aim of reinforcement, the repetitive nature of such learning could ultimately reduce it to mere ritualised reading (i.e. rote learning). Thus the Rabbis ceaselessly promoted repeated contemplative study:

Ben Bag Bag said: Turn it (the Torah) and turn it over again, for everything is in it, and contemplate it, and wax grey and old over it, and stir not from it... (Mishnah, Avot 5:25).

This is because they saw the essence of ‘man’ as a learning animal: “Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai used to say: If you have learnt much Torah do not be overly proud of yourself, because for that you were created.” (Mishnah, Avot 2:8)¹⁵

Such is the centrality of learning that all Jews are empowered to be teachers. Based on the biblical command “*and you shall teach them to your children*” (Deuteronomy 11:19), Maimonides states that the primary educational aim is to *teach* (not *learn*):

Just as one is obligated to teach their child, so is one obligated to teach their grandchild... and not only their own family, for every learned Jew is obliged to teach... (Ibid 1:2). . (Maimonides, Instructions for Torah Study, 1:10)

¹⁵ This reads as a precursor, in a religious context, to the innate learning ability of man described by Bruner: “The single most characteristic thing about human beings is that they learn. Learning is so deeply ingrained in man that it is almost involuntary, and thoughtful students of human behavior have even speculated that our specialization as a species is a specialization for learning.” (Bruner, 1978, p.113)

This empowers Jewish learners because they are encouraged to be the safe keepers of their Tradition. A phrase found in the Tradition Jewish morning prayers profoundly testifies to this: “*Lord, our God... instill in our hearts ... to learn and teach, to observe and to do*”. This prayer is not meant for the elite but for every congregant. It says that all who learn, should teach, *even ahead of observance*. Thus the novice is empowered to teach too. In fact there is no obligation to learn according to Maimonides, only to teach, because even personal learning – self empowerment – is called *teaching* yourself, “Just as a person must teach their child so they must teach themselves.” (ibid. 1:4).

How was progress in studying this lifelong curriculum meant to be achieved and what was the core syllabus? Two key texts are presented to answer this question:

(i) Lifetime progression – The Mishnah details an approach that interweaves child development, rites of passages, and life stages with greater and greater achievements in learning:¹⁶

At five years old for achieving Bible, at ten for Mishnah,
at thirteen for observing the commandments (*Bar Mitzvah*), at fifteen for Talmud,
at eighteen for the marriage canopy, at twenty for finding work,
at thirty for strength, at forty for wisdom, at fifty for counsel,
at sixty for getting old, at seventy for old age, at eighty for power,
at ninety for meditation, and at a hundred it is as if they are dead and lost to the world.
(Mishnah: Avot 5:21)

The numerous traditional commentaries on this text discuss a huge array of curriculum issues.¹⁷

(ii) Threefold progression: Based on a key biblical verse, the Talmud also presents a threefold approach:

¹⁶ The intricate relationship between Jewish acculturation rites and schooling gained prominence in medieval Europe and was influenced by Christian initiation rites (Marcus, 1996). Note also the linguistic-conceptual relationship between *curriculum vitae as rites of passage* and *curriculum as education*, as discussed in chapter one.

¹⁷ See for example: *Arbarbanel on Pirkei Avot* trans. A. Chill (Sepher-Hermon Press, 1991); *Derech Hayim*, Maharal on Avot; *Lehmann-Prins Pirkei Avoth* (Feldhem, 1992), *Midrash Shmuel on Pirkei Avot*, Trans. M. Schapiro and D. Rottenberg (haktav Institute, 1994); *Avoth, MeAm Lo'ez*, Rabbi Yitzchak Magriso trans. D.N. Barocas (Maznaim, 1979).

Rabbi Safra said in the name of Rabbi Yehoshua the son of Chaninah: What is meant by, “and you should teach them diligently [*ve-shinnantem*] to your children” (Deuteronomy 6:7)?

Read not *ve-shinnantem*, but *ve-shillashtem*¹⁸ [you shall divide them threefold]: A person should always divide their years into three: devoting a third to the study of Bible, a third to the study of Mishnah, and a third to the study of Talmud. But does a person know exactly how long they will live? It is done by days.¹⁹ (Talmud, Kiddushin 30a²⁰)

The Talmud also instructs the weekly Torah reading in the synagogue²¹ – i.e. the sedra mentioned above – to be supplemented by personal study. This involved reading the text twice in the original and once in translation.²² Later the ‘translation’ was interpreted to mean an explanatory commentary.²³ This example of binding learning to ritualised reading allowed the entire Torah to be completed on an annual basis.

From the above it is clear that the study of Bible, Mishnah and Talmud made up the core of the syllabus of this lifelong curriculum. Torah, the first third of the Bible, was given special treatment due to its superior revelatory nature.

The above sources distinguish between Mishnah and Talmud because they were written while the Talmud was still being formulated. After the Talmud was redacted, Talmud study was understood to include Mishnah. Thus, in a general sense, the core syllabus of the JCT could be said to be Bible and Talmud. This complements the reading of curriculum as *seder* described above since both Bible and Talmud are made up of *sedarim*.

Of course it should be noted that Hebrew language, ‘the medium of Jewish education’ (Winter, 1966, p.52-54), was always an essential element of the JCT but was expected to be mastered at a very early age and was, almost from the outset, taught through the study of traditional texts:

¹⁸ This is a homiletical play on words common to Rabbinic interpretation.

¹⁹ The standard commentators disagree as to whether this means achieving the goal weekly or daily. Rashi argues that it means two days a week study Bible, two days Mishnah, and two days Talmud. While Tosafot argue that it means dividing each day into a third Bible, a third Mishnah, and a third Talmud.

²⁰ See also Talmud, Avodah Zara 19a.

²¹ Instituted by Ezra the prophet (see Talmud, Bava Kamma 82a).

²² Talmud, Berachot 8a. In Hebrew the phrase is: *Shnayim mikra v'achad targum*

²³ Joseph Karo, Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 285:3

At first [the child] should learn to recognise the letters and then put them together. These are called words. And then they should study the verse and then the sedra and then the Mishnah and then the Talmud. (*Sefer Rokeach*, p.11)²⁴

It was only when Jewish communities became part of modern pluralistic societies (such as in the United States) that the study of Hebrew language had to be formalised in the curriculum to compensate for lower standards and religious commitments (Adar, 1977, p.180-184, 243-244).

2. Talmud and the Yeshiva

The JCT has been moulded by the institution of the ‘yeshiva’ more than anything else. *Yeshivot* (plural of *yeshiva*) gradually grew up in the aftermath of the destruction of Jewish sovereignty in 70 CE. These adult, men-only²⁵, generally residential academies were devoted to the full time daily study of Traditional Jewish texts.

Until today, in *Yeshivot* the world over, the vast majority of the curriculum is taken up with Talmud study and the multitude of commentaries thereon. Traditional texts can easily be found that powerfully express the superiority of the Talmud over all other fields of study²⁶, however right up to the Middle Ages, Bible study was just as avidly pursued. How did the Talmud become the heart of the curriculum at the expense of the Bible? A number of explanations can be identified, each of which sheds light on the changing nature of the JCT in the lives of medieval Jewish communities. These explanations can be grouped into three categories:

(i) Foreign influence – The Bible was studied by Jews and Christians alike whereas the Talmud was exclusive to Jews.²⁷ For fear of being influenced by Christian readings of the Bible, the focus of the traditional Jewish world moved to Talmud study (Breuer, 2003, p.226). This was also a response to the Western Enlightenment whereby progressive Jews would study non-traditional biblical commentaries. Finally, the intermittent bannings and

²⁴ Reprinted Jerusalem edition, 1967.

²⁵ The growth of women’s *yeshivot* within the last thirty years is comparatively recent.

²⁶ See Chapter 10 of the Midrash on the book of Proverbs which presents a clear hierarchy of Jewish textual learning, with biblical studies at the bottom and Talmudic studies at the top.

²⁷ Midrash, Tanchuma - Ki Tisa 34.

burnings of the Talmud from the 13th to the 17th centuries (Werblowsky & Wigoder, 1997) may have contributed to a more fervent commitment to study it.

(ii) Jewish Life – The Talmud has a much more practical focus than the Bible as a guide to religious life because it contains principles on all aspects of Jewish law. Thus for very pragmatic reasons its continued study and applicability to ever new situations was essential (Breuer, 2003, p.97-8). Also, Talmud study was perceived as much more difficult and sophisticated than Bible study, with only the best and brightest achieving great success.²⁸ This led to more prestige being given to Talmud scholars and increased their marriage prospects (Breuer, 2003, p234). As a result Talmud study was being encouraged at an ever earlier age:

...the teacher's aim was to hasten the child on to Talmud as quickly as possible, mainly to please the parents, and consequently most of the other subjects were lightly touched upon or ignored altogether... many boys were already being taught Talmud and Tosafot at the early age of eight or nine. (Fishman, 1944, p.86)

Conversely, Bible study was becoming a more and more specialist field which excluded the majority who were unfamiliar with the advancement of the discipline. A final issue of concern was the actual *contents* of the Bible. Its protagonists did not appear to be very Jewish. A book containing stories of wild and impulsive characters, some with questionable sexual ethics and violent tendencies, did not sit well with everyday mild-mannered Jewish life. Much safer and more relevant were the many legal works that were being produced based on the Talmud.

(iii) Bible subsumed – The Talmud, written in ancient Babylon, also includes an intriguing remark concerning the threefold progression of the core curriculum discussed above:

To what does the name Babylonia [*bavel*] allude? Rabbi Yochanan said that the study of Bible, Mishnah and Talmud was intermingled [*balul*] there.²⁹ (Talmud: Sanhedrin 24a)

²⁸ The Bible was valued for ritual reading, not for serious study. There is evidence that it was viewed as light reading for five year olds (Breuer, 2003, p224, 233).

²⁹ *Bavel*, the Hebrew word for Babylonia, is etymologically similar to the word *balul*, meaning intermingled.

The medieval Tosafot commentary on this talmudic text makes an important contemporary point:

‘intermingled...’: Thus our Talmud exempts us from what the Sages said that a person should always divide their years into three, devoting a third to the study of Bible, a third to the study of Mishnah, and a third to the study of Talmud.

In other words, there is no need to study Bible and Mishnah separately from Talmud because the Talmud includes the Mishnah and Biblical quotes are to be found on every page of the Talmud. i.e. the Talmud *subsumes* Mishnah and Bible. The vast majority of the European Yeshivot of the time adopted this position “that there was no room for distinct classes or hours devoted to biblical studies in the academy curriculum.” (Kanarfogel, 1992, p.84). Tosafot’s words are still quoted to this day in justification of not studying Bible in any great depth in Yeshivot.

However, there are other authorities who read the Talmudic statement as a criticism of the method of instruction in Babylonia. ‘Intermingled’ could mean that the education was confused and disordered and thus prevented the students from a systematic mastery of Bible first, then Mishnah and finally Talmud.³⁰ In contrast to the Tosafot, another authority is very scathing about the lack of biblical studies in medieval Europe:

In this period, I note that Jewish scholars, even the greatest among them, show great disdain for biblical studies. It is enough for them to read the weekly Torah portion and still it is possible that if you ask them about a particular verse, they will not know where it is. They consider one who spends time doing biblical studies is a fool; the Talmud is our mainstay. This disease is rampant in France and Germany in our generation, as it was in the preceding period. But in earlier generations it was not so... (*Ma’aseh Efod*, Profiat Duran, p.41³¹)

Yet another medieval commentary gives a defense of biblical studies, but the argument is based ultimately on the need to understand Talmud better:

...every person should learn Bible... The biblical references that are peppered throughout the Talmud, one here and one there, will not help a person who has not learnt the Bible in order. For occasionally the Talmud cites only one verse from an entire Biblical paragraph,

³⁰ See the commentaries of the *Maharasha* and *Rashash*.

³¹ See the Vienna Edition, printed 1865.

and if the reader does not know the issue of the whole paragraph then they will not be able to appreciate the depth of the Talmudic reasoning and so understand the words of the rabbis in the way of truth. (Commentary of *Anaf Yosef* to Midrash Shemot Rabbah 41:5)

It is clear from the above that the many of the reasons why Talmud usurped Bible as the mainstay of the curriculum were influenced by social, political and ideological issues. It is clear that the JCT has both *formed and been formed* by Jewish communities in a dynamic interplay. With the rebirth of the modern State of Israel there has been a great resurgence of biblical studies, and the debate over Bible vs. Talmud study is still a live issue.

A final point: full-time learning in a Yeshiva is taken literally with the main study hall open from early in the morning to late into the night (Helmreich, 2000). The daily study curriculum is divided into three schedules of hours for traditional Jewish learning. These are called *sdarim*. The choice of Talmudic tractate for study and choice of method to be used are divided within morning *seder*, afternoon *seder*, and night *seder*. Again we see how the language of *seder* is used to describe the curricula framework for Yeshiva students all over the Jewish world.

3. Extending the curriculum

Does the JCT include non-Jewish literature? An affirmative answer to this question is given in the Maimonidean reworking of the Talmud's threefold approach:

The time allotted to study should be divided into three parts:

- (i) A third should be devoted to the Written Law (i.e. the Bible);
- (ii) A third to the Oral Law (i.e. Mishnah and Talmud);
- (iii) The last third should be spent in reflection, deducing conclusions from premises, developing implications from statements, comparing dicta, studying the hermeneutical principles by which Torah is interpreted, until one understands the essence of these principles... (Maimonides, Instructions for Torah Study, 1:11)

Thus Maimonides expands the third category to move from just knowing and into deeper contemplation of the subject matter. This, he goes on to state, is the real aim:

...This [threefold] plan applies to the period when one begins learning. But after one has become proficient and no longer needs to learn the Written Law or continually be occupied with the Oral

Law, they should at fixed times, read the Written Law and the traditional dicta, so as not to forget any of the rules of Torah, and then should devote all their days exclusively to the study of the last third according to their breadth of mind and maturity of intellect (ibid. 1:12).

According to Twersky's understanding of Maimonides (Twersky, 2003), this third category is very broad indeed and includes the study and comprehension of science and philosophy. Thus the full scope of general knowledge and philosophy is part of the JCT according to this reading of Maimonides.³² This was actualised, for instance, in 13th century Spain when the Jewish curriculum was Bible and Talmud until age fourteen, then mathematics, astronomy and philosophy for the next two years, and from sixteen onwards the ideal was to, "give a large portion of your learning time to the labour of thought" (Breuer, 2003, p.117). Eastern Europe Jewry was much less positive about 'secular learning' and it was generally only valued for 'trade education' i.e. to become an apprentice and earn a living (Fishman, 1944, p.116-117).

What is left unclear is the relationship between the main and extended parts of the Jewish curriculum and their relative sizes and importance. This is still a contentious issue in Jewish education. Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, a leader of American Jewry in the last century, and a follower of Maimonides, was unequivocal but was clearly trying to confront a powerful opposition:

We believe that the Jewish child is capable of carrying a double load, the universal secular and the specific Judaic. We believe that the child is able to study and comprehend two systems of knowledge and to excel in both.

Some people deny this. The Jewish child, they say, has to choose between being a literate Jew and a literate human being. Literacy in both realms is an absurdity, they say. We reject this philosophy of doom. We say that the Jewish child is teachable and educable in both fields and at the same time. Not only literacy but even scholarship in both is attainable.

The philosophical reasoning responsible for this optimism concerning the compatibility of the sacred with the mundane, the religious with the secular, is rooted in the thought that *Judaism has never distinguished between these allegedly two areas of being.*

(Public Lecture, 15.11.71; see www.rav.org)

³² This aligns with what is known personally about the man. He was an accomplished doctor and it is clear that he was aware of and appreciated ideas from a range of non-Jewish sources.

4. Two curricula responses to modernity: *Daf Yomi* vs. *Chok L'Yisrael*

In terms of sheer number of learners, longevity, recognition, and tenacious commitment, the most successful examples of curriculum in TAJE today are known as *Chok L'Yisrael* and *Daf Yomi*. Outlining each and contrasting them will shed light on contemporary approaches to the JCT.

Chok L'Yisrael

Rabbi Chaim Vital (1542-1620) was the main disciple of the great kabbalist Rabbi Isaac Luria of Safed (1534-72) and transcribed most of his teachings. They devised a study curriculum of selected important texts from the major books of Jewish Tradition³³, which they called *Chok L'Yisrael*.³⁴ The entire curriculum spans a year, and though the texts to be studied change daily, they follow a weekly cycle that runs from Sunday to Friday with a break on Saturday for *Shabbat*, the Jewish day of rest.

The content of the curriculum is based on the weekly *sedra* (described earlier) and the length of the selections is based on a mystical understanding of the Tetragrammaton.³⁵ Everyday there is a selection from the three sections of the Bible as well as a selection from the Mishnah, Talmud and Zohar³⁶. The daily Torah selections are consecutive and come from the weekly *sedra* of the upcoming Shabbat, the daily selections from *Nevi'im* (Prophets) are also consecutive and come from the upcoming Haftorah³⁷, and the daily selections from *Ketuvim* (Writings) start with Proverbs, progressing daily until completion when select Psalms are substituted until the end of the year. One chapter from the Mishnah³⁸ is selected daily and the Talmud selection is a commentary on part of that

³³ See the introduction to *Chok L'Yisrael Hamaor*, (ed.) D. Bitton [Hebrew] (Hamo'or, 1993)

³⁴ This is a Hebrew phrase from Psalms 81:5 "For it is a *rule for Israel (Chok L'Yisrael)*, a judgment of the God of Jacob." (Psalms 81:5). The 'rule' being the curriculum.

³⁵ The four letter Biblical Hebrew Name for God usually transliterated as YHVH.

³⁶ Lit. 'the Radiance'; traditionally attributed to Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, it is the central text of *Kabbalah*, Jewish mysticism. The Zohar is constructed as a commentary on the Torah and is divided by *sedra*.

³⁷ A short passage from the Prophets read on every Sabbath (Shabbat) in a Jewish synagogue following a reading from the Torah which invariably has a conceptual or textual link to the Torah reading.

³⁸ I have not been able to identify a clear pattern of how the chapter of Mishnah was chosen but most of the selections seem to relate to the immediately practical parts of the Mishnah.

chapter. The selection from the Zohar is part of its commentary on that week's *sedra*. Over a century later Rabbi Chaim Joseph David Azulai³⁹ (1724-1807) added to *Chok L'Yisrael* a daily selection from a standard Jewish legal code⁴⁰ and from a book of *Mussar* (spiritual and character development).

Chok L'Yisrael is commended in a Jewish legal code of 19th century⁴¹ and until today is studied daily by tens of thousands of Jews. Numerous editions of the full content of *Chok L'Yisrael* have been published, one with a full English translation,⁴² and there is even a recently constructed website (www.echok.com), so that it can be studied online.

Daf Yomi

Tossed into a stormy sea when his ship was wrecked, the great Talmudic sage Rabbi Akiva nearly drowned. He later described his perilous rescue to Rabbi Gamaliel saying,

A *daf* (plank) from the ship came my way and I clung to it. As each wave came surged over me I bowed my head and held tight. (Talmud: Yevamot 121a).

'*Daf Yomi*,' or a 'page (*Daf*) a day (*Yomi*)' refers to the system of Talmud study founded in 1923 by Rabbi Meir Shapiro, Rabbi of Pietrikov and Lublin, representative of the Jewish community in the Polish senate. It was in August of that year, at the First International Congress of Agudath Israel World Movement in Vienna, that Rabbi Shapiro, supported by the leading Jewish sage of the time, the Rabbi Israel Meir Kagan (known as the Chofetz Chayim), proposed the revolutionary idea of uniting Jews worldwide through the daily study of a page of Talmud. The 37 year old Rabbi explained the significance of this undertaking by paraphrasing Rabbi Akiva's strategy described above: "A *daf* is the instrument of our survival in the stormy seas of today. If we cling to it faithfully all the waves of tribulation will but pass over us."⁴³ Although Jews have always studied tractates of the Talmud, Rabbi Shapiro's goal was to unite Jews across the globe by enabling them

³⁹ Commonly known as the 'Chida', *an acronym of his name*.

⁴⁰ The two books used are the *Mishneh Torah* by Maimonides (1135-1204) and the *Shulchan Aruch* by Rabbi Joseph Karo (1488-1575).

⁴¹ See *Laws of Learning* 27:3 in *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch*, Rabbi Shlomo Ganzfried (1804-86)

⁴² *Chok L'Yisrael*, Trans. Yoseph Milstein (Jerusalem: Machon Yisrael Trust, 1995)

⁴³ I have found no reliable source for this though it is quoted on many Jewish learning websites.

to accomplish the great achievement of completing the entire Talmud. With his system of a page a day, and given that the Talmud contains 2,711 pages, this would take seven and a half years.

Study groups and individuals throughout the world are currently in the twelfth cycle of *Daf Yomi* which began on 2nd March 2005 and will end on 2nd August 2012. At the completion (*siyum*) of the previous *Daf Yomi* cycle, there were major celebrations in America (joined by satellite link-up), Israel and London, attended by tens of thousands Jews. Numerous websites contain the text of the daily *daf* and some have audio recordings of various Rabbis teaching the daily *daf*.⁴⁴, in Hebrew, English and even Yiddish. It is estimated that around 100,000 people are currently involved in studying *Daf Yomi*.

Comparison of *Chok L'Yisrael* and *Daf Yomi*

There are three main differences between *Chok L'Yisrael* (CL) and *Daf Yomi* (DY) which have numerous consequences:

1. Coverage: CLY is *selective* (no books are completed) whilst DY is *comprehensive* (one book, the Talmud, is completed). Thus the first is about getting a basic grounding and introduction to a number of different Traditional Jewish works while the second concentrates on one to completion. Also, CLY learners never see the framework of the books from which the texts are selected, whereas DY learners have the opportunity to see the big picture as they rapidly complete each Talmudic tractate.

2. Timetable: CLY is repeated annually while the DY cycle is seven and a half years. As a result CLY is studied many times by learners whereas many learners only do one cycle of DY. Unlike the DY timetable, CLY is also connected to the Jewish Calendar, with the selections being in line with the weekly Torah readings in the synagogue.

3. Learner culture: CLY is mainly studied by Sephardic⁴⁵ Jews while DY is mainly studied by Ashkenazi⁴⁶ Jews. The cultural differences between these two groups are reflected in CLY and DY. Thus CLY is treated as a very holy in and of itself and so

⁴⁴ See for example www.dafyomi.co.il; www.e-daf.com; www.ou-dafyomi.org & www.thelivingtree.net#daf

⁴⁵ Those of Spanish or North African descent.

⁴⁶ Those of Eastern European descent.

should be ritually read even if not fully understood (Breuer, 2003, p.117). Conversely, DY is treated much more practically and methodically. Clearly, DY comes out of a tradition in which the Talmud is supremely important (see earlier section) which is true much more for Ashkenazi than Sephardic Jewry.

Two of the differences between DY and CLY described above (coverage and timetable) are echoes of a related debate that originates in the Talmud:

Rava said: If there are two teachers of whom one gets on fast but with mistakes and the other slowly but without mistakes, we appoint the one who gets on fast and makes mistakes, since the mistakes correct themselves in time. Rabbi Dimi from Nehardea on the other hand said that we appoint the one who goes slowly but makes no mistakes, for once a mistake is implanted it cannot be eradicated. (Talmud: Bava Batra 21a)

The debate is about the tension between the need to cover ground and the need to be accurate. Detractors of the fast-paced seven-year long DY would tend to side with Rabbi Dimi and support the less ambitious annually-repeated CLY, while supporters of the comprehensive DY would tend to side with Rava and reject the slower and selective CLY. Recognising the problems with both approaches, the Talmud gives no legal resolution to this ancient quandary.⁴⁷

What unites CLY and DY is their ability to respond to modernity and to unite Jews. Both allow the Jewish learner to spend just about an hour a day involved in TAJE. Thus they can be part of the wider society and still be committed daily to their tradition. Also, the fact that Jews all over the world are learning the very same texts on the same day has a very cohesive effect on the learners and adds to a sense of connectedness for a people spread throughout the globe.

Also, it is clear that CLY and DY grew out of the older JCT described above. The content, the regularity of study and the lifelong commitment all show that these modern curricula are a natural evolution of the JCT. Interestingly, a number of other similar daily study

⁴⁷ It does however conclude with a surprising mythic tale (see Talmud: Bava Batra 21b).

curricula have sprung up in the last twenty years that are modeled on DY but, taken together, have a lot more in common with CLY⁴⁸.

5. Canonical concerns

One final important aspect of the JCT is the notion of canonised texts, explored by Halbertal (Halbertal, 1997). It is often pointed out that the landless and scattered Jewish communities have, from the time of the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in 70 CE until the founding of the modern state of Israel in 1948, cleaved to their ‘text’ and derived their identity from it. Halbertal adds that the shift from Biblical religion to rabbinic Judaism, and the sealing of the canon, together with continuing commentary and interpretation demanded from the community, amount to an unparalleled obsession with textuality. This gave immense authority and supreme value to the canonised texts of the JCT:

A curriculum can be designed to create a self-sufficient internal discourse. In this version of the text-centered community, the text marks the exclusive boundary of reflection. Every text which is not canonical is prohibited. (Halbertal, 1997, p.128)

As a result, discussions about curriculum in TAJE invariably revolve around which particular *sefarim* should be studied. Though *sefarim* literally means books, the word is reserved for traditional Jewish books of the canon such as Torah, Mishnah and Talmud. For new books to be accepted they have to be commentaries on the existing canon. Also, the study of less well-known parts of the Mishnah has been recently revived just because they are in the canon even though the outcomes are purely theoretical and have no direct relevance to contemporary Jewish life (Breuer, 2003, p.94-5).

As a result, curriculum thinking has been rather confined to traditional Jewish books at the expense of some other considerations such as the four commonplaces attributed to Schwab in the previous chapter. In terms of the three aspects of curriculum categorised in chapter one it could be said that the curriculum is entirely controlled by a canonised syllabus and that the curriculum aspects of pedagogy and context are wholly understood and applied in

⁴⁸ See shemayisrael.co.il/yomi. These include: (a) *Daf Yomi* of the Jerusalem Talmud; Mishnah Yomi; Halacha (Jewish Law) Yomi; Rambam (Maimonides) Yomi; and Shemirot Halashon (Laws of Speech) Yomi.

its service. Though this might standardise education in disparate Jewish communities across the globe it also tends to discourage the creative development of curriculum thinking in the field of Jewish education.

This concern about canonised texts is reflected in the contemporary use of textbooks in schools:

Having become accustomed to published textbooks, schools have entered into an economic pact that is difficult to break. In practice, schools have abrogated their responsibility to develop useable curriculum and instead gone the easier, but more expensive route, of purchasing their most important commodity - the content of what they teach. The central question is this: If schools hypothetically had to abandon all textbooks, what would the curriculum be? The purchased book has in practice become the curriculum, and only a complete rethinking of what we want the schools to teach will force us to come to grips with ultimate goals. (Sharpes, 1988)

Sharpes is describing, in a negative way, how school textbooks can actually become canonised texts and schools can become text-centred communities. The difference is that the Jewish canon has developed over centuries whereas school textbooks rarely have a shelf life of more than a few decades. Nevertheless, the canonisation of a curriculum is an ongoing educational concern.

Conclusions

In this chapter I have endeavoured to outline the circumscribing features of the Jewish Curriculum Tradition as it gradually emerged. It has been shown that the 'Jewish' in JCT does not just refer to the subject matter but to its structure, development and values. The circumscribing features could be briefly summarised as follows:

There is an identifiable Jewish Curriculum Tradition, called *seder*, which involves the lifelong learning for all of the core books of the Jewish Tradition and the ever expanding commentaries thereon. The JCT retains a tension between the centrality of Talmud verses other studies, especially Bible. It also retains a tension about how much, if at all, non-Jewish literatures should be studied. In modern times the JCT has evolved into major learning programmes such as *Chok L'Yisrael* and *Daf Yomi* which retain traditional

principles while addressing contemporary circumstances. Finally, while creating a sense of community across the Jewish world, the canonised nature of the JCT tends to hinder creative curricular development.

The host of dramatic changes in modern Jewry, such as the multiplication of religious denominations, the modern state of Israel, fears of out-marriage, and the rise of fundamentalist groups, have all raised many questions about what should be the curriculum for TAJE. This chapter has tried to show that the identification of a JCT could be used as a guide or model for the construction of new TAJE curricula in the future.

Chapter 4

The Torah L'Am curriculum

Introduction

What are the influences of the JCT on the production of a new curriculum for TAJE? To answer this I will analyse the creation, implementation and evaluation of such a curriculum. This analysis follows an Action Research approach and thus involves the critical self-reflection and justification of a curriculum in which I have been primarily involved. The 'Torah L'Am'¹ curriculum was developed over the last seven years throughout which a process of critical trialing has been followed.²

Critical trialing relies on a number of elements of good practice. Firstly, time is given for the innovative curriculum project to 'settle down' before it is summarily reviewed. Secondly, a reasonable number of repeated trials of the project are analysed. Thirdly, evidence is gathered from a broad range of sources about the project. Fourthly, the comments and realisations which occur after each trial are fed back into the project for the next trial. And finally, confidentiality of interested parties is maintained. All of these elements were followed in the critical trialing of the Torah L'Am curriculum.

A case record of the Torah L'Am curriculum, the methodology of which is described in chapter one, is contained in the Appendix. It contains a summary of the critical trialing and follows the format described in McKernan (McKernan, 1996, p.212-215) which is made up of five sections: description, materials, coherency, implementation and assessment. The assessment section includes a sample evaluation summary of the course as well as the comments of an important teacher of Torah L'Am.

¹ A Hebrew phrase which literally translates as "Torah for the People".

² I was not aware, until halfway through the project, of the appropriate terminology for the reflective practice and research I was actively pursuing. However, due to the thoughtful and deliberative educational environment in which I then worked, 'critical trialing' was actually happening from the very outset of the project.

Based on the information in the case record, this chapter contains a presentation of nine major lessons which I have learnt in the production of Torah L'Am. All nine are lessons that relate to philosophical and educational considerations drawn from the field of curriculum studies, and the the first four expressly relate to the Jewish Curriculum Tradition described in chapter three.

Lesson 1 – Take a holistic approach

A strong and clear set of principles should underpin the curriculum and impact on *every* aspect of its production. In this way every section supports the underlying approach and reinforces it to the student. This is especially true of a 'short' course such as Torah L'Am. A holistic approach will keep the students focused and goal orientated.

The holistic goal of Torah L'Am – as elaborated in the case study – was to understand the structure of the entire Torah and learn to Talk Torah. How does this relate to the JCT? Firstly, I chose to construct the curriculum around the book at the core of the Jewish canon. This rationale is elaborated upon in the appendix, section 1(v). Secondly, like the *Daf Yomi* curriculum I saw the need to have a sense of completion and comprehensive coverage, but like the *Chok L'Yisrael* curriculum I saw the need for in-depth study of select sections of text. These dual needs are apparent in the two-part structure of Torah L'Am. The first part – 'Torah Themes' – gives a macroscopic perspective of the Torah by analysing the entire book from seven key perspectives, and the second part – 'Torah Talks' – gives a microscopic perspective by teaching a four-step method for learning and talking about a selected section of Torah.

A key implication of the holistic approach is that a unified and overall responsibility is required for the many steps involved in making the curriculum. Thus even though different people may be involved in the various stages of researching, writing, deliberating, testing, implementing, monitoring, evaluating and adapting etc., nevertheless there needs to be a strong committed leadership (often one individual) that takes overall responsibility and has an appreciation of the whole endeavour. Such responsibility, leadership and perspective move well beyond the curriculum maker/manager/coordinator role described at the end of chapter two. This issue is discussed in greater detail in chapter five.

An interesting outcome of this holistic approach is the notion of a ‘curriculum memory’ whereby teachers and students have an idea of the origins of the curriculum. i.e. the curriculum has been ‘handed down’ from teacher to teacher to students. In my own experience of working on Torah L’Am, I was the originator of the curriculum and the first teachers of the course felt it important to describe to the students what I was trying to achieve. As more teachers teach the course this has become less important, but the need to refer to the heritage of the course has remained. This seems to be important to the students in that they know where the curriculum is ‘coming from’. One concern about this approach, which is mentioned in the teacher’s comments in the appendix, is the need for the curriculum to be teachable by a wide variety of TAJE teachers and not just the course originator or those who are like minded. With Torah L’Am this was achieved through considerable deliberation with a number of teachers and students.

Lesson 2 – Incorporate ‘layered learning’

To maximise each student’s learning experience, and in line with the Jewish learning Tradition, there is a pedagogic approach of ‘layered learning’ in the Torah L’Am curriculum. This reflects the JCT whereby the canon is read and unpacked on deeper and deeper levels: Torah study is completed in an through the annual cycle of the sedra, rabbinic literature expounds on each verse of Torah, and then centuries of commentaries analyse and expand upon this. Layered learning also has roots in the ideas of the ‘hermeneutic cycle’ and the ‘spiral curriculum’.

Hermeneutics, from the Greek *hermêneuô* meaning “to interpret or translate”³, is the theory and practice of interpretation, originally the interpretation of texts, especially religious ones. The ‘hermeneutic cycle’ is the process by which learners return to a text again and again in order to derive new interpretations from it. New interpretations may occur on every iteration for some or all of the learners. Though this happens all the time in daily life (we can understand a book, a movie, etc. a little differently each time we read or see it), as a pedagogic approach it is a formal method of instruction for the students, i.e. the continual returning to a text is built into the curriculum. This is purposefully embedded at the heart of the Torah L’Am curriculum. In the ‘Torah Themes’ section, the entire

³ From the messenger of the gods, Hermes.

Torah is reviewed again and again from a different thematic perspective. Each perspective unleashes the potential for new interpretations on the same text. This approach initiates the student into the practice of hermeneutic cycles. In the 'Torah Talks' section, one particular selected text from the Torah is given to the student. As the course progresses they return to this text again and again in order to develop their Torah talk based on this text. Thus the hermeneutic cycle is achieved through both breadth and depth in the Torah L'Am curriculum. This approach shows students how to unlock the breadth and depth of meaning in a text that they are often unaware of at first glance.

Bruner (Bruner, 1977) introduced the idea of the 'spiral curriculum' in the field of early education. He argued, however, that the idea is applicable much more widely:

The foundations of any subject may be taught to anybody at any age in some form... A curriculum as it develops should revisit these basic ideas repeatedly, building upon them until the student has grasped the full formal apparatus that goes with them... There is much still to be learned about the 'spiral curriculum' that turns back on itself at higher levels... (Bruner, 1977, p.12-13)

Torah study is at the foundation of all Jewish learning. Thus, as has been described above, Torah L'Am clearly follows the idea and approach of the spiral curriculum.⁴ Another important issue here is the need for a curriculum to maintain its focus and structure throughout and never to lose its guiding idea:

What matters is that later teaching builds upon earlier reactions..., that it seek to create an ever more explicit and mature understanding... Many curricula are originally planned with a guiding idea... But as curricula are actually executed, as they grow and change, they often lose their original form and suffer a relapse into a certain shapelessness. It is not amiss to urge that actual curricula be reexamined with an eye to the issues of continuity and development... (ibid. p.53-54)

The strict structure of the Torah L'Am curriculum aims to ensure that Bruner's warning is not ignored.

⁴ When teaching the Torah L'Am curriculum to educators I was told on a number of occasions that my approach was very similar to Bruner's spiral curriculum. This encouraged me to read his work on the subject. As often occurs, practitioners only discover later the published work that eloquently expresses the conceptual underpinning of their approach.

Lesson 3 – Teach for empowerment

As described in the JCT, a Jewish curriculum needs a heavy dose of empowerment if it is to really serve the religious learning and living commitments of students after the course has been completed. Though Freire's *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (Freire, 1993) was about the education of illiterate adults in the Third World, the importance of his educational philosophy has been recognised well beyond the dispossessed in Latin America, and is very significant for the Torah L'Am curriculum. Freire argued that the very real and practical empowerment of students is an essential component to any curriculum and requires meeting the students *where they are*:

The starting point for organizing the program content of education or political action must be the present, existential, concrete situation, reflecting the aspirations of the people. Utilizing certain basic contradictions, we must pose this existential, concrete present situation to the people which challenges them and requires a response – not just at the intellectual level, but to the level of action.

We must never discourse on the present situation, must never provide the people with programs which have little or nothing to do with their preoccupations, doubts, hopes, and fears – programs which at times in fact increase the fears of the oppressed consciousness. (Freire, 1993, p.76-77)

Freire is stressing the need to challenge students to act upon their learning while not increasing their fears to do so. He also demands that the education be supremely relevant and useful. In line with this, the stated aim of the Torah L'am curriculum is to 'encourage people to talk Torah' and, as described in the case study, the course builds up to each and every student giving a 'Torah talk' in the final session. After researching the various forms of TAJE (see chapter two), it is my opinion that many TAJE programmes today do not empower the student to be an active learner and treat them as a mere passive listener. In contrast, the Torah L'Am curriculum responds to a very real need for Jewish adults – the ability to study and talk about Torah in their families and communities. The course actually opens with a discussion of two Traditional Jewish texts about empowerment which set the tone for the entire enterprise. The first stresses that unlike hereditary rights, it is the right of every Jew to learn Torah:

The Jewish people were given three crowns:

The crown of Torah, the crown of priesthood and the crown of sovereignty.

The crown of priesthood was given to Aharon and his descendants...

The crown of sovereignty was given to David and his descendants...

But the crown of Torah is for every Jew. Whoever desires may come and claim it... it is the greatest crown of all. (Maimonides: Learning Torah 3:1)

The second testifies to the sentiment that in-depth study can lead to a deep identification with the subject and the personalisation of the experience:

Happy is the person... who delights in the *Torah of God*;
in due course they are involved in *their own Torah*, day and night. (Psalms 1:1-2)⁵

The Teacher's Guide for the Torah L'Am course asks the teacher to give great consideration and support for the students as they work on their Torah talks in order to address the 'doubts, hopes and fears' that Friere highlighted. The Teacher's Guide also explains how the 'Torah Themes' particularly empower students on the course:

If a reasonably well-educated adult was preparing a short talk on a subject related to their work or a topic of personal interest, they would probably know how to go about it. They would visit a library or search on the Internet using key words, or even contact a specialist in the field. In other words, they understand how the world of general knowledge 'works' and how to steer a course through it.

However, few Jews know how to undertake an equivalent task in relation to the Torah. They do not know the traditional study methods, the conceptual associations or the general structure of the Torah. Many Jews only experience Torah when they hear it read on Shabbat (the Sabbath) and most find their place only because the page number is announced. However, many do not really know 'where they are' in the Torah and, for them, the Torah is an unstructured collection of stories and laws that they may not be able to relate to each other—or relate to. This course aims to address that. It teaches orientation in the Torah.⁶

As the students learn to see the structures of Torah and how to cross-reference information in Torah they become empowered to further study, beyond the course.

⁵ This is based Rashi, the standard medieval Jewish commentary to this verse.

⁶ Zarum, R. *Torah L'Am – A Guide for Teachers*, (ed.) Angela Gluck Wood, to be published by UJIA, p.4

Lesson 4 – Tolerate incomplete understanding

A challenge to the Torah L'Am curriculum during its development was the issue of 'serious learning'. What could be realistically achieved in one short course about Torah? How could students hope to gain the comprehensive knowledge and extensive tools needed to be seriously involved in Talking Torah? My response was an appeal to the *process* of the exercise and the assertion that students could gain an overall idea of structure and content even without a complete understanding of a vast amount of specific points and concepts. For example, in analysing a particular Torah text and its traditional commentaries, students are encouraged to skip the difficult parts of a commentary that they do not understand and to focus on the parts that make sense to them. Though points will be missed, the student 'gets a handle' on how to read a commentary and with further practice will be able to read it ore comprehensively. Although this approach opens the door to misunderstanding, it is a price worth paying if it initiates and habituates the student into learning. This issue relates directly to the Talmudic-based pacing tension between *Daf Yomi* and *Chok L'Yisrael* discussed in the JCT of the last chapter: coverage hinders accuracy and vice versa.

Another way in which the Torah L'Am curriculum tolerates incomplete understanding is through the extensive use of information tables in the Student Study Guide such as, 'The timescale of Torah', 'The key personalities of Torah' and 'The names for God in Torah' etc. Although each of these tables simplifies the issue at hand and paints broad brushstrokes over much precise, complex and occasionally contradictory data, they do, nevertheless, manage to *contain* the basic data in a clear format and allow the student to gain an appreciation of the structure and categorization of an issue even without fully comprehending it.

Finally, an argument can be made that to tolerate incomplete understanding is inherent to a constructivist theory of learning. As the learner fits together new information with what they already know, they are continually in a state of incomplete understanding. In fact it is this very incompleteness that must be tolerated in order for the student to have the mental space to attempt to construct further understanding.

Lesson 5 – Teach up-to-date and original material

The use of original or fresh material can only serve to excite and entice the new student. Though the essential subject matter of an age-old, formal or well-known field may change little, the ways that it may be expressed and taught are constantly in flux due to the changing in attitudes, vogues and foci of contemporary society. For instance, the first ‘Torah Theme’ of the Torah L’Am syllabus seeks to explain the textual layout rules of traditionally printed Jewish bibles by comparing them to standard Microsoft word processor formatting markings. The familiarity and modern nature of this comparison is what gives it such educative power, but it is also what limits its shelf life. This kind of comparison would have been impossible just thirty years ago, little appreciated over ten years ago, and may well have no meaning or relevance within the decade.

The vulnerability of comparisons, metaphors and analogies in education to changing perceptions in society is eloquently illustrated in the field of Biblical translation. In 1997 Everet Fox⁷ published a major new translation of the bible (Fox, 1997) which was intended for widespread use in TAJE and other educational and literary contexts. The Hebrew word *shamayim* in the first chapter of Genesis (usually translated as expanse or firmament), was retranslated to give it a less jarring and more contemporary feel. Unfortunately, Fox chose the word ‘dome’ which, though suitable for American Jewry, led to sniggers and ironic comments by British Jewish readers who were immediately reminded of the London Dome and the media ruckus around its construction and use. Thus Fox’s work was significantly marginalised for this audience.

Lesson 6 – Pilot again and again

Much is gained from testing (trailing) the curriculum with various different teachers and students on an ongoing basis and then selectively incorporating what has been learnt from these trials. Each trial iteration improves the curriculum but should not be affecting its underlying conceptual structure. If this is the case then a rethink of the entire curriculum project is required.

⁷ Fox is Allen M. Glick Chair in Judaic and Biblical Studies at Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts. His works are well-known and respected references for TAJE teachers.

An outgrowth of the repeated piloting approach is the garnering of support for the curriculum project from ‘guinea pig’ teachers and students. Being part of such a pilot project enables them to ‘buy in to it’ and to invest more time and effort. Of course, this must be acknowledged when the curriculum is published.

Ben-Peretz (Ben-Peretz, 1990, p.57-58) describes three possible roles for teachers in curriculum development:

- (a) *Teacher as users of teacher-proof curricula*: Here materials are designed to minimize teacher influence.
- (b) *Teachers as active implementers*: Here teachers are expected to have input into the implementation of curricular ideas and through this to understand curricular innovation.
- (c) *Teachers as partners in development*: Here teachers are expected to be full partners in development and to adapt and mould curriculum materials to their own specific purposes and requirements.

For the Torah L’Am curriculum I would suggest that the initial teachers involved in writing and editing the final versions of the Student Study Guide and Teacher’s Guide (as described in the appendix) were ‘partners in development’. However, later teachers, who have ‘inherited’ the completed curriculum, are better characterised as ‘active implementers’. Their understanding of the motivation of the curriculum is essential for successful teaching. Although, after completion, the materials of the Torah L’Am curriculum may now *appear* to be teacher-proof, experience has shown that only teachers with a clear understanding of the underlying aims of the curriculum are able to cope with the challenge of teaching it.

Repeated piloting then has an impact on the opportune time for producing Curriculum Teacher Guides and associated materials. If the first teachers of a new curriculum project are ‘partners in development’ and as such are initiated into the project orally and are given pilot guides to work from then there is time for subsequent improvement and re-editing of these guides to the benefit of the curriculum.

Lesson 7 – Make sure Schwab’s five bodies of experience are covered

In chapter 2 five bodies of experience necessary for curriculum production were outlined. How were they addressed for Torah L’Am?

(i) *Subject* – As described in the appendix, this came from the methodology of Rabbi Matis Weinberg as well as traditional Jewish learning methods.

(ii) *Students* – This came from extensive piloting with a range of student groups and my years experience of teaching and talking to students of TAJE.

(iii) *Milieu* – This came from my working knowledge of the Anglo-Jewish community and my involvement with many of its member communities through a range of leadership and teaching roles and learning programmes. A real appreciation of the religious sensibilities of many potential students was also essential. E.g. the use of particular examples and explanations within the curriculum had to be more sensitive to the social milieu than the need for authoritative academic sources.

(iv) *Teachers* – This came from working with teachers who already had good experience of teaching TAJE, especially the ‘Melton Adult Mini-School’ (see chapter 2, context 3).

(v) *Curriculum maker/manager* – This was my role, experience for which I had gained from adapting, editing and rewriting parts of the Melton Mini-School curriculum and leading the faculty of teachers involved in teaching it.

In summary, a considered and deep understanding of the subject matter, the needs and aptitudes of potential students, the overall social context, the ability and availability of teachers, and the process of curriculum production itself all need to be formally addressed in any curriculum project.

Lesson 8 – Appeal to alternative epistemologies

Surely every curriculum is underscored by a particular inherent or adopted epistemology from which everything flows?

...interpretation of data must be preceded by a plan of experiment which will yield the desired data. The plan of experiment in turn, is preceded by and determined by a commitment to the kind of question we think is appropriate. And the question of what question to ask is preceded and determined by some metaphysical, preferential, or heuristic commitment to a conception of the nature of our subject matter... (Schwab, 1978, p.240)

However, the problem with constructing a syllabus in a religious context is that a living faith has adherents with a multiplicity of views on the nature of religious knowledge. For some Jews, all traditional texts are *inherently imbued* with Divine knowledge, for others these texts are *inspired* by Divine knowledge and for others the texts are wholly human in origin but result from *humanity contemplating* the Divine. Now if a curriculum were to be built on one particular religious epistemology then this would limit its wider appeal and authority. With this in mind the Torah L'Am curriculum includes in its syllabus arguments and ideas that appeal to a range of religious sensibilities. These can be selected and combined by the teacher depending on the community context in which they are teaching the curriculum. Thus wherever the students are on the positivist to constructivist spectrum in their understanding of religious texts, the curriculum can still appeal to them. This approach of appealing to alternative epistemologies has already been employed by some Biblical scholars, for example:

For those who believe the Bible's story literally, take this part literally. For those who see it as a myth, take this part as a myth. But either way, come to terms with this... (Friedman, 1995, p.76)

Lesson 9 – Make the curriculum transparent

The structure of a curriculum and the reasoning for that structure should be topics that are themselves included in the syllabus of that curriculum. Schwab has argued that to properly study a discipline, there is a necessity for, “finding appropriate ways of including structure as a facet of curriculum *content*.” (Schwab, 1978. p.242). He then calls the implications of this necessity ‘painful’ because:

We will also have the task of learning to live with a far more complex problem – that of realizing that we will no longer be free to choose teaching methods, textbook organization, and classroom structuring on the basis of psychological and social considerations alone.

Rather we will need to face the fact that methods are rarely if ever neutral. On the contrary, the means we use color and modify the ends we actually achieve through them. How we teach will determine what our students learn. If a structure of teaching and learning is alien to the structure of what we propose to teach, the outcome will inevitably be a corruption of that content. And we will know that it is. (ibid., p.242)

In other words, including the structure of a curriculum in the curriculum itself is the only honest approach to take given that this structure fundamentally influences the learning of the curriculum. He adds, damningly, that the content of a curriculum will be corrupted if the structure by which it is taught is alien to the structure of the content. But what exactly is the 'structure of the content'? Schwab goes on to write that nobody *knows* the full structure because of the sheer diversity of possible conceptions of the material. Thus a curriculum has to know and make known its own limitations.

This idea of curriculum transparency was essential to the construction of the Torah L'Am curriculum which begins with an explanation of the origins of the curriculum and a justification of its structure and purpose. Structural issues influence every part of the curriculum.

Conclusions

An analysis of the Torah L'Am curriculum has shown that it undoubtedly builds upon principles from the Jewish Curriculum Tradition as well as engaging with a number of considerations in the field of curriculum studies. This gives preliminary support to the potential usability of the JCT as a guide for curricular innovations in TAJE.

Chapter 5

Curriculum Production

The Curriculum Process

In chapter one the different conceptions of curriculum were discussed. Now we address the *process* of curriculum. Throughout this dissertation, many expressions have been used to describe each stage of this process. These are based on various approaches and foci within the field of curriculum. For some, good *Curriculum Planning* is the essential step on which all depends; others view *Curriculum Development* (Tanner & Tanner, 1980) as the lens by which to judge success; still others see *Curriculum Potential*, the ability of teachers to appreciate and use curriculum materials (Ben-Peretz, 1990), as the all-important stage; still others argue that *Curriculum Improvement* (Oliver, 1977) is vital because it ensures constant revisiting and enhancement of the curriculum, and the list goes on.

Pratt's contribution to the field includes guidelines for the all-important stage of *Curriculum Implementation* (Pratt, 1994, p.326-329). These are: establishing a climate of trust; implementing changes that meet recognised needs; consulting widely; establishing clear goals and limited scope; developing an ethos of collegiality; using personal contact; providing systematic in-service training; providing time and resources; not trying to change everyone; and not despairing.

There is also the issue of *Curriculum Depth*, i.e. the depth of thinking and reflection that goes into the curriculum process. Three levels of this have been suggested (Tanner & Tanner, 1980, p.654-655):

LEVEL 1: *Imitative-maintenance* – Here the normal routines are followed and the objective is just to 'keep the ship afloat'. Change may only occur when the chosen curriculum package is applied to the existing situation. This causes a fragmented view of curriculum.

LEVEL 2: *Mediative* – Here there is an awareness of the macroscopic aspects of curriculum, but improvement tends to be a matter of just lightly refining existing practice. Innovations are based on adaptations of what is, not any real adoptions of new perspectives.

LEVEL 3: *Generative-creative* – Here curriculum is conceived and treated as an articulated whole. The improvement of practice is actively sought by drawing on resources beyond the immediate environment and system. Characteristics such as imagination, artistry, awareness, and confidence to test and experiment with ideas are the hallmarks of this level.¹

The essential factor which differentiates between these three levels seems to be the extent to which the curriculum process is seen as an articulated whole. This relates directly to the first lesson learnt from working on Torah L'Am (described in chapter four), '*Take a holistic approach*', and will be elaborated upon below.

The various stages of the curriculum process could be presented as follows:

Planning → Research → Theory

→ **Design → Potential → Development → Piloting/trialing**

→ **Implementation → Evaluation → Improvement → Renewal**

Of course more stages could be added and others could be adapted, coupled or renamed, but the essential issue here is what *links* the many stages. What is it that *binds* the curriculum process into an articulated whole? I would like to suggest two factors, using a particular terminology, that are necessary (if not wholly sufficient) to achieve this binding:

- (i) The appreciation of *Curriculum Production*
- (ii) The appointment of a *Curriculum Producer*

Learning from the movies

To explain these factors and their specific terminologies a useful (though limited) suggestive comparison can be made with the world of *film production*, and specifically the

¹ This three-level structure has parallels with that of Ben Peretz described in Lesson 6 of chapter four. However, while Ben-Peretz concentrates on the depth of the teacher's involvement in curriculum development, Tanner & Tanner look at the depth of the curriculum process as a whole.

work of the *film producer*. There are two useful comparisons to be made between the curriculum and film making processes:

(a) Both are major long term multi-stage projects

As in film production, the production of a new curriculum (in a school or other formal educational setting) invariably takes a number of years. Major investments of time and resources are required to complete these kinds of projects. The enduring commitment and input of a large group of people is also required in both. Unless all this is fully appreciated at the outset then such a project will quickly lose coherence. The large and ongoing amount of work required heightens the risk that the finished product will not be well-received. Like the various stages of the curriculum process listed on the previous page that require binding into an articulated whole, film production also has a multi-stage ‘production cycle’ which requires overall management and highly-focused direction.

(b) Both require producers with immensely wide skill sets

A film producer oversees the making of a movie by initiating, coordinating, supervising and controlling matters such as raising funding, hiring key personnel, and arranging for distributors. The producer is involved throughout all phases of the filmmaking process from inception to completion of the project.² Unlike directing, acting and writing, the work of producing is much less well defined, “the word ‘producer’ covers a multitude of functions and roles” (Lazarus, 1992, p.122). There are no schools one can attend to learn the skills of being a successful and effective producer as there are for other professions in the film industry. In general, the producer is responsible for turning creative ideas into practical concepts.

The work of a film producer sheds light on the kind of overseeing role required for curriculum production. More than the curriculum coordinator described in chapter two, and in line with the ‘holistic approach’ to curriculum described in chapter four, the curriculum producer is involved in every aspect of the project and, like the film producer, cannot be formally trained for the role. They are pragmatists, people with clear vision who are also able to adapt to changing situations and respond to new and unpredictable

² Though the ultimate creative control of a film project began to shift into the hands of the director with the demise of the ‘Hollywood Studio System’ in the 1950s, the changes in movie distribution and marketing of the last thirty years have meant that it is now the producer who usually has the greatest degree of control in the American film industry.

problems. Reading the approaches of two film producers (Lazarus 1992; Linson, 1993) reminded me of many circumstances and challenges I had experienced in working on Torah L'Am. These producers had to cajole reluctant cast, shepherd the creative progress, come up with last-minute adaptations, manage communications and morale as well as budget and cost controls. These issues of people management, project leadership, meeting deadlines and finance and resource responsibilities were strikingly familiar.

Curriculum Production

Of course there many significant differences between the worlds of film and curriculum production, and film producers are quite different to curriculum producers. But it could be argued that the very practice of comparing curriculum work to a totally different field of endeavour can give an educationalist the distance required to gain much-needed perspective of their own field. Though some of the comparisons that have been made may appear obvious or straightforward, they could stimulate the educationalist to look with fresh eyes at their work. For instance, it might make them reflect more extensively upon whether any formal training could be given to a curriculum producer and if so, what it would entail.

A second point is that the film industry particularly is one of public interest and general excitement making such suggestive comparisons all the more interesting. For instance, the film industry celebrates its achievements with launch parties and award ceremonies. What would it do to the morale and development of a teaching staff if the launch of a new curriculum was marked with fanfare and excitement?

In sum, I have argued that describing the process as *Curriculum Production* and the manager as the *Curriculum Producer* better addresses some of the curriculum concerns discussed in this and earlier chapters, and that this terminology seems to capture the immensity and diversity of the job as well as the long-term commitment it requires.

Now applying this to the field of traditional adult Jewish education as defined in chapter one, a promising *Jewish Curriculum Producer* would have to be well aware of the curriculum contexts for TAJE as described in chapter two, they would have extensive knowledge and appreciation of the Jewish *Curriculum Tradition* described in chapter three, and they would need to have had some experience of *Jewish Curriculum Production*

such as that described in chapter four. This experience would also include a more general knowledge of the concepts and approaches of Curriculum Production as described in the literature.

Endnote

Through the interaction of traditional Jewish texts with research and ideas from modern curriculum studies, coupled with lessons learnt from the actual development of a curriculum in traditional Jewish studies from beginning to end, this dissertation has aimed to shed some light upon the process of curriculum production for the ever-expanding and developing field of traditional adult Jewish education. Along the way I have endeavoured to show that what makes Jewish education 'Jewish' is not just the textual content of this rich and ancient tradition, but also the conceptual thinking, contextual orientation, and ongoing curricular reflections of its many adherents throughout history.

Appendix

A case record for the Torah L'Am curriculum

1. Description of the project:¹

(i) Title:

The Torah L'Am (Torah for Everyone) Course.

(ii) Target aim and purpose:

There is a two-part aim for students on the course:

(a) To discover the multileveled thematic structure of the entire Torah:

Torah is immense. There are thousands of commentaries and perspectives, spanning thousands of years. The seven themes chosen as a focus in Torah L'Am are not exhaustive but include those that are most often discussed. They might be seen as the most basic of all Torah themes and certainly those that are most significant as a starting point.

(b) To learn how to study and talk Torah with their families, friends, colleagues and community:

In enabling Jews to develop their own ways of understanding and ultimately to learn by themselves, Torah L'Am gives students enough appreciation of structure, content and method to be able to tap into their own 'creative juices' so that they can begin to study and talk Torah. The course strives to balance the needs for clear direction and firm support to inspire confidence on the one hand, and room for students' individual scope to encourage a sense of ownership on the other. Torah L'Am aims to bring students to a level of learning from which they can springboard and take off into Torah study for themselves.

¹ Responses for this first section are based on the introductory material in: Zarum, R. *Torah L'Am – A Guide for Teachers*, (ed.) Angela Gluck Wood, to be published by the UJIA.

The term ‘talk Torah’—as opposed to ‘teach Torah’—is intentional. Although Jews are obliged ‘to learn and to teach’, the language of teaching can be off-putting. Most Jews feel that to be a Torah teacher is beyond them and do not see themselves as educators, but the idea of becoming ‘Torah Talk-ers’ is much more realistic. Talking is less formal and feels less authoritative. This is not just a question of semantics: it truly helps to allay fears of Torah L’Am students and make them feel that they, too, can talk Torah.

At the end of the Torah L’Am course, every participant gives a Torah Talk to a small group of three or four, who are also on the course. They will undoubtedly anticipate being quite unable to do this but experience has shown that they can—that Torah L’Am is indeed *Torah for Everyone*.

(iii) Target audience:

These are students of TAJE (as defined in chapter one) who have some basic level of competency and experience of TAJE. It is, as it were, a ‘level 2’ course. Thus students are expected to be familiar with the terms and usages of ‘*sidra*’ and ‘*Parashat HaShavua*’. They should be able to read Hebrew (even if very slowly) and understand why Torah is so central and important. Thus this course is not meant to inspire people to study Torah who currently have no commitment to it at all. It is meant for people who are already interested and are motivated to study but face immense difficulties and get frustrated because they are unable to get very far.

(iv) Origins:

In 1998 I began working at UJIA Makor which is the Centre for Informal Jewish Education for the Anglo-Jewish community. One programme that they had been delivering for some time was the ‘Hebrew Reading Crash Course’ developed in the United States². It was a revolutionary approach because, in just a few lessons, it gave adults the ability to begin to actually read classical Hebrew in a religious setting. It was an empowerment course with a clear practical aim. Graduates were able to be involved in more Jewish rituals because they could say the prayers in the original Hebrew text. I thought to create a similar course that would empower people to talk Torah. Just as

² The initial course was developed by the US National Jewish Outreach Program and was rebranded by the UJIA. See for example: http://www.ujia.org/jewish_future/informal/lifelong/?disp_feature=nCaWo0

classical Hebrew has clear rules and structures, so my own learning of Torah had led me to see the frameworks and structures of Torah. I had learnt much about this approach to Jewish learning from Rabbi Matis Weinberg whom I have known since 1987 and have studied with intermittently ever since. Eventually he published books of advanced essays employing his approach (Weinberg, 1999a, 1999b, 2000, 2002). I was confident that I could adapt this approach for a beginner student and create a course that would empower them to appreciate and talk Torah.

(v) *Rationale:*

Two points: one on Torah and one on structure:

(a) *Why Torah?*

Living a Jewish life affords regular opportunities for learning many different things. However, it is the Torah that is the central text of Judaism. The weekly cycle of Shabbat Torah reading – the *Parashat HaShavua* – in the Synagogue has meant that the Torah is at the centre of Jewish knowledge and study. It is therefore a natural starting point for empowering people in Jewish study. Teaching people to ‘talk Torah’ can have an immediate effect because of the following:

- **Public Reading:** Synagogue attendance means that Jews experience Torah being read aloud.
- **Dvar Torah (Sermon):** The rabbi’s speech in synagogue invariably quotes Torah as a starting point and this can encourage debate and analysis.
- **Shabbat or family table:** A place where it can be discussed.
- **Story:** The narrative structure of the Torah allows for immediate relevance and meaning to be drawn from it.
- **Community:** The central importance of Torah to Judaism means that knowing more about Torah is something to have in common with other Jews. It is the canonical text of Jewish life.
- **Curricula:** Nearly all Jewish educational institutions (schools, adult education courses, community study programmes etc.) have the study of Torah on their timetables.

(b) *Why the thematic nature of the course?* Many Jews only experience Torah when they hear it read on the Sabbath in the synagogue. The page number is announced, and that is how they find the place. However, they do not really know where they are in the Torah.

For many, Torah is an unstructured hodge-podge of stories and laws that they cannot get a handle on. Thus, to be able to give a Torah talk a person will have to know the *structure* of Torah as well as its content and how prepare a talk. A useful metaphor for this is mountain climbing: the aim of this course is to help people to search for and find footholds in their understanding of Torah to enable them to climb to higher and higher planes of understanding.

(vi) Timetable:

Torah L'Am is a short course designed as a series of classes, with opportunities for reflection and further reading between sessions. The optimum teaching time is in the 12 to 16 hour range. However, a two-day course would not be effective because, although it might yield the same number of hours, it would limit the period between sessions that promotes great growth. Equally, a class once a month would have less impact because of the loss of momentum. The course could be taught over a long period and for much more than a total of 12 to 16 hours and it would be a rich and rewarding experience. Yet most students could not attend so regularly and, because of the tight structure of the Torah L'Am course, absence would make for a loss of continuity and progression. It is therefore preferable to aim for virtually total attendance over a relatively short period. Course evaluations have shown that most students can reliably commit to a course of six or eight evening sessions and devote some time for review and preparation between sessions. The optimum pattern is a two-hour session once a week for a number of weeks. To date, it has been taught in both six and eight weekly sessions.

2. Materials of the project:

(i) Teacher and student materials:

Each student receives a 'Student Study Guide' (100-page A4 ring-bound printed booklet) which also acts as a Practical reference guide for talking Torah once the course is completed. They are also given a handout with a pre-selected Torah text with one classical commentary to use in preparing their Torah talk at the last session of the course. Teachers are trained to teach Torah L'Am through a Teacher's Guide (another 100-page A4 ring-bound printed booklet), audio recordings of a Torah L'Am course actually being taught, and ongoing guidance from an experienced teacher of the course.

(ii) Format:

The Student Study Guide is divided into two parts that parallel the two-part aim of the course:

Part 1: Torah Themes – The entire Torah is analysed seven times from different thematic perspectives. The seven themes are: Framework, Space-Time, Personalities, Commandments, God, Tabernacle & Offerings, and Covenant. Each theme is presented and taught in a seminar format.

Part 2: Talking Torah Steps – A straightforward four-step method for studying any Torah is modeled. The four steps are: Analysis, Commentaries, Development and Presentation. Each step is presented and modeled in a workshop format.

The Teacher's Guide follows the format of the Student Study Guide, explaining and enhancing it.

(iii) Usage directions:

The use of student materials is carefully directed by the teacher. The Student Study Guide contains all the material covered in the course and is laid out in an exact systematic manner. A teacher will teach directly from this guide and complete it at the end of the course.

The two parts of the Student Study Guide are not taught sequentially, they are in fact intentionally interwoven. The emphasis at the beginning of the course is on Torah Themes. Then Talking Torah Steps are introduced, *amongst* the Torah Themes. Eventually, the focus is entirely on Talking Torah. This shift in the 'centre of gravity' is mirrored in a shift of teaching and learning styles—and indeed in the transfer of impetus and ownership from teacher to participant:

- The Torah Themes rely on a relatively heavy weight of explanation from the teacher, partially coloured and shaped by participants' questions. Here, teaching Torah requires clear and concise presentation skills.
- The Talking Torah Steps rely on participants making individual responses to a pre-selected Torah text and ultimately taking charge of their material. Here, teaching requires encouraging and supporting individual participants as they interact with a Torah text and engage in their own process of discovery.

(iv) Progress of students:

Through each of the four Talking Torah Steps the student takes more responsibility for their studies and at the end of the course each student presents a short Torah talk to three or four fellow students.

(v) Assessment methods:

After each of the four Talking Torah Steps the teacher checks the progress of each student. This is done informally at the beginning or end of class. In the final session, teachers 'sit' while each student presents their Torah talk. At the end they give feedback to the students. After the course they give feedback on the quality of the talks to the course coordinator.

(vi) Recommended resources for further study:

The Student Study Guide makes reference to a number of relevant books and the Teacher's Guide contains many more.

3. Coherency of the project:

The project gained coherency over time. Here is a very brief outline of the process:

1998 Working on my own I began to develop Torah L'Am and to produce an incomplete first draft of the Student Study Guide. I then presented a pilot of the course at 'Limmud Conference'³ over four days. The focus was much more on the Torah Themes than on the Talking Torah Steps. The response was very positive and at the end of the course three of the fifty students presented a Torah talk. To be honest, this was a very emotional experience for all concerned as it was clear that this was the first time that the three presenters had ever done such a thing. This spurred me on to seriously develop the course.

1999 A much more complete version of Torah L'Am is taught at Limmud Conference again and also to a number of different groups organised by UJIA Makor. Course evaluation forms were developed and filled out by all participants. Small class sizes (12 to 20) are found to be most successful. The content of the Student Study Guide has changed

³ Anglo-Jewry's premier annual residential Jewish educational event. See www.limmud.org

a number of times by this point. Again, the feedback is very positive and by now nearly all students are giving a Torah talk at the end of the course.

2000 I invite two experienced TAJE teachers (Maureen Kendler and Angela Gluck Wood) to watch me teach the course. After this we go through the Student Study Guide page by page and many changes are made. The focus moves much more to the Talking Torah Steps which are made much simpler and clearer. These teachers teach the course a number of times in different contexts and give more comments on the structuring of Torah L'Am.

2001 A third teacher (Adam Taub) is enlisted to teach the course. All four teachers (including myself) teach the course a number of times. We come together to discuss a final version of the course. Up until now the Student Study Guide was photocopied and hand bound. Now production on a final printed version begins.

2002 The final version is produced. UJIA Makor set up a formal system for Jewish groups and organisations to book the course. I teach ten new TAJE teachers how to teach the course. I start work starts on a written Teacher's Guide.

2002-4 I am on a two year Sabbatical in Israel. The Teacher's Guide is finished and given to Angela Gluck Wood to edit. The course is taught by five of the ten teachers in various contexts.

2005 Over 800 people have now attended the course which has gone through multiple trials and changes. What began as a 'one man band' has expanded into a faculty. The curriculum no longer suffers from the idiosyncrasies of one person and has benefited from the input of many experienced teachers in the repeated piloting of the course.

4. Implementation of the project:

(i) Usability of materials:

The materials are very readable and practical. The texts succinctly sum up key points and the many tables present information in an easy-to-read format. At first students find the

Student Study Guide ominously full but as the course progresses they begin to see how it works and appreciate the quantity and quality of the material it contains.

(ii) Knowledge vs. skills:

The two parts of Torah L'Am – the Torah Themes and the Talking Torah Steps – neatly parallel knowledge and skills. The key to the course has been the interplay between the two. By constantly moving between them different kinds of learning are experienced in tandem. Students then understand the support that each one gives to the other.

(iii) Constraints:

One constraint is the length of the course. Further Torah Themes could be taught ad infinitum. Also, modelling the Talking Torah Steps could be done repeatedly to greatly enhance the ability of the students to talk Torah. Another constraint is the ability to find teachers who have the challenging combination of good Torah knowledge coupled with skill of empowering adults. A third constraint is the marketing of the course to Jewish communities. Torah L'Am does not fit into the normal kinds of programmes they experience and it takes time to explain the nature of the course.

(iv) Critical moments:

There are two critical moments for teachers and students in Torah L'Am:

(a) Learning the last section of the first Torah Theme (Framework) – This involves a whole new way of looking at the structure of Torah that is different from the standard chapters. It makes the students rethink their whole view of Torah. This was purposely inserted early in the course to 'wow' the students and get them hooked onto this course.

(b) The experience of giving and hearing Torah Talks at the end of the course – This is invariably a powerful experience for the talkers and listeners. The sense of achievement over the course is palpable and is an opportunity for the teacher to set the stage for further learning. The course at this point is a realisation of empowerment.

5. Assessment of the project:

(i) Testing/evaluation:

Every student on every Torah L'Am course fills out an evaluation form and the last session of each course also allows time for verbal feedback. Teachers too give verbal

evaluations to course coordinators. The non-qualification based nature of TAJE precludes the formal testing of Torah L'Am students. Following is a sample evaluation summary.

Introductory remarks

This evaluation was compiled by UJIA Makor on March 2002. The course was for graduates of the UK Florence Melton Adult Mini-School. It ran from mid-January to February 2002 at Balfour House, North Finchley, London. The programme was a course of six sessions, two hours each, with a short break in-between. There were two separate groups making a total 26 students. There was an average absence rate of two each week. One group was taught by Angela Wood and the other by Maureen Kendler. *Every* student gave a short 'Torah talk' during the final class. There were two separate parallel groups studying the course, making a total 26 students. Twenty of the students filled in evaluation forms at the end of the course. The evaluation forms requested both quantitative and qualitative responses. Below is a summary of the evaluations that were handed in.

1. Did you enjoy the course?

VERY MUCH: 95%, YES: 5%, NO: 0%, NOT AT ALL: 0%.

A selection of the comments written:

"I couldn't believe that we would study the whole Torah eight times in six weeks – but we did!"

"It was a great class – varied and participatory."

"Really enjoyed the clear structure – liked the balance between content and process of analysis."

"Finally a toolkit with which to unpick Torah. Excellent high-level synthesis and an interesting methodology by which to structure the texts."

"Excellent teacher – vital to have a good teacher or else the course will fail."

"I think the course would be better as an eight week course."

"Would have liked greater time for theme 2."

2. Do you now feel able to 'talk Torah'

VERY MUCH: 5%, YES: 75%, NO: 10%, NOT AT ALL: 0%.

A selection of the comments written:

"Excellent – both the information necessary to support a Dvar Torah and the method of preparing and delivering it."

"This is certainly something I can do now as a result of participating in this course."

"This is just the beginning."

“It’s a start. But I do feel that Torah has become more accessible, de-mystified and in fact a terribly rewarding exercise.”

“I’m not sure how much has actually ‘stuck’, so although I know more than I knew at the beginning there is still a lot more to learn.”

3. Do you now feel more encouraged and inspired to want to ‘talk Torah’?

VERY MUCH: 25%, YES: 70%, NO: 5%, NOT AT ALL: 0%.

A selection of the comments written:

“I feel better equipped to tackle Jewish events which need or would benefit from explanation, and so as a result, I feel more encouraged, more confident.”

“Certainly would feel more comfortable doing it – not sure if I am inspired enough to do weekly! But it will definitely enable me to gain a better understanding of the sidrot on Shabbat.”

“I’m more aware of the intellectual rigours required and therefore very wary. However, I feel more at home with the texts and not so scared.”

“I want to share what I’ve learned, and will be trying to encourage people from my congregation to ‘talk Torah’ with me.”

4. What are the most effective parts of the course?

A selection of the comments written:

“The step-by-step session for preparing the talk on a week-by-week basis.”

“The tables are brilliant and provide short cuts to many aspects of the Torah. They cover so much so succinctly and cut out the need to search through pages of text.”

“I liked the ‘homepage’ concept and the fact it was read aloud; and the incredible work that has gone into the material, the presentation of the material, the methodology and the delivery is outstanding. Thank you very very much.”

“Good idea to have homework –helped to consolidate my learning and increased my commitment to the course.”

“Teaching and teachers! Approachable and able to relate contents manual so that it was understandable.”

5. What are the weakest parts? How could they be improved?

A selection of the comments written:

“By concentrating on Rashi only it seemed to be too superficial.”

“Alternative commentators should be included in addition to Rashi.”

“Perhaps more time spent in chavruta.”

“Shortness of time. Amount of information to assimilate. It would have helped to have time to discuss the preparation of the dvar Torah with another student, one to one.”

“More time to use the library, more time with teacher to go over homework and discuss homework with other students, more time with teacher on other texts showing us how to do Torah talk.”

“The key eight questions for any Torah text are quite difficult to use. I found it easier to ask my own questions and to look more generally for patterns within the text.”

“Moadim, especially table 7.4.”

“I don’t think I learnt much about Personalities – too much and didn’t do any detail.”

6. Any other comments?

A selection of the comments written:

“Very well structured and put together in an easy-to-use way.”

“It’s been a very exciting six week voyage of discovery. I felt hampered by my own lack of Hebrew although this did not preclude me actively studying. ...It definitely helped to teach me how to study.”

“There were tough weeks but only because there was always a shortage of time. Why 6 weeks – which is in effect 5 – why not 8 or 10 enabling one session per night on one topic or theme.”

“After the first session I was ready to quit – the thought of presenting a dvar Torah was so intimidating – and in 6 weeks! However, having done it, I actually enjoyed the preparation and felt the time (over 6 hours) well spent.”

“There was a tendency to over-emphasise the difficulties that the course posed to the students – we sometimes spent 15 minutes going over this point (e.g. the post-commentator homework). This ended up exciting rather than allaying fears, as well as eating into valuable learning time. Please don’t be tempted to remove the challenging content – it is very important to stretch us!”

“The ‘God’ slot – didn’t like how it was so one-sided i.e. the non-Maimonidean ‘God like a person’ rather than the other end of the spectrum: ‘God as a distant deity’. People wanted to talk a lot more about it; is the session about God in the Torah or about our relationship with God?”

“I feel left a bit up in the air now at the end. I would have liked to hear the other talks, especially on the same passage. I think also I need affirmation that I was on the right track. It would have been useful to have had one to one time (like a tutorial).”

“When will we get the chance to deliver another Torah talk?”

(ii) Other evaluators:

UJIA Makor is currently researching the lasting effects of Torah L’Am on students from the last five years. The aim is to see if there is a marked difference in their involvement in Talking torah since attending the course.

Below are the responses of Maureen Kendler – a seasoned teacher and trainer of other teachers for the Torah L’Am curriculum – to five questions which were posed to her about her experiences and involvement with Torah L’Am.⁴

QUESTION 1: How did you get involved in Torah L’Am?

Raphael Zarum asked me to become involved with Torah L’Am after the curriculum had been initially written and was at the point of piloting. Together with another teacher we were to be the ‘teacher pilots’. Raphael’s overriding concern was whether this curriculum could be taught by someone other than himself. He was aware that this was very much ‘his’ way of looking at the Torah study world and my methods and approach would be different. Teaching Torah L’Am is for me like putting Raphael’s ‘glasses’ on. These are not my glasses but it has been a great discipline wearing them and I feel I have made the course my own. The other teachers – from very different religious perspectives, knowledge and affiliations – would echo this. I was able to contribute to the Student Study Guide by offering the views of an experienced teacher whose emphasis was less on the ‘body of knowledge’ within Torah L’Am but more on the empowerment and enthusing aspects of delivering it. Also having been taught the course by Raphael I was aware of how I had struggled with certain sections of the course so could present an alternative student’s perspective.

QUESTION 2: What are the underlying principles and values of the curriculum?

The underlying values and principles are those I share. Torah should be accessible to all Jews – it was meant to be ‘understood’, studied and debated, and although it carries ‘eternal’ status, it should be talked about and expounded by anyone who wants to, as opposed to being only the elitist property of very learned and holy people. This is not to say that a position of ignorance is a good thing, or indeed that a relativist position is being promoted. But there are ways in for anyone and everyone to learn and relate Torah to their own lives, and to enter into the ‘Torah conversation’ that has been going on for thousands of years. Involvement and empowerment are the key. Having the confidence to talk about a portion of Torah gives Jews ownership and connection to Torah and Torah L’Am is one way of achieving this.

Often Torah study is haphazard and it is also quite possible to have an in-depth and advanced knowledge of aspects of Torah study but having acquired this in a random way. The structured approach is crucial here, by grounding the Torah in a real, actual structure of time, place and using a thematic approach, the students can approach any passage methodically.

⁴ These unedited responses were sent in an email on 17.8.05.

QUESTION 3: What do you think are the strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum?

Strengths of curriculum: manageable chunks of learning weekly, an incremental sense of learning, logical building blocks, the ‘newness’ of the idea of approaching Torah – so it is easy as a teacher to generate enthusiasm and excitement – the aim of giving the talk on the final week so there is a concrete but achievable goal. Several sections on time/space, personalities tend to be ‘fresh’ approaches and are very intriguing for most participants. The final goal is a shared experience so group bonds well both over the learning and delivering of the talk – groups are supportive of each others’ efforts. The short course concept generates focus and concentration and sense of purposeful learning. There is enough space for questions but not for endless discussion – at times a vice, more often a virtue. The course ends on a ‘high’, with many participants determined to study more. The small section on strategies for delivering a successful talk is a real bonus. Reducing of ‘black hole panic’ when confronted with a section of Torah is the significant success i.e. how students make sense of an unknown passage by not knowing what comes before and after it.

Weaknesses of the curriculum: if students don’t commit to all sessions it is hard for them to catch up and inevitably as this is an evening class or similar format group can disintegrate and success of course is quite dependent on a tight, dynamic group. One section of course – the commentary section – is significantly more difficult than the rest and can weaken confidence of group and can be a bit of a slog. The course is rigorous and although marketed as suitable for everyone, it is definitely easier for more intelligent/experienced learners. The course can be a victim of its own success: participants may well want to develop their skills at giving Torah talks - but where? Communities do not always provide encouragement for lay involvement! The course is not skills-based and the use of Hebrew and using supplementary texts are often big hurdles which Torah L’Am does not address.

QUESTION 4: What is your critique of the development and implementation of the Torah L’Am curriculum?

The implementation of the programme needs someone to sell, promote and encourage it. That is now in place at the UJIA, a central Jewish organisation. Training teachers in each section of the community is a challenge. It is necessary to have inspired and inspiring teachers who are knowledgeable, empowering and open-minded. There are not many about.

Many courses available in the community have an agenda of some sort, or are perceived as having hidden strings attached in terms of ‘changing’ peoples’ religious affiliations – Torah L’Am does not do this. Also overcoming fears that this is ‘not for them’ – there is resistance to education generally across the community. Graduates of the course are the best advertisement and it would be wonderful if people in every section of the community had experienced Torah L’Am, and that it would be entrenched in adult education programmes.

QUESTION 5: What have been the practical implications of developing and introducing such a curriculum?

The practical implications involve personnel. The course is now owned by the UJIA and together with a project manager part of our job involves the promotion and development of this. I am in the process of putting together a final handbook for teachers to accompany the course. Training teachers is labour-intensive but a good investment in the community.

(iii) Comparison with similar projects:

Like the Hebrew Reading Crash Course, Torah L'Am is an empowerment course. There are few courses like Torah L'Am that combine a concentrated amount of Jewish knowledge with training for the particular skill of talking Torah.

(iv) Possible improvements:

The materials are neat and well ordered but would benefit from professional layout and publishing. Directions for further study are not adequate. More research needs to be done on the long term effects of the course. New teachers require even more support and monitoring than was initially expected.

(v) Successes:

Each time the course is run it breeds the launch of another. Both students and teachers appreciate and value the course and are happy to recommend it to others. The quality of the Torah talks at the end of each course are invariably impressive given the starting points of the students. Torah L'Am has been run in a wide range of Jewish community contexts which include: traditional orthodox synagogue education programmes; non-orthodox (masorati & reform) synagogue education programmes; Jewish youth movement leaders; lay leaders of Jewish communal organisations; graduates of the Florence Melton adult mini-school; yeshivas in Jerusalem; and Jewish high school teachers and Rabbis in New York and Seattle. The fact that the course has been well-received in all these contexts is a sign of success.

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