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Prayer in Jewish community high schools: Generation Y Jews in an era of unlimited choices

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PRAYER IN JEWISH COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOLS: GENERATION Y
JEWS IN AN ERA OF UNLIMITED CHOICES

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the

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ABSTRACT

Prayer in Jewish Community High Schools: Generation Y Jews in an Era of Unlimited Choices

by

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The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine and analyze *tefilla* (prayer) programs in three Jewish community high schools, as well as professional leadership practices in these schools as they related to prayer. The questions that guided this research were:

- What does prayer education and practice look like in Jewish community high schools?
- How is prayer education and practice perceived by key constituencies in Jewish community high schools?
- How do educators and students in Jewish community high schools describe authentic prayer?

Site observations, interviews with students, faculty, and administration, as well as data collected from sources such as school websites and marketing materials were used to create narrative portraits of the schools' *tefilla* programs and a cross-case analysis of the programs using the portraiture methodology of Sarah Lawrence-Lightfoot. Marshall and Rossman's seven phases for analytical procedures guided the research analysis, and Barry Chazan's philosophy of Informal Jewish Education was used as an interpretive framework for analyzing the case studies. The research infers implications for Jewish

philanthropic organizations, Jewish teacher training programs, researchers, and site-based educational leadership interested in prayer improvement efforts in Jewish community high schools.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-----|
| ABSTRACT | iii |
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS..... | v |
| CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION..... | 1 |
| Background | 2 |
| Statement of the Problem | 4 |
| Purpose of the Study | 5 |
| Research Questions | 6 |
| Summary of Methodology | 6 |
| Significance of the Study | 7 |
| Definition of Terms..... | 7 |
| Organization of the Study..... | 13 |
| CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE..... | 15 |
| Trends in American Spirituality..... | 15 |
| Trends in American Judaism..... | 20 |
| Independent Prayer Groups..... | 25 |
| Youth Empowerment | 26 |
| Alternative Prayer Practices | 26 |
| Trends in Jewish Education..... | 27 |
| Jewish Educational Leadership | 29 |
| Jewish Prayer Education | 32 |
| Informal Jewish Education..... | 40 |
| Summary | 45 |
| CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY | 46 |
| Conceptual Frameworks..... | 46 |
| Research Paradigms | 47 |
| Qualitative Design..... | 48 |
| Participant and Site Selection..... | 51 |
| Data Collection..... | 53 |
| Data Analysis | 54 |
| Portraiture Methodology | 55 |
| Goodness Defined | 60 |
| Trustworthiness | 61 |
| Limitations | 63 |
| Delimitations | 64 |
| Role of the Researcher | 64 |
| Summary | 70 |
| CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS OF THE STUDY: NARRATIVE PORTRAITS | 71 |
| New Jewish Community High School: An Abstract Expressionist Painting..... | 73 |
| Running after Yonatan Rosner, Director of Tefilla..... | 74 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| Description of the Tefilla Kehilla Institute..... | 75 |
| Genesis of TKI | 79 |
| All Who Are Hungry, Come and Eat | 82 |
| Empowerment | 86 |
| Community | 94 |
| Educationally-sound Planning..... | 103 |
| Leadership | 105 |
| The Philosophy Behind TKI | 114 |
| Comparing TKI Tefilla to the Previous Tefilla Model..... | 128 |
| Summary | 133 |
| Hebrew High School: A Mosaic Mural..... | 134 |
| The Overall Mural | 137 |
| Ninth Grade Mosaic Tiles | 139 |
| Tenth and Eleventh Grade Mosaic Tiles | 146 |
| Searching for the Traditional Tefilla Mosaic Tiles | 149 |
| Contrasting Colors in the Mosaic..... | 151 |
| Pluralism and Authenticity..... | 165 |
| Pick a Tile, Any Tile... .. | 178 |
| Environmental Issues: Camp Versus School..... | 183 |
| The Evolving Artistic Process..... | 186 |
| Summary | 189 |
| Jewish Academy: A Minimalist Architectural Structure | 189 |
| Overview of Tefilla Program | 191 |
| The Main Community Tefilla Service..... | 193 |
| Traditional Minyan..... | 196 |
| Goals of Jewish Academy's Tefilla Program..... | 197 |
| Anyone Got the Time? | 201 |
| Calling All Campers..... | 203 |
| Choice Model: Empowering Students..... | 209 |
| Pluralism and Authenticity..... | 213 |
| Summary | 221 |
| CHAPTER 5 FINDINGS OF THE STUDY: CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS | 222 |
| Analyzing the Three Cases through Chazan's Philosophy of Informal Jewish Education..... | 223 |
| Student-centered..... | 223 |
| Experiential | 226 |
| Sound Pedagogy and Curriculum..... | 233 |
| Interactive Process and Group Experience..... | 234 |
| All-encompassing Culture..... | 238 |
| Engaging..... | 241 |
| Holistic Leadership..... | 243 |
| Summary | 248 |
| CHAPTER 6 IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS | 249 |
| Review of Methodology | 250 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| Critique of Methodology | 253 |
| Summary of Findings and Understandings | 254 |
| Research Question #1: What does prayer education and practice look like in Jewish community high schools? | 254 |
| Research Question #2: How is prayer education and practice perceived by key constituencies in Jewish community high schools? | 258 |
| Research Question #3: How do educators and students in Jewish community high schools describe authentic prayer? | 260 |
| Implications for Practice and Future Research..... | 263 |
| Conclusions | 268 |
| APPENDIX A LETTER OF AUTHORIZATION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT FACILITY | 270 |
| APPENDIX B LETTER TO HEADS OF SCHOOL | 271 |
| APPENDIX C LETTER TO FACULTY | 272 |
| APPENDIX D LETTER TO PARENTS..... | 273 |
| APPENDIX E ADULT INFORMED CONSENT FORM..... | 274 |
| APPENDIX F PARENT INFORMED CONSENT FORM | 276 |
| APPENDIX G MINOR ASSENT FORM..... | 278 |
| APPENDIX H SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS (FACULTY) .. | 280 |
| APPENDIX I SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS (STUDENTS) .. | 281 |
| REFERENCES | 282 |
| VITA..... | 288 |

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

How does an educational leader in a Jewish community school inspire a teenager who calls herself a “hetero, eco-feminist, vegan, Jewish, history major” to engage spiritually with Judaism? What about a teenage boy who refers to himself as a “Grande Soy Vanilla Latte with Cinnamon, No Foam Jew”? These are real terms found in the literature (Greenberg, 2006, p. 1; Sales & Saxe, 2006, p. 4), and are used by contemporary young Jews in America to define themselves. These expressions suggest that young American Jews are identifying themselves as postmodern, which means that their “identity is not unitary or essential, it is fluid or shifting, fed by multiple sources and taking multiple forms” (Kumar, 1997, p. 98).

America in general, including its Jewish community, is living in a postmodern age where young people are attracted to religion by being treated as a customer or consumer. The traditional approach of a top-down religious authority may not attract many people in this free-market, individualistic social and religious landscape of America. For example, requiring all Jewish community high school students to pray the same way in a traditional synagogue service may be as unappealing as going to a coffee shop and finding only black coffee being served. An externally-imposed approach to Judaism likely will not speak to most of the young Jews that populate Jewish community schools today; therefore, leaders of Jewish schools risk losing the next generation of Jewish communal leaders if they do not run their schools accordingly. This research study aimed to start that conversation about how Jewish community educators and leaders can engagingly teach Jewish spirituality, especially prayer, to their high school students.

Background

Just about anywhere in the country, one can see firsthand the business of religion. Fly to Houston, Texas to be one of 43,500 people (in addition to 7 million television viewers) who pack the stadium to hear Joel Osteen preach his inspirational messages. Or travel to Virginia to take a class with any of the 62,000 residential and online students at Jerry Falwell's Liberty University. Turn on the radio: religious radio stations outnumber classical, hip-hop, R & B, and soul and jazz stations combined. At bookstores, the Bible continues to be the bestselling book of all time, year in and year out, and the United Methodist Publishing House is one of the largest publishing houses in the world. For recreation, one can attend a biblically-themed miniature golf course in Cave City, Kentucky, visit one of several religious theme parks across the country, or log on to an evangelical web site called Christian Nymphos, a guide to Christianity's views on moral marriage and sexuality. Wherever one looks, religious institutions are reaching out to connect to the youth and the unaffiliated.

Willow Creek Community Church in South Barrington, Illinois is a good example of this trend. Willow Creek has food courts, basketball courts, cafes, video screens, and parking for 3,850 cars, yet it is not easy to locate crosses or altars. The church boasts two MBAs, a consulting arm, a seven-step strategy, a set of 10 core values, and a management team. In many ways, those in the business of religion have learned how to be capitalists in the purist way possible: they have put the customer first and have learned how to play the free market where one has to sell a product (religion) to a consumer confronted with many choices.

How did Willow Creek come to be what it is today? Its founder, Bill Hybels, conducted a survey of Chicagoans asking why they did not come to church. Based on the responses, he then adapted his church to fit the people's needs. He removed overtly religious images, made services more contemporary and made the church user-friendly, including making sure that the parking lot was well organized like one would find at a shopping mall. The end result proved, "All this emphasis on customer service is producing a predictable result: growth" (Micklethwait & Wooldridge, 2009, p. 185).

In addition to borrowing from the techniques and structure of the corporate world, technology is another key method that religious entities are using to increase their ranks. Willow Creek, for example, has four video-editing suites. The Fellowship Church in Grapevine, Texas, employs a chief technology officer and spends \$4.5 million per year on technology. Bishop T. D. Jakes's Potter's House reaches 260 prisons each week via satellite. Joel Osteen's church raises \$1 million per week largely due to its television and internet ministry that reaches over 7 million people a week.

One major criticism of all this growth is that the message has been watered down in the process. This is a common fear I hear from my own colleagues. After all, if a sermon is broadcast to millions of people or a book is written for millions of people, such a broad approach may leave the end message bland and sanitized. While this critique needs to be taken seriously, it appears to not be the case. For example, according to the website of the biggest megachurch in the world, Lakewood declares that "the entire Bible is inspired by God, without error" (Lakewood Church, 2010). That does not sound like a watered down message.

The point of the marketing approach described previously is to attract the younger generations to make them invest in religion. When young people are pulled in so many directions (for example when religious claims about the origins of life come into conflict with political claims about self-determination and the rights of women), how are they going to decide? Should they make their decision based upon an external decree from a religious authority or based upon their own intrinsic decision-making and identity they have forged?

With these questions in mind, one can begin to see the challenges that face religious and educational leaders who are in the business of spiritually engaging young people in prayer today in a postmodern world, and who endeavor to bridge the generation gap between religious leaders and a younger generation. In particular, leaders are challenged to guide their students from the simplistic “Burger King approach” to prayer—have it your way—to a deeper, more engaging, joyous, intrinsically-motivated, and authentic encounter with their faith.

Statement of the Problem

Traditionally, one of the key aspects of Jewish schooling has been prayer education and prayer services. In most Jewish community day schools today, though, there are a great variety of interpretations as to what Jewish prayer actually means, and therefore great divergence in how schools teach and practice prayer. In recent years, at community Jewish high schools, the phenomenon of non-traditional prayer programs has emerged, such as those focusing on meditation, yoga, discussion, and learning. In fact, many of the students I observed in my research did not have any encounter with traditional, synagogue-based, prayer book-based experiences at all. This emphasis on

alternative approaches to prayer is one way that Jewish community schools have been trying to engage Generation Y postmodern students who are not otherwise intrinsically motivated to pray. The goal for such schools is to connect these students with the process of Jewish spiritual development while working within a pluralistic, non-denominational framework.

To date, these alternative prayer programs in Jewish community high schools have not been formally documented or evaluated. One of the most basic issues for this developing phenomenon was to describe and understand these programs: What are they, and how are they succeeding (or not)? How do they function? Why might they be succeeding (or not)? Documenting and explaining these alternative prayer programs in Jewish community schools may provide valuable research that informs the decisions of Jewish philanthropic organizations, Jewish teacher training programs, researchers, and site-based leadership interested in prayer improvement efforts.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe and analyze prayer programs in Jewish community high schools, as well as professional leadership practices related to prayer in these schools. In particular, I documented and explored alternative approaches to prayer and spirituality and the impact these approaches had on students. The research not only described the phenomenon of alternative prayer programs in Jewish community schools, but analyzed why they exist, and inferred implications for Jewish educational leaders and future research.

Research Questions

In order to achieve the purpose of the study, the following questions guided the study:

- What does prayer education and practice look like in Jewish community high schools?
- How is prayer education and practice perceived by key constituencies in Jewish community high schools?
- How do educators and students in Jewish community high schools describe authentic prayer?

Summary of Methodology

The research employed a qualitative multiple case study designed to examine three Jewish community high schools in the Western United States with non-traditional prayer programs. I used multiple methods of data collection, including interviews, focus groups, direct observation, and document analysis to document and analyze prayer programs in these three Jewish community high schools.

The various stakeholders were asked to describe their programs in their own words, and these narratives were used to develop typologies of the programs, to describe each program in rich detail, and to guide the construction of an explanatory model articulating why these programs might be beneficial to Generation Y, postmodern Jews in Jewish community high schools. The study examined the general trends in American religion and religious education with regards to the experiences of students and prayer leaders in Jewish community high schools.

The research analysis was guided by Marshall and Rossman's seven phases for analytical procedures, which include "(1) organizing the data, (2) immersion in the data, (3) generating categories and themes, (4) coding the data, (5) offering interpretations through analytic memoirs, (6) searching for alternative understandings, and (7) writing the report or other format for presenting the study" (Marshall and Rossman, 2011, p. 209).

Significance of the Study

The research in this dissertation, which described and evaluated the successes of alternative prayer programs in Jewish community high schools, was one avenue for showing the existing Jewish leadership what the problems were in school prayer programs and how some schools were trying to resolve them in non-traditional ways. This research study aimed to start a conversation about how Jewish community educators, leaders, and researchers can contribute to an engaging Jewish spirituality, especially prayer, with Jewish community high school students.

Definition of Terms

Many of the following terms are commonly used in society but they hardly have standard, accepted meanings. Others are Hebrew or Yiddish words with which many readers may not be familiar. As such, it is essential to define how I understand and use these terms in my research. I have provided the following glossary of the most common, repeated Hebrew and Yiddish words that appear in this dissertation. I did not include in this glossary many of the foreign words which are used only one time, and are translated in-text. I have formulated my own understandings of these terms, unless otherwise noted.

Amidah: The main petitional prayer in Judaism.

Beit Midrash, or *Beit Keneset*: Synagogue, often used also as a place to study Jewish texts.

Conservative Judaism: Conservative Judaism maintains that the ideas in the Torah come from God, but were transmitted by humans and contain a human component. Conservative Judaism generally accepts the binding nature of Jewish Law, but believes that the Law can adapt, absorbing aspects of the predominant culture while remaining true to Judaism's values.

Davar Torah: A sermon on the Torah, which typically combines lessons from the Torah that can be applied to everyday life.

Daven: Yiddish term for praying.

Davener: Yiddish for someone who prays.

Generation Y: This is the population of students currently in high schools who are the focus of my study. There is no consensus of when Generation Y was born, but it ranges from the mid 1970's until the 2000's (Wilson & Gerber, 2008).

Regardless, this term refers to the postmodern high school population I studied.

Halacha: Hebrew for Jewish Law.

Jewish: As the saying goes, "Two Jews, three opinions." The classic definition of being Jewish is that one either has a Jewish mother, or converts to Judaism. In today's postmodern world, I do not use that definition in my research. The question of "Who is a Jew" has been a debate that will not soon be resolved. For purposes of my research, anyone who self-identified as Jewish was considered Jewish.

Jewish Community School: There are many variations of Jewish schools, including Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, and secular Hebrew charter schools. In this

research, I only studied Jewish community schools, which are non-denominational, independent Jewish schools that teach all Jews regardless of affiliation, and who teach Judaism in a pluralistic manner, without preference for or exclusion of a particular denomination.

Kabbalat Shabbat: The traditional Friday night prayer service which ushers in the Jewish Sabbath.

Kavanah: Colloquially, spontaneous expressions of prayer. In contrast to *keva*.

Kehillah: Hebrew for community.

Keva: Colloquially, fixed forms of prayer, for example the words a person reads from a prayer book. In contrast to *kavanah*.

Kipah: Head covering.

Matbaya Tefilla: The full, unabridged text of the prayer service.

Mechitza: A divider between men and women during prayer. Colloquially, a “mechitza minyan” refers to a traditional or Orthodox prayer service utilizing a mechitza.

Minyan: A prayer quorum of ten or more people that allows public prayer services to take place. If there is less than a minyan, prayer needs to be conducted individually and certain major parts of the service cannot be held. Colloquially, Jewish schools sometimes use this term to refer to *any* type of tefilla group (e.g. “discussion minyan”).

Mitzvah: A commandment from God. Plural: *mitzvot*.

Naaseh v’Nishmah: Colloquially, doing something on faith before understanding it.

Nishmah v’Naaseh: Colloquially, understanding something before doing it.

Orthodox Judaism: Orthodox Jews believe that God gave Moses the whole Torah

(written and oral) at Mount Sinai. Orthodox Jews believe that the Torah contains 613 commandments that are binding upon all Jews. Modern Orthodox Jews strictly observe Jewish Law, but still integrate into modern society. Ultra-Orthodox Jews, which includes Chasidic Jews, strictly observe Jewish laws and do not integrate into modern society by dressing distinctively and living separately.

Passover: The Jewish holiday celebrating the Israelites' Exodus from Egyptian slavery.

Prayer: The Hebrew word for prayer is tefilla, which will be used frequently in this study. Typically when one refers to “prayer” in Jewish schools, one thinks of using a siddur, being in a prayer space such as a synagogue, and using the traditional prayer structures such as the morning service known as *Shacharit*, reading from the Torah, reciting the declaration of faith in God known as the *Shma*, and reciting the main petitional prayer, the Amidah. Tefilla is often conducted in a minyan, a prayer quorum of ten Jews. In my research, this was one conception of prayer. I also included non-traditional means of connecting spiritually in my definition of prayer, such as meditation, yoga, and discussion and learning groups. All of these I categorized as prayer, which I defined as a deliberate, voluntary practice seeking a connection to something larger than oneself, which may or may not be God.

Pluralism: In my research, I used the words pluralism and pluralistic to refer to a philosophy that argues there is no one single authoritative truth and that one objective reality may be interpreted in different but equally valid ways. This differs from relativism in that one can hold that one's beliefs reflect the truest

interpretation of Judaism (for example) and at the same time respectfully recognize that all Jews do not hold this position. In terms of Judaism, a pluralist would argue that Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox Jews are equally valid members of the overall Jewish community. One Jew might disagree or argue with the practice of another, but that Jew would not argue that the other's practice is objectively wrong.

Pluralistic Jewish School: Synonymous with Jewish Community School.

Postmodernism: Personal identity prior to the Enlightenment (“pre-modernism”) was largely based upon monolithic allegiance to a King, Queen, Pope, Lord, or some other authority. In other words, there was only one truth. Post-Enlightenment identity formulation (Modernism) was largely pluralistic, and marked by a variety of more rational choices in identity; there were multiple objective truths. The hallmark of Postmodernism is the rejection of any objective truths. It rejects sharp distinctions in personal identity (“Jewish,” “American,” “female”). It asks, Do we really know who we are? Personal identity is no longer a given, but an open question (Kumar, 1997, p. 98).

Reconstructionist Judaism: Reconstructionists believe that Judaism is an “evolving religious civilization.” In one way, it is more liberal than Reform Judaism—the movement does not believe in a personified deity that is active in history and does not believe that God chose the Jewish people. In another way, Reconstructionist Judaism is less liberal than Reform Judaism—Reconstructionists may observe Jewish Law, not because it is a binding Law from God, but because it is a valuable cultural remnant.

Reform Judaism: Reform Judaism believes that the Torah was written by different human sources, rather than by God, and then later combined. While Reform Judaism does not accept the binding nature of Jewish Law, the movement does retain much of the values and ethics of Judaism as well as some of the practices and culture.

Religion: In my research, I used Geertz's formulation of religion as "a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic" (Geertz, 1973, p. 90).

Rosh Hashanah: Jewish holiday, the Jewish New Year.

Seder: The interactive home-based Passover service that recounts the story of the Exodus from Egypt using symbolic foods.

Shacharit: The name of the Jewish daily morning prayer service.

Shabbat: The Jewish Sabbath, celebrated Friday night through Saturday night.

Shabbaton: Colloquially, a Jewish weekend retreat on Shabbat, which typically is full of engaging camp-style events such as singing, lots of food, and fun community-building activities. Plural: *shabbatonim*.

Shma: The central credo in Judaism and in prayer services: "Listen, Israel, the Lord is our God, God is one."

Shul: Yiddish for synagogue.

Siddur: Prayer book.

Spiritual: This term often arose in my research, and needs to be defined distinctly from

the term religious. While religious refers to a more public realm of membership in established religious institutions and formal rituals and doctrines, spiritual refers to a more private realm of thought and experience, often independent of anything institutional.

Tefilla: See “prayer” in this glossary.

Yom Kippur: Jewish holiday, fast day, the Day of Atonement.

Organization of the Study

The next chapter presents a review of related literature, including a broad scope of postmodern trends in American spirituality in general, a review of the literature on postmodern trends in American Judaism, the literature and data on Jewish education, including informal Jewish education and Jewish prayer education, and a review of organizational and leadership frameworks that impact Jewish schools.

An overview of the study’s research design, conceptual and methodological framework, participants, methods of data collection and analysis, and procedures for constructing the narrative portraits are presented in chapter three.

Chapter four describes the tefilla programs at three community Jewish high schools using the narrative portraiture methodology of Sarah Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997). In the cross-case analysis in chapter five, I extract the common themes I found in the three case studies presented in chapter four, and using those themes I suggest the elements of a good tefilla program for Jewish pluralistic high schools. The interpretive framework for the cross-case analysis in chapter five is Barry Chazan’s philosophy of Informal Jewish Education (2003).

The study concludes with chapter six, which begins with a review of the design of the study followed by a summary of my research questions, and findings relating to those questions. Finally, I infer implications for Jewish educational leaders and future research.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

To effectively examine the topic of prayer in Jewish community schools, the discussion must be contextualized within a review of relevant research. This chapter begins with a broad scope of postmodern trends in American spirituality in general and funnels into a review of the literature on postmodern trends in American Judaism. Narrowing even further, it examines the literature and data on Jewish education, including informal Jewish education. It then explores what is known about prayer in Jewish schools, as this is the indicator of the postmodern trend in American spirituality which was the focus of my study. This chapter also includes a review of organizational and leadership frameworks that impact Jewish schools.

Trends in American Spirituality

“‘I’m spiritual but not religious.’ It’s a trendy phrase people often use to describe their belief that they don’t need organized religion to live a life of faith” (Blake, 2010, p. 1). This is how an article on recent trends in religion begins on cnn.com. The phrase is now so ubiquitous that it has its own acronym (“I’m SBNR”) and a Facebook page.

This trend towards spiritual affiliation, as opposed to religious affiliation, is reflected in recent surveys. According to the 2009 American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS), Christianity is trending downward in America with the overall number of those claiming no religious affiliation (dubbed as “nones”) earning the highest percentage, 15%, ever recorded by the ARIS. In addition, the number of people identifying with new religious movements such as Wicca and with agnosticism and atheism are also growing. The survey data revealed that no church in America reported

any numerical growth in 2008 and only the Catholic Church (by virtue of immigration) was able to maintain similar numbers from the previous years. Baptists, the second largest Christian group in America, were down to 15.8% from 19.3% of those surveyed in 1990. The decline also is apparent in mainline Protestant churches such as Methodists, Lutherans, Presbyterians, Episcopalians and the United Church of Christ, which is shrinking faster than any other group. Since 1990, the only group that has shown any growth is the Evangelicals. Overall though, America is moving away from organized religion (Kosmin & Keysar, 2009). These trends are good examples of postmodern religion in America. According to R. Albert Mohler, Jr., president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary,

A remarkable culture-shift has taken place around us. The most basic contours of American culture have been radically altered. The so-called Judeo-Christian consensus of the last millennium has given way to a postmodern, post-Christian, post-Western cultural crisis which threatens the very heart of our culture.

(Meacham, 2009, p. 3)

Meacham posits that the Catholic Church's failure to act upon sexual abuse among their clergy is one reason for this trend. This abuse, along with the highly publicized sexual and financial scandals of televangelists, has also continued to contribute to America's loss of faith in its churches¹. For many, the fact that churches are generally not supportive of gay rights and gay marriage, abortion, stem cell research and other highly politicized moral issues has left the impression that mainstream religion is out-of-touch with current culture (Meacham, 2009, p. 3).

¹ Used in this context, "church" refers not just to Christian places of worship, but in general to any religious communal institution.

One of the seminal works that first documented these postmodern trends was Wade Clark Roof's *Generation of Seekers* (1993), which explored the religious values that helped baby boomers define themselves. To conduct the study, Roof and his colleagues sent surveys to 2,620 boomers in California, Massachusetts, North Carolina and Ohio (chosen for regional variation) and conducted telephone interviews with many of the respondents. The stories in the book reflected the generation's struggles with religious postmodernity. For example, Mollie searched for meaning in New Age philosophies, while Linda, a born-again Christian, adhered to more traditional values. Overall, boomers were generally found to value experience over dogma, to distrust institutions, to seek personal over community fulfillment, and to change allegiances frequently, all of which are hallmarks of postmodern religious trends. Roof's work paved the way for later works on postmodern spirituality, such as *Habits of the Heart* by Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swindler, and Tipton, *Bowling Alone* by Putnam, and *The Jew Within* by Cohen and Eisen, all of which will be described later.

A succinct metaphor for these postmodern religious trends can be found in David Lyons' book, *Jesus in Disneyland* (2000). Lyons began his analysis by describing a Christian event held at Disneyland, which some saw as an unholy mingling of the holy with the secular, while others saw it as a way of using a popular venue to bring people to Christ. The question that Lyons asked was whether the Disneyland venue trivialized faith or made it more accessible to seekers. His answer, which he spent the rest of the book unraveling, was that both are true. Disneyland became a metaphor for the way postmodernity, with its emphasis on individualism, consumerism, relativism, image, consumption, entertainment, and globalization, changes the way we understand religion.

Lyons cited two dynamics as keys for understanding religion and postmodernity: the advent of computer information technologies, and consumerism (Lyons, 2000, p. 129). Computers have made the world smaller and faster, and have made identities more fragmented, while global consumerism has marked a shift in understanding ourselves. Lyons observed that we used to understand ourselves as producers, but now we understand ourselves as consumers and recipients of entertainment. He also argued that religion must be involved in the new media, fully knowing that such involvement runs the risk of being relativized as just another choice on the web, but it is a risk that religion must take or be sidelined as an irrelevant social movement. The church can be a haven, he suggested, an alternative to the speed of the postmodern world, a place to slow down.

Similarly, Robert Putnam researched the trend toward religious individualism in America in *Bowling Alone* (2000), his metaphor for how American society has become much more privatized and less communal. He wrote that two-career families, suburban sprawl, generational changes in values, and other changes in American society meant that more and more people were literally bowling alone. Putnam observed, “Americans are right that the bonds of our communities have withered, and we are right to fear that this transformation has very real costs” (2000, p. 84).

One indicator that Putnam used to describe this trend towards religious individualism was the decline in “social capital” in the United States since 1950. According to Putnam, there had been a general reduction in all forms of in-person social intercourse, which he believed had undermined civil engagement in American democracy. Putnam discussed ways in which Americans had disengaged from political involvement, including decreased voter turnout, public meeting attendance, serving on

committees, and working with political parties. Bowling alone, then, was Putnam's overarching metaphor for people not participating in social interaction and civic discussions.

Lest one think that these sociological trends were unique to the Baby Boom Generation, a recent study on Generation Y suggested these trends are continuing in today's youth. The study, *OMG! How Generation Y is Redefining Faith in the iPod Era*, concluded that Generation Y "is characterized by open mindedness and tolerance, believing that people should do their own thing, even if it seems strange to others. For many, pursuing the American Dream simply means, 'doing whatever I want'" (Greenberg, 2005, p. 1).

In contrast to Putnam's (2000) views, Greenberg (2005) wrote that Generation Y does seek community and meaningful involvements, though often in informal and non-traditional ways. Religious faith and commitment is one route by which young people find meaning, value, and community, though their religious pluralism complicates what this looks like in practice. The diversity of Generation Y and the informality of much of their religious participation make it difficult to say that there is any one way that religion works in young people's lives.

One of the most vivid descriptions of postmodern religious privatism can be found in *Habits of the Heart* (Bellah et al., 1985), where the researchers included a description of a young woman named Sheila whose religion has become paradigmatic of this postmodern religious trend. Sheila named her religion, Sheilaism, after herself. Essentially, she took whatever gave her a sense of spiritual identity and added it to her spiritual toolbox. When something did not speak to her, she got rid of it.

Bellah et al. affirmed that the case of Sheila was similar to how many people who attend other churches felt. Many Americans are “Sheilaists,” and feel that prayer is essentially a private matter, without any feeling of external obligation from the Bible, tradition, the church, or religious authority figures. Bellah et al. quoted a Gallup poll in which 80% of Americans agreed with the statement that “an individual should arrive at his or her own religious beliefs independent of any churches or synagogues” (1985, p. 31).

Trends in American Judaism

The Jewish religion has not been immune to these same postmodern religious trends and issues. Before turning to the literature on these sociological trends, it is worth looking at the demographic data that mirrors the ARIS study noted previously (Kosmin & Keysar, 2009).

The National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS), most recently performed in 2000-01, was a representative survey of the Jewish population in the United States that was sponsored by United Jewish Communities and the Jewish Federation system. NJPS 2000-01 was intended to provide a comprehensive social and demographic portrait of the American Jewish population. The data were designed to help understand contemporary Jewish life and to be used for communal planning, policy making, financial resource allocation, Jewish education, and scholarly research.

The survey found that there are 5.2 million American Jews, which is 5% less than the 5.5 million counted in the 1990 population study. The picture of American Jewry painted by the study is complex. On the one hand, the American Jewish population is aging and shrinking, as the birthrate is falling and intermarriage is rising and most Jews

do not engage in communal or religious pursuits. On the other hand, a vast majority of American Jews attend a Passover seder and celebrate Chanukah, and Jewish education is booming. The study suggests that American Jewry seems to be moving in two different directions simultaneously. A small group of affiliated American Jews seems to be undergoing a Jewish renaissance, while a larger group of unaffiliated American Jews seems to be decreasing in Jewish intensity.

Steven Cohen and Arnold Eisen's book, *The Jew Within* (2000), may be considered the seminal study explaining these recent trends in Judaism. In it, these sociologists produced a contemporary picture of the moderately affiliated Jews who make up the bulk of American Jewry. They also explored the foundations of belief and behavior among these moderately affiliated American Jews, many of whom make up the population of parents and students in most Jewish community schools today. The authors' key finding was that the construction of Jewish meaning in America is personal and private and that communal loyalties and norms no longer shape Jewish identity as they did several decades ago. Cohen and Eisen's study confirms the trend toward religious individualism in America that has been observed by other researchers such as Bellah et al. in *Habits of the Heart* (1985) and Putnam in *Bowling Alone* (2000).

Cohen and Eisen's findings have significant implications for the future of Jewish education: the Jews they studied have turned inward, demonstrating decreasing attachment to Israel and minimal participation in organized Jewish institutions. This preoccupation with self has made personal observance of the Jewish holidays the primary expression of Jewish identification, with synagogue affiliation a distant second. The authors expressed apprehension about the future of the American Jewish community,

placing the burden for its survival on the ability of Jewish communal leaders to be sensitive and adaptive to their community's changing needs and concerns.

By focusing on moderately affiliated Jews (e.g. those with some organizational ties, but not the self-selected leadership), Cohen and Eisen focused on the attitudes of everyday Jews, rather than on traditional organizational leadership. Their central thesis focused on the fact that during the last decade or so, Judaism was expressed primarily through organizational involvement, but today ethnic identification has become much more personal, which is to say that Jews today are in a postmodern phase. They believe in God, but it is a personal deity, as opposed to the idea of a Jewish God who wrote the Torah and has a special relationship with the Jewish people; moreover, belief in God altogether is less critical for their identity than it is for Catholics or Protestants.

Other research supports what Eisen and Cohen have found. For example, a study on Generation Y Jews, *Grande Soy Vanilla Latte with Cinnamon, No Foam: Jewish Identity and Community in a Time of Unlimited Choices*, “finds Generation Y Jews incredibly self-confident about their Jewish identities, but also defined by many other factors in their lives, including their social networks, geography, gender, and sexual orientation” (Greenberg, 2006, p. 1). The study found that young Jews are not necessarily rejecting communal institutions; rather, the institutions have become irrelevant to the way young Jews are living their lives. Young Jews are proud to be Jewish, but struggle to define a meaningful concept of a Jewish community. This new generation of Jews tends to experience Judaism informally rather than through formal religious practice, and they do not distinguish between American and Jewish values.

Turkle (1995) vividly described this postmodern trend using the personal computer as a metaphor for identity; it is an especially apt metaphor for these “new Jews,” as they are sometimes called in the field of Jewish community education. An article from the Jewish philanthropic organization The Avi Chai Foundation adopted this metaphor specifically for postmodern Judaism:

A computer user may have several windows open at once even though the user is attentive to only one of the windows on the screen at any given moment.

Similarly, identity for today’s emerging adults is multiple and distributed, not unitary and fixed, although at any given moment a particular aspect of identity may predominate. (Sales & Saxe, 2006, p. 4)

The authors suggested that Jewish identification was just one of many self-definitions in today’s current generation, stating that “for many, a statement such as ‘I am a hetero, eco-feminist, vegan, Jewish, history major’ has replaced ‘I am an American Jew’” (Sales & Saxe, 2006, p. 4).

Cohen and Wertheimer’s recent statistical surveys have supported these postmodern findings. For example, between 1989 and 2005, they found a 15% drop in the number of Jews who indicated “caring about Israel is a very important part of my being a Jew” (2006, p. 5). The survey indicated that younger adults are significantly less likely than their elders to agree strongly that “Jews in the United States and Jews around the world share a common destiny” (p. 5). Even more enlightening, only 47% of Jews under age 35 agreed with the statement, “I have a strong sense of belonging to the Jewish people” (p. 5).

Philanthropic trends in Jewish education are another indicator of Cohen’s and

Wertheimer's findings. Levels of giving on behalf of causes that explicitly address the needs of the Jewish people as a whole have dropped in the past 20 years. Using statistics from the NJPS, Cohen and Wertheimer (2006) reported that Jewish donors supported many causes (including non-Jewish), and the younger donor did not give the same priority to Jewish causes as their parents. Their findings indicate that, adjusting for inflation, the amount of money raised by American federations of Jewish philanthropy dropped by 18% from the years 1990 to 2000. The number of households participating in the federations' annual fund-raising campaigns also fell by one third from 1990 to 2000. Cohen and Wertheimer concluded that "both dollars and donors have been in decline—two conjoined signs of the waning attractiveness of a united Jewish appeal to a united Jewish people" (p. 2).

What are some possible explanations for these demographic and sociological trends? One political reason, Cohen and Wertheimer conjectured, was that

...the late 1980's, a period marked by the first Palestinian *intifada*, appear to have ushered in a period of creeping disaffection from Israel within sectors of the American Jewish community, and prior levels of support have never since been matched. During the second *intifada*, which began in 2000, a demonstration in Washington at the peak of the wave of Palestinian suicide bombings of Israeli civilians could muster only a relatively meager turnout. (2006, p. 5)

The authors also opined that certain factors have led to unprecedented rates of assimilation and loss of Jewish identity; first, Jews in America have been accepted by general society at a rate that has been unparalleled in history, and second, there is virtually no anti-Semitism. Today, Jews have full access to American society, so many

Jews do not see the need to express their Judaism. Some results of these trends include lower levels of membership in Jewish institutions, less attachment to Israel, and less allegiance to the Jewish people.

Independent Prayer Groups

Other trends clearly point towards the advent of a postmodern Jewish era. In the 1960s and 1970s, young adults created independent, lay-led prayer communities, which they called *chavurot*, Hebrew for fellowships. Initiated by baby boomers, then in their 20s and 30s, *chavurot* were that generation's effort to create Jewish communities that reflected their values and lifestyles, and which they could not find in normative Jewish communal institutions, like synagogues. Since the year 1999, there has been a rapidly growing, similar trend in young Jews creating their own prayer groups, commonly called “independent minyanim (prayer groups).”

There are now approximately 60 independent minyanim, from large cities like New York to smaller communities like Phoenix. Individuals in both groups—the *chavurot* of the 60s and 70s, and the independent minyanim of today—were motivated by the desire to participate in prayer services they found personally meaningful, and which they could not find in the establishment. Signs that this trend is growing are national independent minyan conferences, and most impressively, the creation of Mechon Hadar, which is the first egalitarian yeshiva (Jewish seminary) in the United States to train a corps of leaders for independent minyanim. These independent minyanim typically are volunteer-led and organized with no paid clergy, have no denominational/movement affiliation, and are overwhelmingly populated by Generation X and Y'ers (Kaunfer, 2010).

Youth Empowerment

Ethan Tucker, who is considered one of the founders of the independent minyan movement, has written,

Jewish life must do three things if it is to flourish and succeed: 1) It must be compelling and of excellent quality, so that people will choose it; 2) its discourse must be serious, honest, adaptable, deep and transparent, so that it can provide spiritual guidance that truly responds to spiritual seekers; and 3) it must empower people and communities in order to create the motivation and the resources to perpetuate the full gamut of Jewish life. (Tucker, 2007, p. 5)

Tucker used the term “free market Jews” to describe today’s young Jews. He outlined a plan to empower young Jews, which may put them on a collision course with established Jewish institutions:

Empowerment has consequences. It threatens to destabilize the monopolies of existing institutions by opening up skills and resources to anyone who is seriously seeking them. That may lead to tension down the road between empowered Jewish communities and mainline Jewish bureaucracies, but it will ultimately be better for the vibrancy of Jewish life. (Tucker, 2007, p. 6)

Alternative Prayer Practices

Another example of this trend of free market Jews who are searching for spirituality is the common practice of young Jews practicing Buddhism. There is even a term that has become commonplace for such a person, a Jubu, which was first brought into wide circulation with the publication of *The Jew in the Lotus* (1994) by Rodger Kamenetz. These are Jews who gravitate towards Buddhism because they do not see

Judaism as responding to their spiritual needs, and see mainstream, traditional Judaism as alienating.

While there are obviously traditionalist elements in Judaism, it is equally clear that there are many young, disaffected Jews who do not feel their spiritual needs are being met by the religious establishment. These Jews are creating alternative modes of connecting to the religion that are more personal and relevant to them.

Trends in Jewish Education

What is the impact of these postmodern trends in American spirituality and the Jewish religion on Jewish education? According to the last major census of American Jewish schools in 2008 (Schick, 2009), there were 228,174 students in Jewish elementary and secondary schools in the 2008-09 school year. This represents an increase of 23,000 or 11% from 2003-04, and an increase of more than 43,000 or nearly 25% since 1998-99. There continues to be significant growth in day school enrollment. Orthodox day school enrollment continues to grow significantly—a 56% increase in Chassidic schools and a 34% increase in yeshiva-world schools over the past 10 years—in large part due to high fertility rates.

Jewish community day schools continue to demonstrate growth, both in the number of schools—98 in 2008-09 as compared to 75 in 1998-99—and enrollment, which has grown by more than 40% over the past decade. Of note is the increase in community day high schools that generates a significant rise in the number of students in non-Orthodox high schools. The difficulties facing the Conservative movement can be seen in the nearly 25% decrease in enrollment over the past 10 years. Overall, enrollment in non-Orthodox schools is down 2.5% since 2003-04, yet is still 5% higher than it was in

1998–99. In fact, five out of six Jewish day school students in the United States are in Orthodox schools.

Joshua Elkin, the Executive Director of the Partnership for Excellence in Jewish Education (PEJE), used the above data to identify key areas that he believed must receive immediate attention if the world of Jewish education is to thrive in the future (Elkin, 2000). Elkin wrote that the Jewish community, including federations and foundations, must embark on an aggressive campaign to recruit and retain talented lay people, board members, faculty, and administrators for Jewish schools. This includes providing training for board members, raising salaries and benefits for teachers, and convincing talented Jewish administrators in public schools and independent schools to make a career change and work at a Jewish school. In his view, Jewish teacher training programs need to be expanded, and schools need professional help with the development of vision and mission, curriculum, fundraising, and marketing. Identity questions are expressed in debates on issues such as the definition of pluralism, the balance of general studies and Judaic studies, how much Hebrew language to teach, and how much emphasis to place on textual literacy versus more affective programming.

Elkin also emphasized that those concerned about Jewish day school education must embark on a vigorous advocacy program for the support of Jewish day school education. Even with the growth of the Jewish day school population, approximately 80% of the North American Jewish community is unconnected to the world of Jewish education. Advocacy also needs to address the high costs of day school education and the need for financial resources to stabilize tuition and create endowments that will give schools more flexibility in their budgets.

Jewish Educational Leadership

A leader in a Jewish school must facilitate his or her community, and wrestle with the deeper issues rather than just simply trying to fix everything with simple answers to complex questions like, Why do I have to pray? Why do I have to listen to God? What does Judaism mean to me? Jewish community schools do not need technical answers for something that is truly an adaptive problem; however, it is a challenge for any organization or community to question its own attitudes, actions, behavior, or beliefs, especially regarding something as dogmatic as prayer.

Naturally, the leadership of the American Jewish community has become increasingly concerned with how to deal with reports of soaring intermarriage rates, assimilation, diminishing population numbers, postmodernism, and far fewer young people interested in communal institutions. More and more, leaders have begun to grapple with questions such as: What factors shape, nourish, and sustain Jewish commitment? What leads some Jews to place Jewish commitment at the center of their lives, while others consign it to the margins? What matters most to American Jews and why? What are the best models of educational and communal institutions that can help grow American Jewry? How can we best reach postmodern Jews? How can we make institutional Judaism more affordable in a world full of rising costs? How can we adapt our efforts to reflect recent demographic and sociological trends?

The critical aspect of leading a Jewish school is mobilizing the community to confront the difficult issues or problems noted previously. The kinds of questions that Jewish educational leaders face rarely have clear answers and solutions. Ronald Heifetz (1998) made a distinction between routine technical problems such as fixing a broken

bicycle wheel, which can be solved through expertise, and adaptive problems, such as crime, poverty, and educational reform, which require innovative approaches, including consideration of values. His four major strategies of leadership may be helpful to the leaders of Jewish community day schools who are struggling with their prayer programs. Heifetz advised leaders (a) to approach problems as adaptive challenges by diagnosing the situation in light of the values involved and avoiding authoritative solutions, (b) to regulate the level of stress caused by confronting issues, (c) to focus on relevant issues, and (d) to shift responsibility for problems from the leader to all the primary stakeholders.

Heifetz's (1998) views on authority are also pertinent because of the issue of extrinsic religious authority and its relationship to the more intrinsic needs of young people today. In his view, authority is a conferred power to perform a service—it is an expectation or a series of expectations, and it can be given and taken away. Heifetz described two different kinds of authority: formal authority given to a person through a contract, or job description; and informal authority that is given or taken away by the community—often through unspoken expectations. For example, a teacher has the formal authority to instruct the class, but students may not give the teacher the informal authority to do that and will not pay attention. Often one has to increase informal authority in order to exercise formal authority. With regards to religion, perhaps a religious authority figure has positional authority, but the students do not respect that authority.

Essentially, Jewish educational leaders are trying to figure out how to engage postmodern Jews in ways that put social capital back into their lives. This idea is

illuminated in *Better Together: Restoring the American Community* (Putnam & Feldstein, 2003). In this text, Putnam and Feldstein analyzed how to build social capital in today's world. They described examples of postmodern communities, such as the virtual communities of social networking sites. In all the cases that they described in the book, social connectedness was a byproduct of working toward some specific objective, and not an end in itself. Another key point they raised was that the sharing of personal and collective stories was often a critical part of this social capital building process. They wrote that narratives "help people construct and reconstruct their interests...Telling and listening to stories creates empathy and helps people find the things they have in common, which then eases the formation of enduring groups and networks" (p. 27).

Two such Jewish efforts are Birthright Israel and Synaplex. Birthright, funded by the Israeli government and major American philanthropists, sponsors free 10-day trips to Israel for Jewish young adults. Birthright's goals are to reduce the gap between Israel and Jewish communities around the world and to strengthen participants' personal Jewish identity and connection to Jewish history and culture.

Synaplex offers programming that is relevant, inspirational and significant in order to bring more people to synagogue on Shabbat (the Jewish Sabbath). The initiative was created in response to a growing trend—fewer and fewer people attend Shabbat services and a growing number in the Jewish community identify themselves as secular. The goal is to strengthen Jewish identity and build community. Much of this community building is accomplished by casting a wider net to the diverse American Jewish population via offering an array of synagogue activities. These include but are not limited to expanded social events and study groups. For example, some alternatives

include meditation workshops and yoga. One Synaplex program is “Rosh Chodesh: It’s a Girl Thing,” which was established as a way for mothers and adolescent daughters to have a forum to discuss contemporary family issues and to provide support in a Jewish setting during these difficult formative years. Another example is that some of the participating synagogues have initiated a “speed schmooze” in order to have members get to know each other better and thus feel more at home at the synagogue.

One can see in Birthright and Synaplex that there are different trends regarding where to focus Jewish leadership, including considering whether the focus should be on inreach or outreach. Is it better to invest in the already committed Jews to strengthen them (Synaplex), or to provide outreach to unaffiliated Jews (Birthright)? If one peruses the websites of the major philanthropic and educational arms of the Jewish communal world, it is obvious that these approaches are heavily funded right now. Good examples of these approaches relating to the field of Jewish community education can be seen on the websites of The Avi Chai Foundation (avichai.org.il), Partnership for Excellence in Jewish Education (peje.org), and RAVSAK: The Jewish Community Day School Network (ravsak.org).

Jewish Prayer Education

One of my research questions involved what constituted “authentic tefilla.” One definition of tefilla is simply traditional prayer using a siddur. It is also common nowadays, though, to find non-traditional forms of tefilla, including meditation, yoga, and learning groups. The question is whether these alternative tefilla programs are actually tefilla, or something different—what is authentic tefilla?

Dr. Michael Rosenak, a professor of Jewish education at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and a prominent philosopher of Jewish education, has organized two poles of authenticity in Judaism. On one extreme is what he termed the normative-ideational model, and on the other extreme is the deliberative-inductive one. The first model, which he also called explicit religion, knows what truth is, and concerns itself with imposing God's tradition and authority on the student. The second model, which he also called implicit religion, "concerns itself with subjective spirituality and individual discovery" (Rosenak, 1987, p. 10).

The educator who views authentic tefilla from the normative-ideational model "sees the solution to the problem of Jewish education in the successful molding of pupils by Jewish subject matter that is represented and adequately transmitted by good teachers" (Rosenak, 1987, p. 20). Rosenak stated that the main problem of such an educator was that the student who must be shaped by the subject matter resists proper molding.

The educator who views authentic tefilla from the deliberative-inductive model "may decide that the traditional 'religious' way of apprehending Judaism is unproductive and useless for the modern Jew, and that the religious way has been—or should be—outgrown and discarded" (Rosenak, 1987, p. 25). Rosenak wrote that the main problem of such an educator was with Judaism itself, which "alienates modern secular-minded people" (p. 25).

Rosenak (1987) gave three examples of prominent Jewish educators who exemplify the normative-ideational model of authenticity: Yehoshua Leibowitz, Isaac Breuer, and Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik. Rosenak wrote that their philosophies of Jewish education implied

an unambiguous imitation model: Educated Jews are those who observe the mitzvot (commandments); that is, they do what their elders do. As for the teacher, he or she is an agent of society, charged with the task of inculcating patterns of normative behavior. Likewise, goals of instruction are uniform...and extrinsic to the interests of the individual child. (p. 138)

Rosenak (1987) pointed to Martin Buber as the most prominent Jewish educator to champion the deliberative-inductive approach to authenticity. Buber made a distinction between religiosity (which is analogous to Rosenak's implicit Judaism) and religion (analogous to Rosenak's explicit Judaism). Buber wrote, "Religiosity starts anew with every young person, shaken to his very core by the mystery; religion wants to force him into a system stabilized for all time" (1958, p. 152). For Buber, religion was identified with passivity while religiosity was active and creative.

"Explicit religious education...is not convincing to most Jews in the modern age," wrote Rosenak (1987, p. 168). It may be "unreflective" (p. 168), and part of a "harsh and antagonistic environment" (p. 185). On the other hand, "intrinsic religious education...lacks specificity or religious depth; it is either culturally 'universal' or simply national" (p. 168). He also wrote that it may be "indifferent" (p. 168), and "corrupt" (p. 185).

The problem, according to Rosenak, was this:

How *does* one really educate a young person, really *help* a young person to become loyal, disciplined by the regimen of revealed norms and, at the same time, curious, open and endowed with an expansive spirituality? What is the "recipe"

for blending piety and humility with a more-than-scholastic intelligence and faculty of criticism? (p. 257)

Rosenak was raising one of the classic tensions in Jewish spiritual life, which is how to balance keva and kavanah. An easy way of understanding these two terms is through the following analogy: before a jazz musician can do spontaneous, improvisational jazz, he first needs to spend long hours learning how to play his instrument. He has to learn where to put his fingers, how to read music, and practice his scales. This type of rote learning and practice is keva; the spontaneous improvisation is kavanah. In tefilla, keva refers to such things as learning how to navigate a siddur, the order of the service, what the prayers mean, the choreography of a service, and so on. Kavanah refers to the spiritual high one feels when communing with God, or the soaring inspiration of watching a spectacular sunset drop behind an ocean.

Traditionally, Jewish schools have favored keva over kavanah with regards to tefilla. Regardless of how the students felt about tefilla, they have been required to figuratively practice their scales for hours on end. A typical rationale is that in order to achieve any sort of kavanah prayer experience, one first needs to become experts in the keva of prayer. In other words, schools have typically featured a proficiency approach to prayer over a spirituality approach. Obviously, both proficiency and spirituality are ideal, but the only one that schools could control was proficiency, and that was the one that could be demonstrated and observed by parents and community members.

Another way to conceptualize Rosenak's framework within traditional Judaism is the expression *naaseh v'nishmah*, which literally means "we will do and we will hear," but traditionally has been understood as the Jews first blindly accepting the Torah on

faith even before they understood it because they placed their complete trust in God. Ever since, *naaseh v'nishmah* has been the Jewish way of saying that Jews obey the Torah even without understanding or believing in what they are doing, which parallels Rosenak's normative-ideational model.

Naaseh v'nishmah—"do it even if you do not understand it"—has been the philosophy that commonly drives tefilla programs in Jewish high schools. In other words, the rationale behind making teenagers pray in a traditional manner is the supposed intrinsic value in "just doing it." Schools typically feel that a requirement of going to a Jewish school is to both learn how to pray and to practice praying. In contrast to *naaseh v'nishmah* stands *nishmah v'naaseh*, which means first understanding something and then doing it, similar to Rosenak's deliberative-inductive model.

After presenting these two different conceptions of authenticity, Rosenak (1987) proceeded to try and solve these questions of how to balance them: "Our thesis is that theology and educational theory that are only explicit or implicit are religiously and educationally distorted" (p. 168). He did not claim that either pole was more authentic than the other. In fact, he argued that Jewish schools must incorporate *both* normative and deliberative models, and a school that does not incorporate both "will lead to partial—dogmatic or vacuous—understandings of religious tradition" (p. 10). In another of his books, *Teaching Jewish Values: A Conceptual Guide* (1986), Rosenak similarly argued that Jewish educators need to strive to balance authenticity and relevance.

He recalled the Chasidic teaching that Jews pray to "the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" rather than to "the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" because each of the patriarchs found God in his own way. He concluded,

A religious personality that is both loyal and spontaneous requires a community that makes some self-understood demands but that also tolerates idiosyncrasies and is hospitable to personal differences and controversies “for the sake of Heaven”...Conversely, the religious person not only is commanded to authenticity but also must accept discipline and act responsibly within his or her limitations. (Rosenak, 1987, pp. 265-266)

Ultimately, Rosenak believed that neither mode—normative or deliberative, pure authenticity or pure relevance—is, or should be sufficient unto itself. On the one hand, normative discourse that does not also address the needs of the students will end up being sterile. Deliberative discourse, on the other hand, always needs to be anchored in normative assumptions or risk having nothing to do with Judaism. According to Rosenak, there must be a constant, dialectical interaction between the normative and deliberative modes if Jewish educational issues are to be addressed both honestly and intelligently.

There simply was not much academic research on prayer in Jewish community schools that addressed these issues raised by Rosenak, although there were a number of opinion pieces which all tended to say the same thing, that prayer in Jewish schools was broken, regardless of the denomination. For example, a recent article described the feelings of one student being forced to pray:

I can't stand it when my teachers go out of their way to make me daven (pray). It makes me insane!!! Something about those words in the siddur (prayer book) just don't reach out to me. Even if I read them (the prayers) in English I still am not feeling them. I feel really bad though—I would like to understand I just can't get

there. Every day I do the same as everyone else—stand up sit down stand up sit down..... I just wish it meant more to me!! Any advice?? but NO PREACHING PLEASE!!!! (Goldmintz, 2009, p. 1, emphasis in the original)

Golombek (2004) offered a brief description of an approach to creating meaningful prayer for students in Jewish schools that addresses the data and trends described earlier regarding how to reach postmodern, Generation Y Jews. At Golombek's Conservative Jewish middle school in Pittsburgh, prayer was as problematic as ever. Rather than policing the students even more, as Head of Jewish Studies, he decided to conduct an action research project to help the situation. He surveyed the students, asked what type of prayer was meaningful to them, and created a prayer program based upon what would be most engaging to them, even if it did not fit with the traditional mode of Jewish prayer, an approach that was reminiscent of Willow Creek's approach noted in the introduction. Golombek and the students mutually designed a singing group, a creative/artistic group, a learners/study group, and a more traditional prayer group. Follow-up data from students revealed a significant increase in their willingness to participate in prayer.

Golombek briefly touched upon one of the most critical aspects in this whole endeavor of prayer education: what is the purpose of it?

If the primary objective of tefilla (prayer) is to teach the meaning of the tefillot (prayers), then we should offer only the learning minyan (prayer group)...I would argue that the primary objective of middle school tefilla is to encourage children to connect with tefilla, and to value it as an important element in their lives. What I have learnt is that different people have different spiritual styles. Some people

connect spiritually through intellectual wrestling with the content of prayers, while others connect in more affective ways, such as through music. Some people have a spiritual preference for tefillot that are active and creative, while others prefer services with a high level of decorum and predictability. (2004, p. 4)

Perhaps the most prolific author on the topic of prayer in non-Orthodox Jewish schools is Dr. Saul Wachs. Most of his work (Wachs, 1999, 2008) includes best practices that he has witnessed and his personal reflections and suggestions after observing various schools. For example, he wrote that one key to a successful prayer service he has observed was the creation of depth:

Let me share some good practices which I have observed. The teacher will: tell a story; share a personal message; read a newspaper clipping; read a poem; introduce a creative prayer; engage in a meditation—either a walking meditation or one standing or sitting in place; expect pupils to enter the Beit Keneset (synagogue) in silence...(Wachs, 2008, p. 12)

Wachs made many of these observations when he worked as an independent consultant in schools, especially Conservative Jewish schools. One major case study he conducted studied “the course of change that took place among a group of elementary school teachers between 2002 and 2009 as a result of collaboration between the Head of Jewish studies and an outside consultant [himself]. Specifically, the case study seeks to describe the intervention and assess its impact on the teachers and the culture of prayer and the study and teaching of prayer in the school” (Wachs & Lewis, 2009, p. 1). Most of his suggestions in this particular study mirrored those already described previously.

Informal Jewish Education

Judaism is an experiential religion. For example, during the holiday of Passover, Jews literally try to recreate the Exodus from Egypt through food, song, games with children, and many other rituals. The Jewish Sabbath is filled with the smells of *challah* (ceremonial bread) and special Sabbath singing around the dinner table. Jews build a hut on the holiday of Sukkot (Feast of Tabernacles) to represent the huts that the ancient Israelites lived in on their journey through the desert. Jewish prayer is no different—it involves *doing* something and not just learning about it.

This emphasis on the *experience* of Judaism aligns well with the philosophy of Informal Jewish Education (IJE) of Barry Chazan, who is one of the seminal researchers in this field:

In a field that is conceptually underdeveloped, the scarcity of literature on informal and experiential Jewish education is not surprising. What surprises us is the lack of research which considers the variety of informal Jewish education contexts as constituting a single field. Very few researchers have recognized that the various informal educational settings constitute a singular field of experiential Jewish education. Only the work of Chazan (2003), based on the earlier work of Reisman (1979), has attempted to define the field of informal Jewish education and articulate the elements that constitute this endeavor. (Reimer & Bryfman, 2008)

Chazan (2003) defined IJE as having “eight formal attributes” and posited that “the uniqueness of informal Jewish education lies in the configuration and synergy of these eight characteristics” (p. 5):

1. Person-centered Jewish education: “Helping each individual grow and find meaning as a Jew. The emphasis is on personal Jewish development rather than the transmission of Jewish culture, and the individual is actively engaged in his/her own journey of Jewish growth” (p. 5).
2. The centrality of experience: “Learning occurs through enabling people to undergo key Jewish experiences and values...Cognitive learning about an experience cannot replace the real thing” (p. 5).
3. A curriculum of Jewish experiences and values: “While it is both flexible and closely related to the lives and significant moments of the learners, this curriculum is rooted in a well-defined body of Jewish experiences and values” (p. 6).
4. An interactive process: “The pedagogy of informal Jewish education is rooted in techniques that enfranchise openness, encourage engagement, instigate creative dialectic, and insure comfort of diversity and disagreement” (p. 7).
5. The group experience: “Groups are not simply aggregates of people learning individually in parallel fashion; they are social networks that teach ideas and values through the essence of the group process” (p. 7).
6. The culture of Jewish education: “Informal Jewish education...attains its goals most effectively by treating the entire educational setting as a comprehensive culture...Informal Jewish education emphasizes the importance of orchestrating settings to reflect and model the values and behaviors deemed important” (p. 8).
7. An education that engages: “Informal Jewish education intensely engages and

even co-opts participants and makes them feel positive about being involved...Research on informal Jewish education points to the high degree of participant satisfaction as compared with other spheres of Jewish life” (p. 9).

8. Informal Jewish education’s holistic educator: “The informal Jewish educator is a total educational personality who educates by words, deeds, and by shaping a culture of Jewish values and experiences” (p. 9).

Regarding Chazan’s second characteristic of IJE, Reimer and Bryfman (2008) critiqued him by stating that “he does little to explain how ‘experience’ is actually educative” (p. 2). In an article written in response to Chazan’s definition of informal Jewish education, Reimer (2003) stated, “I will dig a bit deeper into what we mean by saying that ‘experience’ is central to the practice of informal Jewish education” (p. 5). He encapsulated his message by writing,

All these points can be summarized in these simple statements for informal Jewish educators:

1. Do not confuse the program with the experiences.
2. Your primary task is to set a challenging, but safe trail.
3. But stick around for the meaningful conversations.
4. And for learning’s sake, don’t forget the follow-up. (2003, p. 5)

Chazan (2003) stated that IJE is not defined by any one of its eight characteristics, rather by the synergy of all eight working together: “a person-centered approach, an emphasis on Jewish experience, a curriculum of experiences and values, interactivity, group process, a culture of education, an engaged mood, and a holistic Jewish educator are all required to add up to informal Jewish education” (p. 13).

Chazan (2003) wrote that for centuries there has been a “mistaken dichotomy” between informal and formal education, and that modern societies have created schools which focused on “intellectual learning; progression on a hierarchical educational ladder; transmission of cognitive knowledge from adult to child; and addressing the socio-economic needs of societies” (p. 3). All education that happened outside of these schools was termed “informal education,” according to Chazan, and they were treated as “separate and distinct domains” (p. 3).

Chazan affirmed that the most common definition of informal education—education outside of schools—“is convenient but not very useful” (2003, p. 3). First of all, Chazan wrote that was a misnomer because much of what happens *inside* schools is actually informal education, for example, sports, debating societies, language clubs, and yearbook. Second, he believed that defining something by what it is *not* is unhelpful. Thus, his monograph attempted to define and analyze the concept of informal Jewish education.

Chazan (2003) looked at examples of informal Jewish education in order to provide clues to come up with a definition of IJE, and to create a list of common characteristics of IJE. He included many different types of institutions as being examples of IJE, such as the following:

- Jewish youth movements and organizations: “young Jews voluntarily participate in cultural, educational, ideological and social activities within a peer group context” (p. 4).

- Jewish camps and retreats: “educational settings where Jews spend blocks of time with peers in a diverse range of activities, including education, sports, recreation, social pastimes, and Jewish living” (p. 4).
- Jewish Community Centers: “multipurpose institutions established to provide a diversity of recreational, cultural, social, athletic, and Jewish and general educational activities for a broad cross-section of Jews” (p. 5).
- Adult learning: “voluntary frameworks established to enable adult Jews to enrich their Jewish knowledge and acquire Jewish skills in warm and non-threatening settings” (p. 5).
- Jewish family education: “educational programs developed for entire families with the purpose of strengthening Jewish family life and co-opting the families into the education of the young” (p. 5).
- Jewish travel: “organized educational journeys that take young people and adults to places of Jewish interest throughout the world” (p. 6).
- “Also sometimes cited as examples of informal Jewish education are museums, the Internet, synagogue centers, and preschools” (p. 6).

Chazan described eight common characteristics of these Jewish informal environments detailed above. In doing so, he crafted the following definition of IJE:

Informal Jewish education is aimed at the personal growth of Jews of all ages. It happens through the individual’s actively experiencing a diversity of Jewish moments and values that are regarded as worthwhile. It works by creating venues, by developing a total educational culture, and by co-opting the social context. It is based on a curriculum of Jewish values and experiences that is

presented in a dynamic and flexible manner. As an activity, it does not call for any one venue but may happen in a variety of settings. It evokes pleasurable feelings and memories. It requires Jewishly literate educators with a “teaching” style that is highly interactive and participatory, who are willing to make maximal use of self and personal lifestyle in their educational work. (2003, p. 12)

Chazan blurred the distinctions between informal and formal education.

“Ultimately,” Chazan wrote, “informal Jewish education is a philosophy of Jewish education. It is a theory or philosophy about educating people that emphasizes choice, high degrees of interactivity, a flexible conception of content or subject matter, accessible ‘teachers,’ and much group process” (2003, p. 13). Chazan stated that “IJE implies not a place but a worldview about how people learn, what is important to learn, and how we should teach. To begin to really talk about informal Jewish education is to confront the big and basic questions of education” (2003, p. 13).

Summary

This literature review served to set the topic of prayer in Jewish community schools within the context of existing research. This chapter began with a broad scope of postmodern trends in American spirituality in general and American Judaism in particular. It examined the literature and data on formal and informal Jewish education, including prayer in Jewish schools and issues of authenticity in Jewish education. This chapter included a review of leadership frameworks that impact Jewish schools. This review set the stage for my own research on this topic which will be detailed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study described and analyzed prayer programs in Jewish community high schools. In particular, it documented and explored alternative approaches to prayer and spirituality and the impact of these approaches on students in Jewish community high schools, as well as professional leadership practices relating to prayer in these schools. The research not only described the phenomenon of alternative prayer programs in Jewish community schools, but analyzed why they exist, and inferred implications for Jewish educational leaders and future research.

To guide the research, I developed the following three research questions. These questions served more as a heuristic than concrete questions requiring definite answers.

- What does prayer education and practice look like in Jewish community high schools?
- How is prayer education and practice perceived by key constituencies in Jewish community high schools?
- How do educators and students in Jewish community high schools describe authentic prayer?

Conceptual Frameworks

I used three main conceptual frameworks to study this topic. The seminal sociological work on postmodern Judaism, which describes the student population in the schools I studied, is Stephen Cohen and Arnie Eisen's *The Jew Within* (2000), described in greater detail in chapter two. Their key findings suggested that Jews have turned inward, demonstrating decreasing attachment to Israel and minimal participation in

Jewish communal life. This first framework was heavily influenced by researchers such as Bellah, Putnam, and Roof, also described in chapter two.

The leadership issues were examined using Heifetz's concepts of adaptive leadership and authority. His perspectives were key to understanding the leadership decisions these schools have made (or need to make) in developing their prayer programs. Lastly, I utilized Chazan's philosophy of Informal Jewish Education (IJE) as an interpretive framework for analyzing the three case studies. All of these frameworks were described in chapter two.

Research Paradigms

One research paradigm that informed this study was constructivism, and it is also the approach which best describes my own leadership perspective and the way that I personally learn. This paradigm also was one of the lenses through which I performed the cross-case analysis. Constructivism, as a theory, was important to my research because it holds that there are multiple realities, and each reality is comprised of how people remember and construct and make sense of their everyday life experiences. These constructions are not necessarily true; they are informed. This means that as individuals encounter different views, they may alter their opinions of reality. The researcher and participants are linked, creating a consensus construction of reality (Hatch, 2002).

Critical theory, which tries to raise the consciousness of those being oppressed or marginalized, also influenced this work. Raised consciousness can lead to social change. In this study, the group whose voice was not being heard was high school students in Jewish community schools. Perhaps oppressed is too harsh of a term to use, but I feel strongly that teenagers in general are indeed marginalized and at the bottom of the social

hierarchy, and they are in need of an intermediary especially in the area of their religious schooling. This paradigm requires a dialogue between researchers and participants that leads to positive, transformative change in the lives of the participants. The critical paradigm is supported by research on the importance of adults paying attention to student voices. For example, research by McCombs and Miller suggests that “the number one indicator of student success is to focus on the student, followed by quality teaching and research-based instructional practices” (2009, p. 59).

Qualitative Design

Qualitative research explores a human or social problem in a natural setting where the researcher collects data and interprets individual experiences inductively by focusing on participant perspectives and meaning (Creswell, 2004; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). It is “pragmatic, interpretive, and grounded in the lived experience of people” and is conducted by researchers who “are intrigued with the complexity of social interactions as expressed in daily life and with the meanings the participants themselves attribute to these interactions” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 2). Unlike quantitative research, which uses “few variables and many cases,” qualitative inquiry works with “few cases and many variables” (Creswell, 2004, p. 16).

I chose qualitative research for this study because there has been no academic study of alternative prayer practices in Jewish community schools, thus necessitating descriptive and exploratory research into this phenomenon. The qualitative method investigates the why and how of decision making, not just the what, where, and when; hence, smaller but focused samples are more often needed, rather than large samples.

Perhaps the most traditional way qualitative research has been used is to explore an under-studied phenomenon, such as my research did.

As Glesne explained, “To understand the nature of constructed realities, qualitative researchers interact and talk with participants about their perceptions” (1999, p. 5). Because these perceptions are in large part products of individual construction and interpretation, they cannot be easily measured or analyzed quantitatively.

The particular type of qualitative research that best suited my study was a multiple case study design. I utilized this approach to examine three Jewish community high schools in the Western United States with non-traditional Jewish prayer programs. Often, the term case study is used synonymously with ethnography and participant observation studies, but many researchers feel it is a distinct methodology of its own (Creswell, 2004; Hatch, 2002; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2009).

Data collection and analysis procedures are similar in case studies to those of other qualitative approaches. What makes it distinct is its focus a “bounded system” that is “a program, an event, a person, a process, an institution, or a social group” (Merriam, 1998, p. 13) or “what it is you want to be able to say something about at the end of the study” (Patton, 1980, p. 100).

In addition to finding schools to profile, I also needed to determine specific characteristics of each school that would define the study. Besides creating a crisp research design, bounding the system was important in retaining a reasonable scope for the case. In this study, the case focused specifically on the prayer program at each school. The case did not focus on the students, teachers, or other stakeholders themselves, although these were data sources that were used in order to uncover information about the

program itself. There was no assumption that the data collected in this study could be expected to reflect the experiences of all Jewish community schools. Rather, this exploratory and descriptive study was designed to serve as an opportunity to lay the groundwork for future research. As Merriam (1998) noted:

The main concern of case studies...is interpretation in context. Case studies are particularistic in that they focus on a specific situation or phenomenon; they are descriptive; they are heuristic—that is, they offer insights into the phenomenon under study; [and they are] inductive—focusing on process, understanding, and interpretation—rather than deductive and experimental...emphasizing description and interpretation within a bounded context. (p. 21)

Case studies offer insights that can be construed as hypotheses that help structure future research. Thus, case study plays an important role in advancing a field's knowledge base. In addition, educational processes and problems are examined in case studies in order to bring about understanding that in turn can affect and improve practice. The essence of a case study “is that it tries to illuminate a decision or set of decisions: why they were taken, how they were implemented, and with what result” (Yin, 2009, p. 23).

The multiple case study approach utilized in this study was more compelling and more robust than a single case study approach because it follows replication logic, defined as such:

The replication logic is analogous to that used in multiple experiments...Each case must be carefully selected so that it either (a) predicts similar results (a literal replication) or (b) produces contrary results but for predictable reasons (a

theoretical replication). Thus, the ability to conduct six or ten case studies, arranged effectively within a multiple-case design, is analogous to the ability to conduct six to ten experiments on related topics... (Yin, 2009, pp. 48-49)

This is not the same as sampling logic, in which a number of respondents are assumed to represent a larger pool of respondents, and “any application of this sampling logic to case studies would be misplaced” (Yin, 2009, p. 50). This replication logic enhanced the validity and generalizability of the findings.

Participant and Site Selection

I have been working in the field of Jewish community school education for 12 years. There are only about 20 Jewish community high schools in the world, so I was well aware of all of the schools available for my study. I was also limited as to which schools I could observe because most are not within a reasonable distance from me. Three of these schools happen to be within a relatively close range (approximately 6-hours driving distance) to where I live in Las Vegas; therefore, I did not need to rely on third-party data collecting techniques such as network sampling, which is obtaining “knowledge of potential cases from people who know people who meet research interests” (Glesne, 1999, p. 29).

The three schools profiled in this study were Hebrew High School, New Community Jewish High School (“New Jew”), and Jewish Academy. All three met the necessary criteria for inclusion in the study in that each one (a) was a pluralistic community Jewish high school, (b) offered alternative approaches to traditional prayer, and (c) made strong attempts to meet the needs of postmodern Generation Y Jews. Each

school was also struggling to meet the needs of the various stakeholders in their community, such as those who want only traditional prayer practiced.

As the world of Jewish community educators is a small one, I had already met the people who were in charge of prayer in these schools at professional conferences over the years. I contacted them, shared my research interests, and informally gauged their interest in taking part in my study. All seemed eager. I sent a formal letter to each Head of School, inviting them to participate in the study.

Initially, I had decided to anonymize the identities of the participants and schools from my case studies; however, one of the three schools I observed (New Jew) insisted that I actually identify their school. The reason tefilla director Yonatan Rosner gave was that they were very proud of what they were doing, and they felt they were doing a distinctive, good job, and wanted credit for it. Rosner even indicated that he might have pulled out of my study if I did not identify his school, because he thought they deserved public credit for a job well done.

The question to me was whether this was ethical. According to my IRB proposal which had been approved based upon anonymizing the schools, and since the other schools I observed would remain anonymous, was it ethical to change my research protocol and identify New Jew and keep the other two schools anonymous?

I contacted an Administrator for the Social Behavioral IRB at UNLV, who answered via email that

there is no federal regulation that states that individual or institutions must remain anonymous when participating in a research study. If a school wishes to be identified in your study, I recommend that you document their agreement to do so

and give them the opportunity to review the final draft of the research findings before it is published or presented...The IRB will review your protocol for *procedures which are consistent with sound research design and which do not unnecessarily expose subjects to risk.* (Personal communication, November 16, 2010, emphasis in original)

Thus, following this IRB administrator's advice, I chose to name New Jew in this dissertation, but I anonymized all of the students. The other two schools and all of their participants remain anonymized in this dissertation; all names are pseudonyms. Also at the IRB's advice, I allowed Rosner (New Jew's tefilla director) and the school's Head of School, Bruce Powell, to review the final draft of the findings.

Data Collection

Multiple methods of data collection were employed in order to increase triangulation; for example, I collected and analyzed documents from each school, such as websites, printed marketing materials, and news articles. The main source of data collected from each school came from observing their tefilla programs and conducting on-site interviews of faculty, administrators, and students from November 1, 2010 to November 5, 2010. I spent 2 days each at New Jew and Hebrew High School, and 1 day at Jewish Academy. The semi-structured interview protocols (see Appendices H and I) were developed according to my review of related literature, the research questions guiding the study, and my own experiences working in Jewish community schools. The flexibility of this semi-structured, open-ended interview format allowed respondents to engage and expand upon their feelings and emotions throughout the interview process, which was important to this study since "the elaborate responses you hear provide the

affective and cognitive underpinnings of your respondents' perceptions" (Glesne, 1999, p. 93). Prior to actual use of the interview protocols described above, I practiced interview techniques and piloted the questions on colleagues and professors to gain greater clarity and focus with each interview. Revisions were made to the interview protocols based on colleagues' and professors' feedback.

During those site visits, I observed as much as possible at each school, including the prayer services and classes relating to prayer. I interviewed 10 faculty members and five administrators, and a total of 72 students in the six focus groups I conducted at the schools. A professional transcriber transcribed over 30 hours of interviews. During the interviews, the various stakeholders were asked to describe their programs in their own words, and these narratives were used to develop typologies of the programs, to describe each program in rich detail, and to guide the construction of an explanatory model articulating whether these programs are beneficial to Generation Y, postmodern Jews in Jewish community high schools.

Data Analysis

The research analysis was guided by Marshall and Rossman's seven phases for analytical procedures, which include "(1) organizing the data, (2) immersion in the data, (3) generating categories and themes, (4) coding the data, (5) offering interpretations through analytic memoirs, (6) searching for alternative understandings, and (7) writing the report or other format for presenting the study" (Marshall and Rossman, 2011, p. 209).

Once I collected all of the data, I completed the process of coding it, which entailed "conceptualizing the data, raising questions, providing provisional answers about

the relationships among and within the data, and discovering the data” and “breaking the data apart in analytically relevant ways in order to lead toward further questions about the data” (Glesne, 1999, p. 31). Throughout the data collection process, I recorded the categories, patterns, and themes that manifested themselves among the collection of interview transcripts. I organized categories and themes that emerged collectively from the interviews and observations.

I did not use a computer program to code the data; I coded data by hand because I felt this was the best way to reflect the nuances and stories I heard. I also found that it helped me write much richer narratives of each school as I sifted through and analyzed all of the data. Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot’s (1983) portraiture methodology was a useful analytical tool.

Portraiture Methodology

In the style of Lawrence-Lightfoot’s *A Good High School* (1983), I analyzed the three schools by describing their narrative portraits, and then drew a single set of cross-case conclusions in search of a “good” tefilla program. John Dewey’s *Art as Experience* (1958) was one of the earliest philosophical works to push the boundaries of how to aesthetically represent teaching, and was an influence on Lawrence-Lightfoot’s portraiture methodology. Dewey (1958) wrote that the experience of teaching and learning was richly textured, and a purely empirical approach would not truly appreciate its artistic gestalt:

The reciprocal interpretation of parts and whole, which we have seen to constitute a work of art, is effected when all the constituents of the work, whether picture, drama, poem or building, stand in rhythmic connection with all other members of

the same kind—line with line, color with color, space with space, illuminative with light and shade in a painting—and all of these distinctive factors reinforce one another as variations that build up an integrated complex experience.

But...there is a tendency to limit rhythm to some one phase of an art product, for instance, to tempo in music, lines in painting, meter in poetry, to flattened or smooth curves in sculpture. Such limitation always tends in the direction of what Bosanquet called “easy beauty” and when carried through logically, whether in theory or practice, results in some matter being left without form and some form being arbitrarily imposed upon matter. (p. 171)

Dewey suggested that education needs to be envisioned as an art form, yet one should be wary in doing so of reducing it and oversimplifying it so much that the art becomes distorted. In short, he advocated for the merging of the aesthetic and empirical approach, an appreciation of both the details and the overall form of the art. He wove together and crossed the boundaries of art and science in order to demonstrate the nuances of both the parts and the whole of education.

Similar to Dewey, Elliot W. Eisner advocated for a paradigm shift of what really matters in schools. In *The Art of Educational Evaluation* (1985) and later in *The Enlightened Eye* (1998), Eisner viewed education as an expression of artistry, and encouraged researchers to develop more creative responses to the situations that educators and learners encounter. For Eisner, conceiving of educators as artists shifted the paradigm of teaching into one that was closer to an art studio or science laboratory.

In Eisner’s view,

...The task of the critic is to help us to see. Thus...connoisseurship provides criticism with its subject matter. Connoisseurship is private, but criticism is public. Connoisseurs simply need to appreciate what they encounter. Critics, however, must render these qualities vivid by the artful use of critical disclosure. (1985, pp. 92-93)

Criticism is the connoisseur's disclosure of one's perceptions "so that others not possessing his level of connoisseurship can also enter into the work" (Eisner, 1975, p. 1). This is done through thick description, interpretation, evaluation, and identifying themes. In short, through criticism the connoisseur reveals the complexities and textured perceptions of teaching and learning.

Eisner (1998) described three ways that such educational criticism can meet reasonable standards of credibility:

1. "Structural Corroboration"—triangulation, support from other types of data.
2. "Consensual Validation"—agreement among "competent others."
3. "Referential Adequacy"—extent to which criticism reveals what might otherwise be overlooked (pp. 110-114).

The "thick description" that Eisner referenced can be traced back most prominently to anthropologist Clifford Geertz who defined it as "the researcher's constructions of other people's constructions of what they are up to" (1973, p. 9). Geertz wrote that the "researcher's imagination" was an integral part of cultural depiction: "It is not against a body of uninterpreted data...that we must measure the cogency of our explications, but against the power of scientific imagination to bring us in touch with the

lives of strangers” (p. 16). Still, he was careful to emphasize rigorous attention to methods of qualitative research.

It is with the backdrop of philosophers, educators, and researchers such as Dewey, Eisner, and Geertz that Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot has popularized portraiture, which is a qualitative research methodology that bridges science and art and that merges “the systematic and careful description of good ethnography with the evocative resonance of fine literature” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 4). After Lawrence-Lightfoot’s first use of portraiture in *The Good High School* (1983), she endeavored to create a systematic methodology of her approach, which culminated in the book she co-authored with Jessica Herman Davis, *The Art and Science of Portraiture: A New Approach to Qualitative Research* (1997). In this book, Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis wrote that portraiture has five defining attributes. First, portraiture views context as an important tool for interpreting meaning. Second, because social science research tends to focus on “pathology and disease rather than on health and resistance” (p. 8), portraiture actively seeks “goodness,” a term which will be defined shortly. Third, portraitists not only listen to stories, but also listen “*for* a story” (p. 9), which is a process of creating compelling narratives with characters, metaphors, and a central narrative arc. Fourth, portraitists insert themselves into the stories they tell. And fifth, portraiture seeks to speak to audiences beyond just fellow researchers.

In explaining portraiture as a research method, Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) wrote:

Portraiture is a method framed by the traditions and values of the phenomenological paradigm, sharing many of the techniques, standards and goals

of ethnography. But it pushes against the constraints of those traditions and practices in its explicit effort to combine empirical and aesthetic description, in its focus on the convergence of narrative and analysis, in its goal of speaking to broader audiences beyond the academy, in its standard of authenticity rather than reliability and validity, and in its explicit recognition of the use of the self as the primary research instrument for documenting and interpreting the perspectives and experiences of the people and the cultures being studied. (p. 13)

Context plays a critical role in portraiture. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis addressed several ways that the portraitist makes use of the context to create a rigorous portrait. First, the portraitist vividly details the setting: “The description works from the outermost circle inward, macro to micro, large to small, backdrop to foreground, general to specific, public to private” (1997, p. 44). The setting is also complemented by the researcher’s “perch”: “The portraitist is clear: from where I sit, this is what I see; these are the perspectives and biases I bring; this is the scene I select; this is how people seem to be responding to my presence” (p. 50). The portraitist also uses metaphors, which serve as overarching themes and undercurrents that resonate throughout the portrait (p. 55).

In the cross-case analysis in chapter five, I extracted the common themes I found in the three case studies presented in chapter four, and using those themes, I suggested the elements of a “good tefilla program” for Jewish pluralistic high schools. My definition of “good” was heavily influenced by *The Good High School* (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983). In this research, she profiled six “good” high schools, and then

synthesized all six cases into common themes of “goodness” in high schools. I used the same process, but for tefilla.

Goodness Defined

Lawrence-Lightfoot first clarified that goodness cannot be reduced to simple statistics such as attendance records or numbers of graduates attending college. This means that goodness in tefilla programs cannot be reduced to the number of students coming on time to tefilla, the rate of student attendance at synagogue services, or the number of students who choose to attend a traditional service over an alternative service, for example. Instead, Lawrence-Lightfoot (1983) wrote, “‘Goodness’ is a much more complicated notion that refers to what some social scientists describe as the school’s ‘ethos,’ not discrete additive elements” (p. 23). She wrote that “it also encompasses less tangible, more elusive qualities that can only be discerned through close, vivid description, through subtle nuances, through detailed narratives that reveal the sustaining values of an institution” (p. 23).

Lawrence-Lightfoot suggested goodness has four key elements. Goodness is (a) a complicated notion; (b) situationally determined; (c) imperfect and changing and; (d) a holistic concept (1983, pp. 23-25). For example, two tefilla programs could be equally mediocre, but one has remained mediocre for years while the other has transformed itself from terrible beginnings to mediocrity; only the second tefilla program would be classified as good. In comparing the two tefilla programs, Lawrence-Lightfoot would look at each school’s collective assumptions, group norms, and the history and evolution of its ideals and norms. Ultimately, Lawrence-Lightfoot referred to goodness as a “a

complex mixture of variables whose expression can only be recognized through a detailed narrative of institutional and interpersonal processes” (p. 25).

Thus, using Lawrence-Lightfoot’s more holistic and less absolutist definition of goodness in schools, I develop a cross-case analysis of the three case study narratives: a mosaic mural at Hebrew High School, a Jackson Pollock abstract impressionist bench at New Jew, and a minimalist architectural structure at Jewish Academy, all metaphors for the three tefilla programs I observed in my research. Despite their differences, common themes emerged when comparing these programs. It would be folly for me to suggest one paradigmatic tefilla program from just these three case studies; however, I do think that certain common elements emerged which any Jewish pluralistic high school can use in their quest to create a good tefilla program. Thus, while I cannot generalize from these three cases, a cross-case analysis uncovered organizational themes that may inform practitioners who want to create good tefilla programs, and researchers who want to explore the disciplined study of good tefilla programs in pluralistic Jewish high schools.

Trustworthiness

To add to the trustworthiness of the study, I needed to establish the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability in order to create the necessary rigor and quality of my research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

To confirm credibility of the findings, I triangulated data from interviews, observations, and artifacts. Peer debriefing of observations, interview protocols, and site visits were conducted. I utilized purposive sampling, which is the intentional selection of participants for a study that increases transferability (Creswell, 2004). Improving “contextual similarity” (Creswell, 2004, p. 298) “through these parameters will allow

others to make ties to their own situation and reality” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 202).

Dependability calls upon “...the researcher to attempt to account for the changing conditions in the phenomenon chosen for study and changes in the design created by an increasingly refined understanding of the setting” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 203). In order to increase the reliability of the information in my case studies, I maintained a chain of evidence in all the data I collected. Observing changes, collecting the data, and documenting, organizing, and theorizing about the data increases the naturalist’s view of external reliability, known as dependability.

Confirmability was achieved through the use of triangulation among data collected from audio recordings of interviews, field notes from observations, and analysis of artifacts collected at the school sites. Transcription of oral text and field notes further confirmed the researcher’s objectivity.

As recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985), I maintained a reflexive journal. This 38-page typed and 50-page written journal included notes regarding my observation schedule and logistics of the study; comments that I wrote down during interviews and observations; a personal diary where I reflected upon my observations, values, and interests, and speculated about growing insights; and notes regarding themes that emerged during the analytical stage of my research. My reflexive journal also served as a means of establishing trustworthiness by making available “the same kind of data about the human instrument that is often provided about the paper-and-pencil or brass instruments used in conventional studies,” as well as a tool designed to persistently confront my role as a research instrument (p. 327).

Limitations

One limitation of my research methodology was the scope of the study. The research may have been more rigorous if I had studied a larger number of schools. Along those lines, my research time in the schools was limited to 1 or 2 days. A more robust case could have been built if more time was allowed to profile the schools. Finally, I did not return to the schools for a follow-up visit, and perhaps the study would be more potent if the schools were followed over time.

Another possible limitation was the amount of data collected and how it was analyzed. With over 30 hours of interviews, it is possible that revisiting the data at another time would reveal issues that I did not originally find, stories that I should have told that I chose to edit out, and themes that initially did not emerge. Another way of looking at this is that there are often several different ways to present the same set of issues, and another researcher might have come to different conclusions than I did with the same set of data.

It is also important to note that by definition, case studies can make no claims of generalizability. I have no way of empirically knowing to what extent the three schools I observed are similar or different from other Jewish schools around the world. Furthermore, because the sample is small, there is no way to establish the probability that the data are representative of some larger population. For many researchers and others, this may be a limitation of my findings.

A key determinant of the quality of a piece of case study research is the quality of the insights and thinking brought to bear by the particular researcher. The research is not, and cannot be, completely objective. I tried to present adequate evidence from the data

and existing research to support the narratives and findings, but a certain amount has to be taken on trust. For some researchers, this may be another limitation of my research.

Delimitations

There are many types of Jewish schools, such as Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform. I only studied non-denominational, pluralistic Jewish schools. In this dissertation, I refer to such schools as “Jewish community schools.” I chose to study only these schools because they are the ones I work in; therefore, this study had the most impact on my own career.

The research sites were three Jewish community high schools within driving distance of each other in the Western United States. This particular location was selected because it was in reasonable, physical proximity to myself as the researcher, I had access to the schools because I was a colleague with the people in charge of these schools, and I knew they offered good examples of non-traditional prayer programs.

Role of the Researcher

“Research designs should include reflection on one’s identity and one’s sense of voice and perspectives, assumptions, and sensitivities,” wrote Marshall and Rossman (2011, p. 96). They stated that when biases are out in the open, “they are more manageable and the reader of the final report can assess how those elements of identity affected the study” (p. 97); moreover, of the four characteristics of qualitative researchers that Marshall and Rossman identified, two of them dealt with personal biography: “The qualitative researcher systematically reflects on who she is in the inquiry,” and “is sensitive to his personal biography and how it shapes the study” (p. 3); thus, this section details my personal role in this research project.

I grew up in Louisville, Kentucky. My parents were proud of being Jewish and instilled that pride in me. We celebrated Chanukah by lighting candles, went to synagogue on Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur, celebrated a large Passover seder, belonged to the JCC, and ate “Jewish food” like lox and bagels, deli sandwiches, and chicken soup with matza balls. We did not go out of our way to eat non-Kosher food, but ritual observance was not a great emphasis growing up.

Although I did not go to a Jewish school—from preschool through high school I attended independent schools—I did have a Bar Mitzvah at the Conservative synagogue we belonged to, and in preparation for that I attended Hebrew school and Sunday school for a couple of years, in addition to having private lessons with the Cantor. I recall being very proud of becoming a Bar Mitzvah, but my formal Jewish education ended afterwards.

In high school I experimented with different forms of spirituality. One phase I went through involved studying and practicing Buddhism. At that point, Judaism was not even on my radar as a form of spirituality or as a mode of providing me with any meaning or guidance in life. All it meant for me at the time was ancient prayers and rituals that were entirely irrelevant.

I was fiercely independent, and almost took pride in being rebellious. Henry David Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Alan Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, Herman Hesse’s Siddhartha, and Holden Caulfield were my idols. If my teachers told me to do one thing, I typically would do the other. In retrospect, I probably worshipped my own individuality more than anything else. I tended to reject anything which was imposed upon me.

Things changed when I travelled to Israel for the first time. I had dropped out of

my freshman year of college in order to travel and “find myself.” My parents insisted that I stay connected to university life in some way, hoping that I would return to my studies, so they offered to send me to Israel to learn Hebrew and work on a Kibbutz (a Jewish commune of sorts). I took them up on their offer, and was off to Israel. I never really came back.

I have tried to explain my attraction to Israel before, and I never quite have the words. The closest thing I can relate it to is falling in love. How do you explain love? How do you rationalize it? I really do not know why or how, but when I went to the Western Wall in Jerusalem for the first time, I knew I was home. I never had much Jewish education, never went to a Jewish school, was raised fairly secular, and did not have much Zionist upbringing. Yet I knew, in a sort of irrational way like when you have a crush on someone, that Israel was my home.

With a 2-year break to return to the United States to earn my bachelor’s degree, I stayed in Israel for the next 7 years. Initially, I was an ardent secular Zionist. My dream was to become the next David ben Gurion. I enrolled at the university in Jerusalem, and made *aliyah* (immigrated to Israel). I joined the Israeli army, learned Hebrew, and lived and worked among Israelis.

Gradually, though, the secular Zionism grew empty, and my old cravings for spirituality crept back. I began to inquire about classes in Judaism, and some of my friends had taken classes at a non-denominational yeshiva (Jewish seminary) called the Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies. I would spend the next 3 years of my life there, immersing myself in Torah and Talmud, and learning about Judaism, prayer, and spirituality. I became more and more observant of Jewish ritual, and came to appreciate

tefilla and prayed daily. Prior to coming to Pardes, I do not recall ever in my life praying. I may have read the prayers for my Bar Mitzvah, but that was a rote recitation of words, not prayer.

I had a steep learning curve at Pardes. I came in with virtually nothing in terms of a formal Jewish education, and I took in massive amounts of information. I enjoyed it tremendously. I found meaning within Judaism that I had no idea existed outside of Buddhism. I found a community of searchers and seekers. Eventually, I would become so enamored with learning about and practicing Judaism that I would become a rabbi ordained by the director of Pardes.

In order to be closer to family, I returned to America after I married and started having children. Since the year 2001, I have worked in pluralistic Jewish schools as a teacher of Jewish texts. I also led high school tefilla groups, and eventually rose to the rank of an administrator and became the person responsible for Jewish life, informal education programming, tefilla, holidays, Jewish studies curriculum, and supervision of teachers. This is where I learned of the great struggles that Jewish educators across the nation were having engaging students with Judaism, and in particular tefilla. Routinely, Jewish educators complained the most about tefilla, more than any other aspect of Jewish schooling.

At a certain point in my career, I came to the realization that forcing students to pray was only serving to alienate the students even further away from Judaism. I became interested in exploring alternative ways to engage my students and began experimenting with different tefilla models. Over the years, I tried offering different non-traditional options to my students, such as yoga and meditation. I tried different methods

of teaching tefilla. I experimented with empowering the students to have them create their own tefilla program. I had endless debates with my colleagues and supervisors over what the goals of the tefilla program should be, whether it should be proficiency in traditional prayer or whether alternative modes of spirituality were acceptable for students to explore and choose as a Jewish commitment. I wondered if it was acceptable for students to opt out of prayer entirely.

Initially when I began my career in Jewish education, I felt an obligation to teach my students about traditional Jewish prayer, and at one point even thought a goal should be to have students increase their observance of Jewish rituals like tefilla. Since my colleagues and I were butting our heads up against this seemingly no-win challenge of engaging our students in tefilla, I began to think of how I could approach it differently. I eventually fell back on my own childhood experiences described previously and began to think about how the students were feeling. I started to think of the tefilla conundrum from the students' perspective, how it could be made more interesting and relevant to them, and whether it was an appropriate goal to have students become proficient in prayer even at the expense of their enjoying it.

Writing the above auto-biography impacted how I conducted my research. I became more in tune with what my biases were, how they influenced my research, and what I could do to overcome those biases. One of the main biases I still hold is my own identity as an avowedly postmodern Jew. I believe that there is a disconnect between the older Jewish establishment and the younger Jews of Generation X and Y. I identify with this younger generation, and this has influenced my beliefs about how they should be engaged. I know that one of my agendas is to more successfully reach young postmodern

Jews in ways that I wish I had been, but was not.

Another bias I hold is that I am a current Jewish educator in a Jewish community school. I know from the inside what it is like to work as a teacher of these postmodern young Jews against the backdrop of a larger culture that often does not think in a postmodern lens. My own struggles with being counter-cultural in schools as a student, and as a teacher and administrator trying to change the old ways of approaching Jews and Judaism, is fresh in my memory, and a part of my current reality. I realize that as a practitioner, I want to change the cultures in Jewish community schools to be better attuned to the postmodern young generation. I suspect my identity had implications for the style, content, and manner in which the study participants shared and communicated with me, as well as how I communicated with them.

Along those lines, the factors that I wanted to study were the ones that I wanted to see changed in schools. I understand that this may have influenced how I interacted with the school members I encountered when I observed and interviewed them. As Lawrence-Lightfoot wrote about the interventionist nature of anthropological approaches, the participants in her study “appeared to feel supported and invigorated by the focused attention” (1983, p. 371).

To the best of my knowledge, I did not omit any interviewees or groups from those that I interviewed based upon bias. I also did not target anyone because I felt they would support my own biases. I was aware of reducing any procedural bias by giving respondents as much time as they needed to answer my questions, and giving them the opportunity to continue talking to me at a later date.

In qualitative research, subjects are often reluctant to give socially unacceptable answers for fear of being judged; therefore, interviewer bias was something I needed to be aware of at all times, since my data was so rich with interviews. I was aware of the possibility that I might subconsciously give subtle clues to what answers I preferred via my body language or tone of voice. I attempted to avoid that situation by phrasing the questions using neutral language that would not suggest any of my own biases.

Researcher bias is unavoidable, which is why it is so important, especially in qualitative studies, to identify biases and how they may jeopardize impartiality. I hope that by understanding and articulating my biases, I helped minimize their effects.

Summary

This qualitative study described and analyzed prayer programs in Jewish community high schools. Site observations, interviews with students, faculty, and administration, as well as data collected from sources such as school websites and marketing materials were used to create narrative portraits of the schools' tefilla programs in chapter four and a cross-case analysis of the programs using the portraiture methodology of Sarah Lawrence-Lightfoot in chapter five. Marshall and Rossman's seven phases for analytical procedures guided the research analysis, and Barry Chazan's philosophy of Informal Jewish Education was used as an interpretive framework for analyzing the case studies. Finally, I offer conclusions and implications for practice and research in chapter six.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY: NARRATIVE PORTRAITS

This chapter describes the tefilla programs at three pluralistic Jewish high schools, each presented one after another. When beginning my analysis, I started by organizing my data. I took all of the transcripts from my interviews and focus groups and all of the printed materials, and thumb-tacked them up on an empty wall in my office. This allowed me to have all of my data accessible and easily retrievable. As I organized my data, I immersed myself in it; I read and re-read though the data to become intimate with it.

Next I streamlined and reduced the amount of data. I then read through each interview and relevant document I had in my possession and coded them in the margins. I searched for themes in the interviews and began to pay attention to the ways in which my codes clustered together.

Once all of the data were coded, I transcribed the codes onto a white board. I then looked at the large puzzle of codes and began to cluster smaller, related themes together into larger meta-themes and patterns. These became the section headings for each of my case studies, such as “empowerment” and “pluralism.”

Throughout this process, I wrote analytic memos about thoughts that arose as I sifted through the data and codes; for example, this is the stage in which the thematic metaphors of artwork began to emerge. Once I had the largest, most central themes of each school identified, I then proceeded to write each narrative. I utilized all of the data at my disposal, including interviews, focus groups, newsletters, websites, and my reflexive journal.

After I finished a draft of each school's narrative, I went back to the white board and began again the process of looking for cross-case themes. For example, one that clearly and quickly emerged was that my interview participants wanted school tefilla to resemble camp tefilla. From this insight, I searched for an appropriate interpretive analytical framework and found Chazan's informal Jewish education framework.

Finally, after the categories and themes were developed and the narratives were written, I began to offer my own integrative interpretations and conclusions of what I learned by utilizing Marshall and Rossman's process to bring "meaning and coherence to the themes, patterns, and categories, developing linkages and a story line that makes sense and is engaging to read" (Marshall and Rossman, 2011, p. 219). The results of these insights largely appear in chapters five and six.

In each narrative portrait that follows, I first identify an overarching metaphor for the school's tefilla program. I did not enter the schools with this in mind, but once I started coding my data, the metaphor of artwork jumped out to describe all three schools. Besides giving the reader a good way to digest each narrative, the use of these artistic metaphors allowed for an easier cross-case analysis.

The first school I describe, the New Jewish Community High School of Los Angeles, is symbolized by the Jackson Pollock-style bench I saw upon entering the school, which represents that school's "abstract impressionist approach" that will be described. Hebrew High School portrayed itself as a mosaic in its marketing literature and that turned out to be a fitting metaphor for the school. The final school I describe is Jewish Academy, whose Director of Jewish Studies used the term minimalist in describing the school's tefilla space. I found the symbolism of the minimalist style of

architecture aptly described that school's whole program. While on the one hand the metaphors serve to unify each portrait and allow the reader an easier way of differentiating between the three, they also show that there are many different ways of crafting a good tefilla program.

New Jewish Community High School: An Abstract Expressionist Painting

Six benches sat in front of the main modular of the New Jewish Community High School of Los Angeles ("New Jew," as they call themselves). Each graduating senior class had decorated and donated a bench and one in particular struck my attention. This splatter-painted bench reminded me of a Jackson Pollock painting. The words those seniors chose to write on their bench were especially meaningful and symbolic: "It might be messy but we always had fun."

On the surface, the words could simply refer to the messy fun that the students had in painting the bench. Looking a little deeper, the students might also have been describing their time at New Jew. This bench, so reminiscent of Pollock's style, could be classified as "abstract expressionism." In contrast to the static realism that preceded this form of art, the style of abstract expressionism exuded individualism and spontaneous improvisation. Abstract expressionism was less of an art form and more of a philosophy rooted in freedom of expression and personal and communal identities which were raw, unshaped, free flowing, and ever-changing.

This art form aptly described the identities of the postmodern teenagers that I met at New Jew. In fact, more than one person I interviewed made the same analogy between art and prayer: in order to be spontaneous does one first need to learn and practice by rote? Should a teacher of a teenage Jackson Pollock force him to practice still lifes and

realism? In order to be extemporaneously spiritual does one first need to learn and practice traditional prayer?

The remainder of this portrait will look at the various individual colors used to make up the larger abstract expressionist painting of the New Jew tefilla program, the artists themselves, their artistic vision, the process they used to create their product, as well as an analysis of the overall artistic effect they created.

Running after Yonatan Rosner, Director of Tefilla

On November 4, 2010, I followed the GPS in my rental car to New Jew for the first morning of my 2-day visit. As I was walking in to the front office, the secretary arrived at the same time and greeted me by name without even knowing me. I felt welcomed. She escorted me to the roughly 50 feet long by 15 feet wide rectangular faculty work area. I immediately noticed a very long extension of desks along both lengthy walls of the rectangle, and in the middle of the room sat more long desks that spanned the distance of the room. Each teacher had a little work area with a computer. There was no privacy in these very tight teachers' quarters—I estimate around 70 teachers shared this one work room.

As I walked in, Yonatan Rosner jumped up and quickly greeted me and said, politely with a smile, “Welcome! Would you mind waiting while I finish up something?” Rosner directed the tefilla program at New Jew, and arranged my visit. I told him that I was happy to wait, and I sat down at an empty teacher's desk in the faculty room. I peeked at what Rosner was doing and could not help eavesdropping due to the close quarters: he was teaching Torah to a fellow faculty member. Perhaps they were building a curriculum together, or the teacher just wanted to learn Torah. Regardless, this was an

example of the collegiality and mutual learning between teachers that I would find commonplace at New Jew. Whenever I walked into the teacher's workroom, I frequently witnessed collaboration, integration, and lesson planning between faculty members.

Later that day, I asked a secretary to introduce me to the principal, Ellen Howard. She told me that Howard did not have an office—she sat in back with the other teachers in the teacher workroom. At first I felt confused why the principal did not have an office, but then I figured out that she had the same tiny desk space in the cramped faculty workroom as every other teacher. As principal, she easily could have procured an office (others who did not have her position in the school had offices) but instead she told me that she opted to sit with her teachers. This spoke volumes about her leadership style and the general atmosphere of the school.

When Rosner was done instructing the other teacher, he came over to me. There was not much chit chat—he was courteous but his demeanor suggested he was in a hurry. He gave me my schedule, and then I was running after him to his first class of the day. He was teaching the student leadership team of the Tefilla Kehilla Institute, a student-led program Rosner created which designed and ran all tefilla at the school.

Description of the Tefilla Kehilla Institute

Tefilla at New Jew is entirely student-led. Rosner invites approximately 20 student leaders each year to join the Tefilla Kehilla Institute (TKI), which plans all tefilla for the entire student body of approximately 400 students in grades 9-12. These TKI students take Rosner's special course in leadership training and Judaic Studies, where they also learn about the content, skills, and spirituality of Jewish prayer. With input

from the rest of the student body and under the guidance of Rosner, the students create and lead one 30-40 minute creative tefilla service every other week for the school.

I observed TKI lead a tefilla session for one of their feeder Jewish middle schools in the area. While the TKI students normally lead their own high school peers, this was a special occasion designed to recruit middle school students to New Jew. Nonetheless, Rosner said that what I saw was representative of the philosophy, planning, and execution of a typical TKI tefilla service.

Once the students arrived at the middle school, they proceeded to the designated prayer space and started setting up. New Jew took over the whole room as their own—it reminded me of a reality TV show where the experts come in and speedily remake a home in need of repairs before the owner returns. The crew of New Jew TKI students (they call themselves “TKIers”) and faculty, all in matching maroon school t-shirts, started moving the chairs, set up their keyboards and percussion instruments, placed microphones up front, and erected the screen and laptop for a PowerPoint presentation.

Rosner brought a couple of video recorders along to videotape the event. He told me he shows the videos to his students afterwards to help them assess how the sessions go, and they also use the images for marketing purposes. Rosner asked me to videotape for them, and I did—it actually gave me unparalleled access to walk around during the session and observe. Rosner had me videotape the audience while he asked another teacher to videotape the TKIers only. Easily five cameras from both schools were recording this anticipated event.

Just as the middle school students started walking in, the TKIers started drumming and playing background music. A senior stood up front at the microphone and

welcomed everyone in with a wide smile. Once everyone had filed in, the TKIers stopped playing their instruments and a hush fell over the crowd. All of a sudden, the music picked up again and they started in full force singing and playing the upbeat *Oseh Shalom Bimromav* (Make Peace on High). The students toyed a little bit with the traditional wording of this prayer by inserting the names of their school and the middle school into it. They also sang one refrain and asked the audience to sing another part back, which they were more than willing to do. It appeared well orchestrated, and the music was catchy and fun.

Before each song or prayer, the students would briefly introduce its meaning. On a screen in the background was a PowerPoint of the order of the service and the words of every song or prayer, and the students also announced the page numbers from the prayer book that they put on each seat. The service had the structure of the traditional Friday night Kabbalat Shabbat (Welcoming the Sabbath) service, and included prayers like *Mizmor Shir l'Yom haShabbat* and *Lecha Dodi*. They abbreviated the service and took creative liberty with other parts by inserting songs not normally sung during this service. They chose familiar synagogue tunes that the students were likely to know, as evidenced by almost everyone in the audience singing along.

In the middle of the service, the TKIers engaged the middle schoolers in an interactive discussion on *Parshat HaShavua* (the weekly Torah portion) which, that week, focused on brothers Jacob and Esau. The students retold the story and then asked questions of the audience about the story's theme of sibling rivalry, which started a lively conversation. The middle school students shared instances from their own lives when they fought with siblings or friends. The high school students asked the eighth graders in

the room to share how they solved such problems. Some of the responses included not avoiding the problem but confronting it head on. Another student suggested doing something fun to get his mind off the fight. Another said to be the bigger person, and not retaliate but walk away.

Then New Jew led the Shma (the central credo of monotheism in Judaism) in sign language and shared what they had learned about that prayer. One TKIer explained,

We looked at the difference between listening and hearing (the Hebrew word Shma has both connotations)...Is there a difference between the two? One would think that they are the same. But they are so very different. To listen is the key to success in your lives. Don't just hear, but listen, and take in what is being heard and make it your own. It's like the difference between knowing and understanding. Hearing is like knowing, of just simple awareness. You've got to strive for understanding. This is what will mold you into an A+ human being, like we say at New Jew. The first step to becoming a leader is to listen to those around you.

This message was one that would repeat itself many times during my visit.

Afterwards, the high school students led the group in the remaining part of the service, which was all singing. They did standard prayers and songs such as *V'ahavta*, *V'shamru*, and *Hinei Mah Tov*. They handed out percussion instruments to the middle school students to accompany the singing, and I saw that they enjoyed playing along. The final prayer during the service portion of the session was Aleinu, sung in the traditional synagogue melody.

When the service was over, the students ended with an enthusiastic group shout of “We are New Jew!” The students then initiated a question and answer session, and in particular asked if the eighth graders had any questions about New Jew. The goal of their visit was not only to lead the middle school in tefilla; it was also a recruiting effort. New Jew had all of their key administrators in attendance, including Head of School Dr. Bruce Powell, principal Ellen Howard, Rabbi David Vorspan, Dean of Academic Affairs Dr. Marc Linder, and Yonatan Rosner.

When a middle schooler asked what it was like at New Jew, one of the TKIers told the story of New Jew that Dr. Powell would later emphasize to me so much in our interview. The student said how important it was to be an A+ human being (which was a term coined by Dr. Powell, meaning that it is important not only to get an A+ in classes, but also in life). The student also mentioned how important it was at New Jew to increase their circle of friends—to venture out of small cliques, be accepting of all people, and expand their community. She also mentioned learning about “wisdom” and not just simple knowledge at New Jew.

They closed the question and answer session with one last traditional Shabbat song, *Shalom Aleichem*. Rosner had arranged for his students to stay afterwards and shake hands and work the crowd. This was a skill that I saw him explicitly teach his students earlier that morning. He taught them how important it was to make this experience as personal as possible, and both he and the students spent time afterwards talking individually to as many students and teachers as time allowed.

Genesis of TKI

The TKI tefilla program rose in response to numerous intrinsic problems that

Rosner and his team identified with creating communal tefilla in Jewish community high schools. In an article co-published with the school's Director of Jewish Studies Rabbi Tzafi Lev, they called tefilla in pluralistic schools a "polite, well-intentioned tangle of different customs, divergent expectations, decidedly real impediments of faith, and a paradoxical hope that everybody in the room will be able to balance equal measures of both individuality and belonging" (Rosner & Lev, 2010, p. 34). Rosner and Lev pointed to something they called "the high hurdle of requirement" (p. 34), in which they determined it was an unrealistic and unfair expectation that schools obligate students in prayer while adults can opt out entirely from praying. They write, "The school setting does not allow for the central choice which makes 'adult' synagogues work, the choice to attend or not attend" (p. 34).

In preparation for their article, Rosner polled students at New Jew regarding their expectations of tefilla. He found that their three most central hopes were to (a) make a connection to God, (b) self-reflect, and (c) build community. In response to the students' hope of making a connection with God, Rosner and Lev asked, "If the individual cannot will a Godly moment, can we expect to purposefully contrive such a moment for a collective" (2010, p. 34)? Regarding the second expectation, they wrote that it is hard to program for because "self-reflection seems antithetical to the communal experience...and the unlikely nature of meaningful 'self-time' while surrounded by others" (p. 34). Rosner acknowledged that the third goal, community, is the easiest to achieve.

Another obstacle Rosner encountered was the environment of the school itself. He tongue-in-cheek commented that Jewish schools typically tell students, "Pencils down...now pray!" In their article, Rosner and Lev explained that "students are expected

to move directly from the cerebral and academic to the soulful at the Pavlovian ring of a bell” (2010, p. 34). On top of these issues, Rosner identified the difficulties of creating prayer in a pluralistic environment with divergent and often opposing views of what constitutes Jewish prayer, as well as different family backgrounds and traditions.

Jared Stein, the music teacher who helped Rosner lead the TKI tefilla sessions, confirmed that the students “were not engaging with tefilla” before TKI. When I pressed him why, he said,

It’s really hard to take yourself out of the test you have the next period. Or what just happened with your friend. Or you have homework to do, and you forgot to do it. And not only that, there’s a culture of talking, and yapping away and not worrying about being disrespectful during tefilla.

I asked him where that culture came from, and he suggested that the students have no routine of praying and a lack of reinforcement, and also “there’s a culture of talking in synagogue that they probably learned from their parents. And so the kids see that and go okay, this is normal to talk in shul (synagogue).” He also pointed to the lack of prayer role models for the students, and that many adults seem to put “more weight” on other things like going to college. He listed other impediments as well: “The tefilla setting is the same place that they have other things, like town meetings or lunch. The timing is off, too—it’s in the middle of the day, and they only get it once every 2 weeks.” It should be noted though that Rosner was grateful more time was allotted to the TKI students’ leadership classes, and he credited that as part of his perceived success of TKI.

In addition to that list of obstacles to tefilla, Stein mentioned,

I just don't think it's easy to engage a young, Jewish American teenager in prayer. It's a hard age. They're dealing with a lot of things, and so there's almost too much going on in their lives and praying is not a priority. Also, how do you teach somebody prayer that hasn't felt the need for it? I mean come on, when I was in high school, I didn't want to go to shul either.

After laying out the problems with prayer, Rosner and Lev asked this question: "Can we carefully craft a prayer service for different daveners (pray-ers) as we would create a single lesson plan to meet the varied needs of our many learners" (2010, p. 34)? The following is New Jew's answer.

All Who Are Hungry, Come and Eat

Rosner modeled TKI after arguably the most child-centered ritual ceremony in Judaism: the Passover seder. Passover is the Jewish holiday celebrating Israel's emancipation from slavery in Egypt. The seder is the ritual home dinner that families conduct to celebrate the holiday. It is rich with symbolic foods such as *matzah*, the unleavened bread symbolizing both slavery—it was the food the slaves ate in Egypt—as well as freedom—it was the food Jews ate because they were in too much of a hurry to let the bread rise as they were escaping slavery.

Children are featured prominently during the seder—the ceremony is built around them and for them. The night before, parents and children often play a hide-and-seek game trying to find *chametz* (leavened bread, which is forbidden during the holiday). During the seder itself, families play a game in which the children have to find a hidden piece of dessert *matzah*; the seder leader uses a question-and-answer format for telling the story of the Exodus, especially designed for children; families sing many child-

friendly songs; and there are plenty of tasty holiday foods and sweets. The children are highly encouraged to ask questions and take an active part in the seder, even to the point of the adults playing tricks on the children to spark their interest.

The aspect of the Passover seder that Rosner used as the basis for his tefilla program was that the *Hagadah* (the ritual prayer book of the seder) declares that families hold a single seder for four different typologies of children: the “wise child,” the “rebellious child,” the “simple child,” and “the child who does not ask questions.” In modern educational terminology, the ancient rabbis created a service using differentiated instruction. Despite the variety of people sitting around the seder table, it was vital to them that everyone sat together, and the service was varied enough so that everyone was able to engage on his or her level. Rosner explained, “The good news is that the same approach that we take with a good seder or with a good classroom lesson also works with tefilla.” In their article, Rosner and Lev summarized this point as follows:

Based on our experimental tefilla program, it has become clear that successful tefilla in the community day school requires consciously including students in creating the expectation you are working toward as well as crafting a purpose-driven multi-modal approach throughout the service. (2010, p. 35)

The wise child from the seder was at the heart of New Jew’s tefilla program. Rosner and Lev wrote, “If you want to educate the wise child, let him or her lead” (2010, p. 35). The wise children were chosen to join the Tefilah Kehilah Institute. They were motivated and proficient students who demonstrated leadership ability, and who agreed to take a special Jewish Studies course that focused on leadership and tefilla. They were taught how to communicate engagingly, how to plan and coordinate a dynamic and

varied 30-40 minute all-school tefilla, how to elicit responses through questions, how to vary tone and use non-verbal communication to engage an audience, how to evaluate the effectiveness of programming, and other relevant knowledge and skills. TKI exposed these student-leaders to a variety of modalities such as music, movement, and technology during their class, which they then use to create different experiences for their classmates in the all-school tefilla sessions they create. Rosner called these students the leaders of the seder, “trying to keep the entire table happy while moving the seder forward” and taking on the responsibility of crafting an engaging tefilla for the different needs of the community.

The “rebellious child” of the Hagadah is one of the four that come to the seder table. These are the ones who talk back, act out, and do not listen. Rosner and Lev wrote that for these students, “the key is engagement. The needs of this student lie not in skill, ability, or proficiency, but rather in a lack of trusting himself to fit in and in so doing not lose his new-found individuality to the group” (Rosner & Lev, 2010, p. 35). TKI students therefore utilized music and singing to engage this wise but skeptical student. This type of student, they wrote, “does not have to confront any of his misgivings about tefilla during such parts of the service, it’s always fun and always light” (p. 35). Every tefilla session at New Jew has such a component that is “primarily communal and only secondarily prayerful,” according to Rosner. He said that “at worst” those are communal moments, and “at best” they are also spiritual.

The third prototypical child from the seder is the simple child, the open but uninitiated student. This student might not have the background to be proficient, but she can and wants to learn. The TKI students who have been given the opportunity to

regularly study tefilla in their special class were tasked with educating these “simple” students. TKIers tried to reach them through explanations during tefilla, question and answer sessions, and stories that TKIers create. For example, during one tefilla session, TKIers asked students to color in the words of the Shma on a page they were provided, while the student leaders taught lessons about the different possible meanings of this central Jewish credo. Over four different student-led tefilla sessions, the Shma portion of the service was taught in four different ways (art, music, meditation, and discussion) to meet the needs of the “simple child.”

The fourth and final prototypical child at the seder table is the one who does not know how to ask, and looks and feels lost. He is not familiar with the outline of the service, the words do not sound familiar to him, and the Hebrew is an impossible obstacle for him at this point. TKI students therefore create and project a PowerPoint outline throughout their services to help students know what is going on and what to expect next. They also project transliteration and lyrics to songs and prayers so that everyone can feel comfortable. The goal is to help the uninitiated student feel adequate and connected to the service.

Rosner and Lev (2010) sum up their approach to tefilla at the end of their article: For Passover, we don’t hold four different seders, we hold one—for everybody. It’s not easy. We ask our students to create services whose modalities shift throughout the tefilla. They have to articulate what their goals are at each step (a Godly moment, a reflective moment, a communal moment). Choices have to be made regarding which modality they should try in reaching that goal (song, art, discussion, chanting), and most importantly for leadership training, TKIers have

in place a lengthy reflective process after every tefilla encounter. *What worked, what didn't, and why?* Our students are fully aware of the challenges that tefilla in a community day school presents. They live it, but they aren't cowed by it. Instead, our students creatively meet the challenges head on. As teachers we support them, teach them, answer questions, and then we take a seat in the pews and *kvel* (are proud). (p. 35)

Empowerment

Thus far, I have painted the larger picture of tefilla at New Jew. As with most paintings in the abstract expressionist or impressionist genre, the viewer gets a broad perspective of the art from a distance. When approaching the artwork closer, it is possible to dissect all of the individual colors and techniques that blend together from a distance. Now, I would like to move in closer and examine specific elements of the tefilla program that so far have been referenced only generally. The biggest brushstroke one can see as I move in closer is empowerment, the single most referenced theme in all of my interviews. Additionally, Rosner listed student empowerment as the number one essential ingredient in the program.

There were several reasons behind their conclusion to turn to an entirely student-run program. For one, they observed that no teacher-led or subject-driven tefilla had worked. Rabbi Lev remembered the failures:

So we had things like choose your own. And then it became too social, because the same groups of kids would go together, and wouldn't pay attention. Or we had them on a minyan rotation. Let's introduce them to all these different minyans, you know, they didn't really pay attention to why because they didn't

want to be there in the first place. Sometimes we would try and have it be on some sort of an educational thing—like, let me explain to you why this should be important to you. Well, you know, the kids who understood already were bored, and the kids who didn't want to pay attention, it didn't work.

In general, the overall culture at New Jew gives the students as much ownership over their school as possible. Lev gave the following example:

We had a parking problem because the school was expanding. We invited the kids to help us figure it out. Certainly the goal, everything else we've done in our school, we have traced back to its involvement with the students. Really what we're doing is finally applying this culture piece of give it to the kids, give them the tools, give them the ownership, support them in making it better, to this last spot, tefilla. We've done it in every classroom, in every club, in every policy, and it was hard for us rabbis to get out of the way on this one (Tefilla).

Rabbi in Residence David Vorspan, the head rabbinic administrator at New Jew, agreed with Lev that the rabbis were unsure about the move to a student-led tefilla program:

I was a little uncertain about that because I'm a rabbi. That's what I'm supposed to do. To get up in front of 400 people and lead the service. I wasn't really quite sure if you took a kid who didn't know, who wasn't able to have the "masterful presence" of a rabbi getting up to do it, how effective were they going to be?

Lev explained the rabbis' initial suspicion of student empowerment further: "Part of that has to do with the particular rabbis that we're talking about. We're used to our synagogues, right? But it turns out that wasn't really working." He was referring to the

decline of the synagogues among young Jews, and referenced a recent Avi Chai report called *Generation of Change: How Leaders in Their Twenties and Thirties Are Reshaping American Jewish Life*, which states,

Institutions that had been in the forefront since the middle decades of the twentieth century are declining in membership and now play a far smaller role than in the recent past...Stalwart Jewish institutions of the past century—synagogues, Federations, Jewish community relations agencies, and mass membership organizations—are encountering difficulties in retaining the allegiance of their supporters and recruiting new ones, prompting concern about their future viability. It appears, though, that a new era has dawned in the history of American Jewish collective arrangements. (Wertheimer, 2010, p. 1)

A longtime congregational pulpit rabbi, Lev commented in response, “It does make me a little sad that synagogues aren’t important.”

Lev had conflicting thoughts on how the Avi Chai findings should impact tefilla at New Jew: “My personal view on this is changing here. I’m still shifting on the mindset from ‘Let’s improve synagogues so that it will be better’ to ‘Maybe [synagogues] are just not as useful, and these kids should be doing something different.’” He commented that in the past, synagogue rabbis could lead congregations simply by being the most learned members of the community. Today though, Lev said that “we put those kind of rabbis where we’re more comfortable with them—back in institutions, so they could teach other rabbis.”

In contrast, Lev felt that successful rabbis and leaders for today’s generation “are influential not because of what they know, they’re influential because of what they do,

and how great a teacher they are and how they relate.” He termed this a “neo-Chasidic revolution.” The Chasidic revolution refers to the 1800s in European Jewish history when power shifted from the elite, learned rabbis to the lay leaders and commoners. Lev was confirming the strength of a student-empowered tefilla program rather than a rabbi- or subject-driven program. He summed up, “Our program is meeting them where they’re at.”

Lev admitted that not only has the Jewish world and the school shifted in that direction, but he himself has made similar personal changes in his own tefilla. This past year he stopped working as a pulpit rabbi for the first time in many years, and commented,

I can’t tell you how wonderful it feels to not have that obligation. The kavanah of my own davening has increased exponentially, to an extent I had forgotten how much I enjoyed it...And I’m not going to shul as often. But I’m davening with smoother regularity and with greater intention than ever before.

Rosner subscribed to the student-empowerment model of tefilla as well, but for different reasons than Lev. Rosner is an Israeli who rose to the rank of an officer in the Israeli army, and was heavily influenced by the leadership-training approach of his officer training academy. He described the Israeli army’s approach as choosing a highly capable group of soldiers, and investing much time and energy in training them to be leaders. Beyond regular battle skills, these officer-in-training also learned how to succeed under pressure, the importance of integrity, how to lead others who do not want to be led, the history of Israel and the Israeli army, how to plan and strategize, how to communicate effectively, how to organize, and so on. This tremendous investment in a

core leadership group who would be capable of leading other soldiers is a critical component of the success of the Israeli army, Rosner said. These invested, empowered and highly trained leaders then go and lead the army, and succeed because they are given the skills and confidence to do so. These are the wise children of the seder table, according to Rosner.

The success of the army's empowerment and leadership training model directly influenced how Rosner crafted TKI. He created a "tefilla officer training program," and Rosner was now teaching his own students all of those skills listed above that he learned in officer training school. Rosner was the general of his tefilla army, his TKI students were his officers, and the rest of the students in the school were the regular army soldiers.

The Israeli army teaches its officers the mentality of *acharai* (after me!) One of the core values of being an officer is leading others into battle—the officer goes first and leads the way. Rosner empowered his students to feel the same way—to lead their peers and take ownership over the program and the leadership of the school. The TKI students expressed this to me during my focus group with them. One student suggested that they make better use of the classrooms during their tefilla sessions and said, "So I'll email Dr. Powell (the Head of School) about it and tell him we need the classrooms," as if the student were the head of school. At another point, the TKIers were discussing whether they needed teachers at all to help them lead some small group sessions they were planning. One student opined, "I don't think a teacher should be involved in the groups though." They proceeded to agree that if they have these breakout sessions that a teacher was not necessary. The feeling of student empowerment in the room was palpable.

The TKIers clearly felt empowered, but this also led them to feel frustrated that the school did not always let them do as they pleased. One student complained,

I feel like we need to just—us as the class—need to be able to just plan around tefilla without, I don't want to say without teacher input, but...I had a plan last year, and it was a really good idea. And it was changed significantly by the teachers. Like it went from this whole big discussion to let's just do prayer. So I feel like we need to be able to express ourselves and do what we want to do more than just being told like, "Okay, well, you should just add prayer because." Well, we should be able to do it however we want.

Another student concurred,

Yeah, so adding on to what she said, I think we should do less of teacher input and more of our input instead of just a teacher telling us, okay, you do this, you do this, you do this, even though we don't have as much education, we don't have as much experience, but what we have that they don't is relationships with other students. And I think that that is so much more powerful.

The students argued that they had just as much potential to lead tefilla as any adult at the school did:

I think it's not just about having knowledge, but you know, we can be taught knowledge, too. That's what this class is all about. Being taught about prayer and how to lead and do tefilla so the rest of the school wants to do it. That's the whole point, for us to lead and not the teachers.

One of the students in the room listening to this exchange commented, “The students here are very vocal, if you haven’t noticed yet.” The room erupted in good-natured laughter. After the laughter subsided, another student continued:

So we students are able to get a discussion going with the other students, and then after that it just takes off. We lead our own tefilla sessions. Nobody paid attention to anybody else who was teaching them before us, not the rabbis or anyone. But we got a discussion going, everybody’s hand was raising, everybody was saying things. Students will be participating. The students will bring up their ideas. And their questions will be answered, and it will pertain to them. And so they’ll listen. To us.

The TKIers also understood the importance of getting their peers to feel just as empowered as they felt by soliciting their friends’ input. They realized that without their peers feeling as much ownership as they did, the TKI tefilla sessions would not succeed. One student described how they tackled this:

One thing that we do is we send out an email asking what the kids would want to do. Make it more like interesting for them, but a lot of times even that they won’t do. They don’t respond, and I think a way that we can make it like really personal for them is if we ask them in person and if we show it later, like in our tefilla service, and they see what they said was taken into account and actually used. They would enjoy it a lot more and have more respect for us trying to make it easy for them.

The focus group respondents seemed to intuit that the more students they involved and the more they spread the ownership of the program, the more successful it would be.

One student noted,

I think it's really helpful when we get other students that aren't in TKI involved.

Like when we led our tefilla session we had kids in our grade that weren't in TKI and they said things. And I realized that when they went up, everybody paid attention to them. Because it's someone different. Someone they haven't seen up there.

When I asked how she went about getting other students involved she responded, "I just asked them. They're my friends. If you ask, half my friends would be dying to like go on stage, have all the attention in the world." The group laughed in agreement at this comment. Another TKIer said,

Last year, we did one with one of the clubs at our school, and that went over really well. And it's getting other people besides just the same five people.

Because once you get more people involved, more people will pay attention, and it's, basically, involvement equals success.

This empowerment model at New Jew stemmed from Dr. Powell creating a culture of empowerment among his teachers. Rabbi Lev declared that "the school culture comes first and foremost from Bruce [Powell]. But we now own it. Like he's created a culture and invested you with it." I observed that Powell empowered the administrators, the administrators empowered the teachers, and the teachers empowered the students. Rosner concurred: "Bruce lets us be in charge. So he's done the same thing that we're

doing with the kids. That's what we do across the board. Across the board." The theme of empowerment permeated the school, and drove New Jew's tefilla program.

Community

After student empowerment, Rosner identified the value of community as the second most critical ingredient of the tefilla program. Rosner's Israeli army background again influenced the centrality of community in his tefilla program. Israel is a melting pot—Jews from around the world (Russian, Ethiopian, Yemenite, native Israeli, American, etc.) live there, and almost all join the army. It has always been the way that Israel created a unified, cohesive Jewish community. Beyond bringing all elements of society together and uniting them with mutual goals and a clear mission, the army also forces them to work together for their common good. Additionally, the army teaches every citizen common values essential for creating the country's ethos, such as being ready to succeed with the resources at one's disposal, no matter how scarce they may be; and that failure is not an option. I heard Rosner apply these Israeli values that he learned in the army to his tefilla program, such as when he said, "There is no other way but success," and that his goal was to "win the war." He immediately realized that "war" may not have been the term he wanted to use in a school tefilla setting, but the army imagery he used was vivid and clear.

Rosner's choice of the Passover seder analogy was not coincidental either. It stressed the importance of community: regardless of differences, everyone comes together and sits around the same seder table. He explicitly did not choose the multiple minyan model found at many other schools where an array of minyan options are offered to students. He said it would be like at Passover telling all the wise children to sit at one

table, all the rebellious children to sit at another table, and so on. Thus, *klal Yisrael* (the Hebrew term for the united community of Jews) was an explicit goal for Rosner's tefilla program.

The TKIers weighed in on the multiple minyan model. Their conversation centered on whether they were losing out on something by having tefilla with a group of 400 students in one room. A student recalled when the seniors had a successful tefilla session by themselves, apart from the larger community:

The seniors last year, as one of their last senior programs, wrote prayers. We could do a "write your own tefilla" session in mentor groups, write your own prayer tefilla service, and I think that would work really well. But you can't do something like that in a room full of 400 people because it's not the same personal connection.

No student advocated for a multiple minyan model, but many suggested that within the existing TKI context to do some smaller breakout sessions. The students did not feel the personal connection could be made as easily or frequently in the all-school tefilla sessions.

The students described the larger school culture as unified and cohesive, despite it being a pluralistic community with so many types of Jews represented. As one student explained,

Coming into this school, there is nowhere on an application that asks if you're Jewish. There is nowhere that asks if you're Reform, or Conservative. No one knows. You could be anyone. There are some people who are more Conservative

and some that are more Reform, and nobody really cares. And, we all believe in the same morals for the most part. So, we just all kind of come together for that.

This was an overarching theme I heard for what brought this community together: common values. The students were unanimous in the belief that being a good person was the foundation of the New Jew community. I did not hear them focus on overcoming differences, only on shared similarities. One student explained the school culture like this:

This school really teaches us how to be good people and how to accept people. And that's one of the morals of this school. Dr. Powell talks to us a lot about that, about accepting everybody. So I guess that's how it happens because in this school we're taught that we should accept people even if we don't have the same beliefs, and everybody is their own person. That's how we've been able to maintain about how there's all different sects here, but we're always open to other people.

The students characterized their school as a pluralistic community, but again did not focus on differences at all. Instead, they defined pluralism as “encompassing everybody, encompassing all beliefs” and “kind of encompassing all sects of Judaism.” They consistently focused on their shared voices.

A student identified the school's goal as one of acceptance, which she defined as follows:

All the people here just want other people to do what's right for them, because we all want each other to be happy. So I guess everyone just respects that

everybody needs to do what they need to do in order for them to be the best person that they could be.

Another student shared similar comments about the accepting nature of the community, stating,

I think, mainly it's just the notion that people want to be accepted on who they are and what they do. And it's not necessarily based off belief and practice, because that's something that might happen in an Orthodox school, but at least compared to the other schools I've been to, nobody here really cared if you were Reform, Conservative. But honestly here it's more that they really teach us how to accept people. And, with accepting people for who they are, it's accepting people for their beliefs, and everything about them.

Regarding how the different denominations felt at the school, one student said, Well, our school is very good at respecting Jewish beliefs. I have a friend who is Orthodox. So, she can't do work on the weekends. So, it's very accepting of being able to do your own thing.

Another student jumped in and said,

They're very accepting of every sect of Judaism. And it's, oh, you're Reform? It doesn't matter to people unless maybe they're really religious. It doesn't really matter to anyone in this school. It's just like you're a person, I'm a person.

A fellow student confirmed,

School really takes a universal stance on Judaism. So it doesn't really matter if you're Orthodox, Reform or Conservative because there are a lot of beliefs in

Judaism that Reform, Orthodox, and Conservative all share, and that's sort of what this school preaches is those beliefs, not the differences.

One student summed up the school's vision by saying, "It's not how we differ. It's more like how we're the same. You know?" This vision of community described to me by the students aligned well with Rosner's vision of community, his analogy to the Passover seder, and the goals of his tefilla program. One TKIer applied the school's vision of the community to the tefilla program:

I think another thing we learn here is that people are deeper than if they say a prayer or not. Because really you could be Orthodox and not be a good person. You could be Reform and not be a good person. You could also be Orthodox and be an amazing person. You could be Reform and be an amazing person. And we learn just because whatever prayers you sing, whatever you follow, it doesn't make *you* who you are. It's what you take out of those things that shape you.

Since community was such an important value for everyone at the school, I inquired about how a more traditional or Orthodox Jew would fit into the New Jew community. Rabbi Lev said,

My hope for this school was that our community would be a true community day school. That the percentage of Reform, Conservative and Orthodox in my community would be mirrored in our school. And, that's not the case. There are fewer Orthodox kids than should be represented. But we do have some.

He felt that the school does not attract many traditional students because there are

Orthodox schools in the area that they would go to instead. Nonetheless, according to Rabbi Vorspan, the school does its best to cater to the entire Jewish community. He noted,

All segments of the community, Reform, Orthodox, Conservative, Chabad, secular, however they want to identify themselves, have to feel comfortable with what we do here. Which means that they should feel comfortable with the Shabbat experience, with the eating experience, with the trip experience, that everything will be done *l'halacha* (according to Jewish law). With the sports experience, so that everything will be done halachically. I grew up going to regular high school, and I couldn't participate in sports because it was always on Shabbat. And even when I was on the team that normally might have their competition Friday afternoon, well, every now and then they had one on Friday night, I would have to say goodbye to the bus and go home. And, we did not want to have a school where any kid had to be left behind. So, that's why everything is done that the most of observant of us will feel comfortable.

He thought that an Orthodox student would feel comfortable in New Jew's community.

"We provide a mechitza minyan (a traditional male-led prayer service segregated by gender). We only use Orthodox *hashgacha* (kosher certification) for all *kashrut* issues."

However, a self-described Orthodox faculty member expressed concerns about New Jew's tefilla program. He said he was skeptical because it does not teach siddur proficiency, and while it may be successful with the TKI student-leadership team, he stated that the vast majority of kids "just won't shut up" during tefilla. Rosner replied that there simply were not enough Orthodox students at the school to warrant a separate

program for them other than TKI, although the school would support a daily Orthodox minyan if one were requested. The Orthodox faculty member volunteered to lead a mechitza minyan, but Rosner predicted there was not enough interest to consistently form one.

A student I interviewed said that he identified as Orthodox and used to go to an Orthodox school. He contrasted his tefilla experience at New Jew with his experience at his old school:

I guess my experience in Orthodox schools, we prayed every day. One of the reasons I like the prayer here is the whole point of prayer is really getting to it. It seems like in an Orthodox school the whole point of prayer is to get through it.

At least when I prayed in the morning, it went so fast, I honestly couldn't keep up.

So, I really couldn't care. I would tune in and out. And, maybe do the Shma.

When asked whether his Orthodox friends would feel comfortable coming to New Jew, he responded,

I knew kids that were very, very Orthodox. I don't think they'd want to come here. It's not just the tefilla. It's every little concept. I mean, like a lot of Orthodox kids wouldn't want to go to school and learn with girls in the same Judaics class.

The school does not require its student body to pray traditionally at any point during their high school career. TKI students felt it was important, though, for the student body to have some required exposure to a traditional prayer service, but not over-exposure. A student explained, "Yeah. We actually did [a traditional prayer service] last

year. One of them. We did a mechitza service last year. Just like sort of an exposure to what it looks like.”

Rosner’s tefilla program incorporated and reflected his own self-described love-hate relationship with tefilla. Perhaps because he felt that he “never fit in religiously,” he strove so hard to have every student feel like they do fit in, regardless of how they think of or practice tefilla. His background in pluralistic Jewish settings such as the Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies primed his views on building community. For example, he commented on wanting to create a pluralistic community that went beyond the “mere tolerance” that he has observed. His own personal identification as an *apikorus* (heretic) may have influenced the place for more traditional Jews in his tefilla program, and the non-traditional, experimental nature of the tefilla sessions at New Jew.

Furthering the theory that the tefilla program mirrors Rosner’s own background was its emphasis on spiritual growth as opposed to ritual adherence to traditional prayer. Rosner said about himself, “it’s not that halacha isn’t important,” it is just not his primary connection to Judaism. He said he identified with Jewish philosopher Franz Rosenzweig’s answer to the question whether he was religious: “Not yet.” He talked about being on a path, going on a journey, and discovering himself, far more than about prayer itself. He described experimenting with Jewish rituals, such as not keeping kosher in the past but taking on that commitment more recently, and sometimes he wore a kippah in front of the students, sometimes he did not.

One ironic conclusion from creating this type of spiritual community at New Jew is that graduates of it may not feel comfortable outside of it. As Rabbi Vorspan predicted,

They may not even be able to find a community out there that is able to duplicate creating the feeling that they had when they were here. So, I think in that regard we're always going to fail [in preparing them for spiritual life outside of New Jew]. But where we're going to succeed is that we will have touched a part of each student, hopefully within the time that they're here.

Educationally-sound Planning

After student empowerment and creating community, Rosner listed the extremely structured nature of the program as the third most important characteristic of tefilla at New Jew. He compared it to a classroom teacher who created meticulous and well-crafted lesson plans, which was an analogy that almost everyone associated with TKI also used. TKIers spend a great amount of time in their classes planning the tefilla sessions they lead. They carefully outline them, literally minute by minute. Rosner was like the army general drafting his battle plans down to the last detail, leaving nothing to chance. In essence, he applied educationally-sound planning methods to his tefilla program.

"There's an awful lot of planning that goes in to being a part of TKI," one student exclaimed. After another student said, "Wow, it's a big commitment," the rest of the students in the room responded with emphatic "*Yeah's*." One student said regarding their tefilla sessions that "we plan it by the minute, like, this part of the service will take 4 minutes 30 seconds." One student sounded like a teacher reflecting on classroom management when he said,

There were a few seconds at a session that weren't put together. I realized everybody around me was talking and having their own conversations and we

would lose their concentration. We need to have really tight planning, down to the second.

I asked where they learned how to do all of this detailed planning, and in unison they said, “Mr. Rosner.”

Rosner showed me on his laptop some of the planning to which the students referred. For the tefilla session that the TKIers led with the local Jewish middle school, the class had created an eight-page plan. Like a teacher’s lesson plan, it detailed the goals of the program, delegated who was doing what, described exactly what was to be done and when it was to be done, listed the resources and musical instruments needed, and so on. Rosner showed me literally dozens of documents like this on a Wiki page he created for this class that the students could access. It contained similar plans for every single tefilla session that TKI has led, as well as summaries of lessons that the TKIers learned with Rosner in his class with them. Everything appeared carefully documented, organized and laid out. When I observed the TKI class planning to lead the tefilla session described earlier, it reminded me of a college of education class with novice teachers and their professor discussing the best way to plan a lesson, except these were high school students planning a tefilla session with Rosner.

The following anecdote illustrates Rosner’s use of good pedagogy as a foundation for his tefilla program. I observed him teach the final lesson of a unit on the Shma, and his TKI students were presenting their unit project, Shma wind chimes. Using what they had learned in class about the Shma, students created a wind chime which represented their interpretation of the credo. One student said regarding his and his partner’s project, “We decided that since not everybody can understand Hebrew and the prayers, we’re

going to make our prayer into music because everyone understands it.” Another student made his wind chime with red, blue, brown and grey colors to represent the four elements of the world. He said that “most people see God as being above us but actually He is all around us.” After the class was over and literally while he was in the middle of running to his next class, Rosner shouted back at me, “That was a great summative assessment!”

Rosner’s use of the Passover seder also illustrated good educational theory such as differentiated instruction. For example, he thought that the more rebellious students needed to feel like they were at a music concert in order to feel engaged in tefilla, so he spent \$1000 on musical instruments for a tefilla session. Every student received a percussion instrument to play along with during the session. He met the needs of the individual students and attended to the different modalities that different students favored. Another way of using different modalities was when he had students tie-dye kippahs by class color with the goal of using something physical and familiar (clothing) to attract some students to tefilla. He mentioned that he has also used familiar pop songs and changed the songs’ wording to make it on the one hand familiar but on the other hand connected to tefilla for those students who are more acoustically-minded.

With the encouragement of Dr. Powell, Rosner has been collecting data on TKI to assess the effectiveness of whether it has been achieving its goals, and as a way of using data to modify and improve the program. For example, Rosner has kept meticulous records of documents which describe the TKI project, its vision, mission, structure, and so on, such as through internal documents he has created as well as articles he has published about the program. After each tefilla session, TKI students have written reflections on their sessions, both what went well and also constructive criticism. Rosner

has solicited and kept a record of faculty reflections and suggestions after sessions. He was planning to conduct surveys on the entire student body during the second semester of the 2010-2011 school year, and his intent was that the survey would be created by the TKIers. Finally, Rosner said he has recorded his own reflections as “virtual classroom posts, articles or emails to faculty.”

Rosner’s methods can be classified as action research. In fact, he was taking part in a research project run by the Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies, whose goal with this project is to train Jewish educators running tefilla programs in the methodology of action research. Not only was Rosner conducting action research himself, but he was training his students to be action researchers as well.

In essence, Rosner viewed tefilla as any other educational project he would plan. It requires a sound educational theory, critical thinking as to what has worked and not worked in the past, excellent planning, student empowerment, good assessment and data collection, data-based decision-making, collaboration with other teachers, differentiated instruction, multiple intelligences and modalities, being attuned to student developmental needs and issues, and so on.

Leadership

Now that Rosner’s three main brushstrokes (student empowerment, community, and educationally-sound structure) have been detailed, I would like to take a step back and look at the artists—the school’s leadership. Two leaders stood out as being responsible for this program: Rosner and Dr. Bruce Powell, the Head of School. Without Rosner, his colleagues told me on many occasions, this tefilla program would not have happened. Without Powell, the students and faculty confirmed, Rosner would not have

had a supportive school culture within which to create his tefilla program. These two leaders were main characters in the story of tefilla at New Jew.

Every single faculty member and administrator I spoke to praised Rosner's leadership abilities. Judaic Studies teacher Raanan Mallek attributed this to Rosner's training as an Israeli army officer:

He knows how to get things done, and that's what he did. Yonatan was the only one able to take the theory and turn that to practice, which was great. The force behind the program, he had a personality of somebody that is willing to do whatever it takes to get things done. He needs to be on the ball and on top of it, constantly. I mean, he found a niche, you know, and he filled that niche.

Rabbi Lev attributed TKI's success to the fact that Rosner was *meshuga ladavar*, which means that he was "crazy about it." He said one of the smartest things he has done is

to get out of Yonatan's way. I'll say that none of this TKI stuff, which I think is innovative, and I'm so glad that we're trying it, wouldn't happen without Yonatan. We wouldn't have done it. And, the most important thing he's doing is that we're approaching it educationally. Every other program that we've done in school we've included the kids.

Other faculty called the program "Yonatan's inspiration" and "Mr. Rosner's baby." Despite this, Rosner insisted that he was creating a process that the students would be able to do without him, and would not be dependent on him. One of his stated goals, in fact, was "to disappear." He told me that if the tefilla program depended on him, it would fail in the long term, but if the program transcended any one faculty member or administrator, it would succeed.

The school culture supported Rosner becoming a teacher-leader and gave him the institutional support he needed. When I visited the TKI class a couple of hours before the students traveled to lead tefilla at the local middle school, New Jew's principal, Ellen Howard, addressed the class about expectations. She told them that they were ambassadors of the school and they should act like it, not just for the sake of looks, but because they were "*national role models* in how to do tefilla right." Rosner pointed to Howard's words specifically as evidence that the administration supported him.

I noticed a certain humility in Rosner when he hesitated to ascribe his own leadership as a factor in the success of the program. I described to him what I had observed, that he seemed to be role modeling for his students about how to lead, how to work hard, how to think critically, and so on. He responded that this was how an army officer leads his soldiers—again, he mentioned the imagery of being like an army general role modeling for his officers-in-training how to lead. His colleagues' descriptions reinforced the sheer force of his can-do personality as a factor in the success of the program. In his own words, "There is no chance of losing."

I observed another leading catalyst behind this program besides Rosner. Towards the end of my focus group with the TKIers, I asked them who had the most influence on them being successful student-leaders in TKI. They said in unison, "Dr. Powell." A student explained, "He comes into our classes all the time." Another student recounted,

Yesterday he was in our art class. And he said, what are you making? And I said, sculpting something. I was explaining to him the project. And he was in our classroom for 15 minutes just watching us do our art.

I shared with Dr. Powell what the students said about him, and asked him to respond. He closed his eyes, leaned back in his chair, and thought for a good minute. I got the feeling that talking about himself made him feel uneasy, and I apologized. He said, “No, not at all. I’m happy to hear that to some extent. I’m not on the spot, it just gives me time to think.” Again, there was a pregnant pause before he asked, “Now I’m curious which ones told you this.” Eventually, he said,

The head of school has certain core responsibilities to any institution. Probably the number one responsibility is MVP, the mission, vision, and philosophy. And to ensure that the school’s story permeates every single corner of the school, without exception, from the receptionist in the office, to the walk-on coach for football, to the Jewish Studies Director, to the teachers in the classroom, every single corner, to the Board, every corner. So the question is, Can everybody tell the story?

I asked him what New Jew’s story is. He replied:

The story is a very Jewish story. So the TKI kids are saying, these Jewish values that our Head talks about ad nauseum, *that* drives our tefilla. The Captain’s Counsel, our captains of sports teams, I think would talk about the Jewish values of not speaking *lashon hara* (gossiping) on the field, and acting with dignity, and treating the other team as having *tzelem Elokim* (the image of God), you know, it’s all about our Judaism. And that came from our school, and it came from our Head of School. The English Department, you know, they’ll say, we’re reading this poetry. And how does it relate to Jewish values?

He said his main job was

to be the school's storyteller, so if those kids felt my presence, that's because that's what I do. And that presence has to be in fundraising, and in recruitment of students, and in hiring, and every corner of the school. For example, just yesterday, my advancement director came in and there was some tension in the community because of the dates of galas. There was tension but she said you know what? We have to be bigger than that. We have to be honest in business. I'm going to let it go. And because that's not who we are as a school, to act like this in the community. She's my advancement director, and *she's* quoting to *me* the values of this school.

I saw this New Jew story all around the school. For example, as I was entering the school one morning, I ran into a student handing out student newspapers. On the very front of the newspaper was written:

This edition centers upon a common theme: most of the articles are opinion pieces, many of which offer the student's personal interpretations of Jewish values. By embracing the beliefs of fellow students, we, as a community, can grow and delve deeper into the facets of our own lives that resonate with Judaism. As stated in Proverbs 24:3, "through wisdom is a house built; and by understanding it is established; and by knowledge shall every room be filled with precious and pleasant riches." (Price & Kepler, 2010, p. 1)

I asked her who decided to make the student newspaper focus on Jewish values. She explained that *she* was the editor of the newspaper, and the *students* decide on the content and themes, not the school.

Likewise, I came across an article in a local Jewish magazine called *Tribe* that described the New Jew soccer team. The coach of the team (and the co-author of the article with Powell) was Benjamin Resnick, also a rabbi and Judaic Studies teacher at New Jew. The article described “the inherent values of playing sports and the values inherent in playing sports correctly.” It mentioned how Jewish values infused the sports department at New Jew. For example, during basketball games, “our fans don’t yell and taunt during free throws.” It quoted John Wooden who wrote, “What you are as a person is far more important than what you are as a basketball player” (Resnick & Powell, 2010, pp.16-17).

Powell made his presence felt in smaller ways as well by stepping out of his office to be close to the students. He said,

I go to lunch and say hi to the kids. I’ll stop by the classrooms. I’ll stop, and I’ll say something if I hear somebody did something good. And, I teach all the seniors. I give the opening talk to the ninth graders before the retreat. I periodically give a *schmooze* (talk) at town meeting. I give the keynote address at the shabbaton on Saturday afternoon, so that too. There are spots that I am sure to insert myself, to tell the story.

He insisted, though, that the school culture was not about his presence:

Honestly it’s very dangerous for an institution to be about an individual. The United States of America was not about George Washington. The United States of America is about American values and the Constitution, that’s what it’s about. You know, I’m mortal, so it can’t be about me, it has to be about the greater

things. So, if it's working, it's because the faculty and students are telling the story themselves.

A leadership characteristic I observed in Rosner was his empathy. He has walked in the shoes of his students, and perhaps still does. As described earlier, he saw himself as struggling with his personal tefilla, and he was more comfortable experimenting with spirituality than praying traditionally. He called himself an apikorus, which is a term reminiscent of the “rebellious son” of the seder table. He was open about all of this with his students—he did not hide any of it. A factor in his success as a leader might stem from his ability to feel what his students are feeling and think what they are thinking.

Rabbi Lev told me an anecdote about the impact of Rosner's empathy on New Jew's tefilla program:

The reason why he is the right person to lead the tefilla program is because he hates it. Because he's been there, where the students are, so he can empathize with them. Last year I was walking one time to Town Hall, I asked him how come he's not coming down. He said he can't stand it. He can't stand it. It's too unorganized. It's too unfocused. They're just shushing people. So I said to him, that's why other faculty people don't want to come down to tefilla. It's torture. And he really appreciated that. He said, “That's why I'm going to change tefilla.” You can either complain about it, or do something about it. He did something about it.

Another leadership characteristic I observed in Rosner was his emphasis on the process and journey rather than the product or destination. Regarding his personal Jewish identity, he talked about going on a journey and discovering himself. He confirmed he

was trying to teach his students the same reflective ability to form their own unique identities, rather than teaching them pro forma about Judaism and tefilla.

He applied his focus on process to TKI. When I asked him if TKI was a success, he responded, “It’s a process. We have a lot of tefillot that are not good...that’s why we have reflections.” He said that the last tenth grade tefilla was “great” but the eleventh grade tefilla was “awful.” Part of this process for him was collecting data on TKI, and making decisions based upon objective facts rather than subjective opinions, as evidenced by the action research he has completed so far. He used the word “process” many times during our conversations.

As developed as it may sound, TKI was still new. It partially began in 2009-2010, and only then as a lunch club. It was by the force of Rosner’s personality that it happened at all—he convinced about a dozen students to give up their lunch time for the “TKI club.” He said that it will take 5 years to get TKI off the ground. Year 1 was making it a lunch club, year 2 was making it a leadership class, year 3 would be expanding the class to reach every grade (he wanted 10% of each grade to be in TKI), and the ultimate goal in years 4 and 5 would be to create a system change where he could step out of the picture and have the students be completely empowered.

Powell has advised Rosner to make this change process as transparent as possible: Part of our ethos here, part of our values, is to be very transparent. The more people know, the more they are not afraid. And, it’s when you don’t tell people things, they wonder what you really are thinking...On a macro level, the lack of this kind of a process is why the Democrats lost the recent [2010 Senate] election. Hubris. Arrogance.

I found Rosner also attuned to the politics of leadership. He described how at the beginning of this process before TKI began, he had to have a “soft voice and not rock the boat too much.” In describing how he navigated the school’s political waters, he allowed others to give him the position of directing tefilla rather than taking it. Leading unmotivated teenagers in tefilla is not an easy job, and the other rabbis seemed almost gleeful to have someone want to take it on. By allowing the previous leaders of tefilla to hand it over to him and keeping them involved in the process and program, he avoided any political minefields in assuming the position of directing tefilla at New Jew.

Rosner also displayed the leadership characteristics of reflection and risk-taking. For example, he described himself as being more cerebral, not listening to his heart, and being more of an intellectual; however, he wanted to improve and increase “the use of the heart and not just the head” and mentioned Rabbi Lev as someone who “does the heart well, and teaches his students about using the heart,” and he wanted to try and do that more. The same morning he made these reflections, he stepped outside of his intellectually-minded comfort zone by doing the Shma wind chime project.

I observed that Dr. Powell also was a reflective risk-taker. When describing why he supported the TKI program even though it was untested, he said, “There’s risks here, and there’s risks there. That’s how it goes. There are risks all over the place.” Rosner explicitly said that he was not concerned if a TKI tefilla session failed because “we learn as much from our mistakes as we do from what works. It’s a learning experience still. So the TKIers can learn, and if mistakes are made, that’s part of the learning process.” Jared Stein, the music teacher who helped lead the TKI tefilla sessions, summed it up best by saying that TKI is

a grand experiment. And I think our job is to experiment. You know, this is a laboratory for Jewish learning. With the right kind of leadership and humility to, you know, make mistakes and to learn from them. We're creating creators.

The Philosophy Behind TKI

Thus far, I have described the details of the abstract expressionist painting of the New Jew tefilla program from a distance and up close, examined the artistic medium and method, and looked at the artists who painted it and are featured in it. Now, I leave the painting itself, and turn to the philosophy behind it. As usually happens when a new artistic medium develops, its authenticity will be called into question.

As described in detail in the literature review, the dominant approach to creating tefilla programs has been with the philosophies of naaseh v'nishmah, and emphasizing the importance of keva, sometimes at the expense of kavanah. New Jew has created its own midrash (story) though, and has thrown out these traditional frameworks described above. As Powell bluntly told me,

The Orthodox world is naaseh v'nishmah. Our world is 180 degrees from that.

It's nishmah v'naaseh. We have shifted 180 degrees the opposite direction. We start with kavanah, and then get to keva.

Why did Powell make this shift? "Number one, tefilla is excruciatingly boring. And number two, it is the single most nuanced, sophisticated and difficult piece of Judaism to access for a child, for adults!" He called this the "educational answer." The "political answer," he said,

is because we're a pluralistic Jewish day school. There are so many different modes of tefilla, from nothing, to Orthodox, to Reform, to Conservative, to

Reconstructionist...Therefore we had to do something that was as universal as possible.

The school's goal was not proficiency in prayer, Powell said. He commented that at the Orthodox schools he was familiar with, "The dumbest kid in the school knew how to daven. They can blow through it. Except for a very few kids, there was no kavanah there. They'd rather be playing basketball." He hypothesized that if you ask them what prayer really means,

You'd have maybe 10 kids out of 500 who could give you a serious answer. But all of them could blow through the Amidah (the main petitional prayer of Jewish services) in 10 seconds, and they call that davening? So who are we all kidding? Right? So we have a serious educational and developmental problem. A challenge.

He believed that if a student had not gotten the keva by the time he or she reached high school, it was too late to start with it because

in high school, that's boring. If you want to capture the keva, capture it in Kindergarten through eighth grade because they'll do it without complaining. I believe that that's the purpose of elementary education is keva. Whether it's learning the time tables by rote or learning tefilla. I believe that's the time to learn by rote, I really do. But high school? Now we need kavanah. And if they haven't gotten the keva, you can't expect the high school now to replace it. Now you've got to start with kavanah, and then try to get them to keva.

To focus on keva in high school would be to disrespect the child, according to Powell. Instead, schools need to meet the students where they are at:

Our kids are not coming out of a deep world of Judaism, learning and Orthodoxy...Our kids are coming out of a world of YouTube, Facebook, and parents who have not been habituated to Judaism and ritual practice. So part of this is just constructivist learning. Where are we starting from?

I asked Powell if he felt this approach to tefilla was authentic. Was tefilla at his school actually prayer? Powell responded by saying,

If we were to ask a traditional, yeshiva-trained guy whether or not our tefilla is working, he would say no. Why? Because his definition, I'm speaking as if I know for sure but I don't know if he would say this, but someone like that will say, no, "working" means that they know the matbaya tefilla. That they can lead a shul in a minyan at the drop of a hat. And, they consider it davening three times a day. We're nowhere close to that.

Powell contrasted this traditional keva-based conception of tefilla to the kavanah-based one at his school:

If one considers "working" that we create some kavanic, if there is such a word, focused spiritual or communal experiences, yeah, it's working. It's definitely working. If we're talking about "working" meaning some sort of a connectedness to the community and to Judaism with the outline of the service, yeah then it's working. So much of this is so dependent on what one sees as successful outcomes. Again, if "working" means creating a leadership cadre of kids who really want to help others make this work, then we're succeeding now.

Powell showed his personal ambivalence on whether he actually embraced this position, or felt it was more pragmatic realism. After describing what he thought a

traditional, yeshiva-trained educator would consider real prayer, Powell admitted, “In many ways I agree with that, by the way, what some people would consider ‘working.’” Later in our interview, he would preface his description of the tefilla program at New Jew with, “Again, I don’t 100% agree with what I’m saying, you know.” His pragmatism again surfaced when he said,

I’d be very interested in knowing how many kids could lead a simple *shiva* (mourner’s) minyan now. How many can follow? How many know the basic structure? My guess is that the numbers are not very high. And, I’m not happy with that. But, you know, we prioritize what’s more important. We can’t do everything. How much time do we have to do what? We have to prioritize.

His doubts came out when he said, “I’m hopeful, but I sometimes wonder if all we can really do is do the keva and have a shabbaton once a year and hope for the kavanah. And, hopefully at some point they’ll pick it up like I did.”

I asked if it concerned him that a student might graduate from his school without knowing how to pray traditionally. He responded,

Of course it is dangerous just from a social standpoint that you graduated from a Jewish high school and you can’t even lead a minyan. What’s the matter with you? The kids don’t know that yet. They don’t care, and they probably will never find themselves in that situation. They’re looking for some deeper sense of meaning, connectedness and spirituality. But we hope that they get involved in Hillel, and maybe they know enough to say, you know what? Maybe it’s time for me to sit and learn this because now I need to do it.

Rabbi Lev expected the TKI students

to be part of that creative leadership niche that we saw described in that Avi Chai study (referenced earlier in this portrait). They're going to find their way and have the tool kit to speak directly to their own passions. And the larger community...I expect them to be great ambassadors to the multiple expressions of Judaism, even in tefilla, in multiple synagogues, and multiple prayer settings. I expect them to be comfortable. I don't think they're able to lead but they'll have the comfort level at least, hopefully. They might by choice come late to shul. But it's not going to be because they feel uncomfortable.

The TKIers, in their own words, echoed Powell in his philosophy of *nishmah v'naaseh*. One student described it like this:

If we did a traditional service, I'd be so lost because I don't speak Hebrew, I can barely read Hebrew. So getting into the prayers like TKI does allow me to...I actually want to pay attention because I actually know what I'm praying about. I want to pray to God. Not only do I know a lot of prayers, but I *understand* them.

Another student concurred:

If we just did the traditional praying, no one would pay attention. Because I know I'm not going to just sit here and say words that I don't know what they mean. Why would I pay attention if you don't know what it means? And, so really a lot of the time that's why we have the kids learn about it because then it means so much more. But after we learn about it, when you say the prayer how the prayer is supposed to be said, we say the whole thing in Hebrew. So, it's just a matter of learning about it before we say it.

One TKIer commented on the negative impact that rote tefilla has had on her:

I've kind of become desensitized to hearing someone say just the prayers over and over again, and then going over like the literal meaning. I'd rather someone in the audience who we're talking to get something out of it than just go through the traditional prayer, and be like, oh, that was boring. I'm getting a life lesson that they realize, oh, I could do this differently, and I'm not doing this, or I'm doing this well. I would rather have someone feel good about it than just be bored.

Powell believed that high school students needed to be exposed to kavanah right away, and he explained this via an analogy to the ancient Temple service:

My guess is that the Temple service was one great party. It had music, and drums, and flutes, and trumpets, and all kinds of really fun stuff. Bring your goat, cut his throat, throw the blood, go home for lunch. That sounds like fun, except the goat part. But, that must've been really amazing and with a real sense of, you've got to look that goat in the face, that goat that you raised, that living being, and you're now going to sacrifice its life, and cut its throat, or the priests are going to do it, and you're going to watch it die and burn up and, boy how could you *not* have some connectedness with that?

The students agreed that tefilla needed to be engaging and relevant—the word “fun” was mentioned 22 separate times during my half hour interview with the non-TKI students.

Powell contrasted that kavanah-inspired environment to the atmosphere of keva in most Jewish schools and synagogues: “What do we have today? We have some watered-down words that nobody understands. Nobody understands how we're all connected. We don't teach it well.” That brought him to how schools need to teach

about tefilla. Powell did not suggest that keva be ignored, but taught better. He complained that just studying the siddur “has no meaning whatsoever. So what I try to do is I try to make up stories. I would love to have a siddur, and in every single prayer, there’s a story. What’s our story?” He gave an example of this from his own teaching experience:

I used to teach the Amidah to ornery boys at Hebrew High School. And, I’d say look, you ever ask a girl for a date? So what are you going to do first? You’re going to go in and kiss up. You’re going to sell yourself to the dad about how great you, and how great they are. Then you’re going to do a lot of begging. And then you’re going to say thanks. That’s the Amidah. Tell stories. We are the people of the story.

Powell’s nishmah v’naaseh philosophy of tefilla was greatly influenced by the Brandeis Bardin Institute² (BBI), one of the oldest Jewish camps in the United States. Powell was a camper there and eventually would come back to direct it. His doctorate centered on the camp’s educational philosophy. In 2007, Powell won the prestigious Covenant Award for exceptional Jewish educators. In his application materials for this award, he wrote the following about the influence of BBI on his own educational philosophy:

On a warm Southern California weekend in February of 1960, my parents met Dr. Shlomo Bardin at the Brandeis Institute in Simi Valley, California. During that 48 hours, Jewish life for the Powell family changed forever, as my mother was

² In 2007 the Brandeis-Bardin Institute and the University of Judaism merged to create the American Jewish University. BBI’s official new name is The Brandeis-Bardin Campus at American Jewish University. BBI’s Camp Alonim still exists under that name.

inspired to return to some level of Jewish practice, and my parents decided to send me to Camp Alonim at the Brandeis Institute... That month at camp was like stepping back into the Garden of Eden. My eyes were opened to a Jewish life I had never imagined... My motivation for transmitting Judaism, Jewish life, and Jewish values continues to emanate from those moments in 1960 that energized my future. Today, my motivation includes trying to create those same moments for our students, moments that will lead them to purpose, and meaning, and the blessings of a sacred life. (Powell, 2007)

Powell's tefilla philosophies echoed "the Brandeis Method" created by Dr. Shlomo Bardin. Bardin, one of Powell's mentors, was a Russian Jew who lived in Palestine and moved to America in 1939. Urged by U.S. Supreme Court Justice Louis D. Brandeis to do something to stop youth from rejecting their Jewish culture, Bardin agreed to create a summer program in conjunction with the Zionist Youth Organization. Founded in 1941 and sitting on 2,200 plush acres of rolling foothills, BBI combines programmatic concepts adapted from the Danish Folk High School (expressing one's identity and culture through the creative arts) and the Israeli Kibbutz (the dignity of physical labor and sharing responsibility for the community) set in the context of the American recreational summer camp.

Bardin developed his model into what he would later call the Brandeis Method, which proclaimed a simple educational mission: "to make Jews" (Powell & Aaron, 2007, p. 3). BBI's mission, according to Powell, was "to imbue Jewish people with an appreciation for the joy and power of their Jewish traditions, its intellectual depth, and its ability to create meaning and purpose in one's life" (p. 3). For example, Israeli dancing

at BBI was not mere dancing, rather Bardin called it “learning Judaism through the feet” as Powell recalled (p. 5). Powell wrote in an article on Bardin, “He felt Jewish dance itself was a value, the final result being an authentic Jewish way to express joy and celebration...Where the community gathers, where ten adult Jews share experience, the place itself becomes transcendent and Godly” (p. 5).

According to Powell, Bardin believed that the essence of education was “first we touch, then we teach, since the touching is for life” (Powell, 2007, p. 6). Powell wrote, “He argued that once you touch a student’s soul, inspire their thinking, and provide experience with organic community, students more readily embrace teaching and learning on both emotional and intellectual levels” (p. 6). This echoed Powell’s own philosophy of *nishmah v’naaseh*, and that *kavanah* precedes *keva*.

Music teacher Jared Stein referenced BBI’s influence on New Jew without my mentioning it. He said that the BBI educational philosophy reached its apex at New Jew during the school’s shabbaton (all-school Sabbath overnight experience on the campus of the Brandeis Bardin Institute). The school takes all of its students off campus and into that idyllic setting, and has a fun, community-building experience with music, dancing, food, sports, and singing, all framed by the Jewish Sabbath. Many students mentioned to me that the shabbaton was the highlight of their year. As one non-TKier told me, “I wish I could feel the shabbaton all year round.” Stein said that “the ultimate expression of who we are as a school spiritually, and communally, happens at the shabbaton.” Powell (2010) proclaimed in a school newsletter:

Our shabbaton is the moment when grade level distinctions fall away and New Jew truly becomes one vibrant community enterprise. In a phrase, the shabbaton

is *the* culture-making moment where our values, our students, our faculty and staff, meld into one powerful, almost inexplicable entity we call New Community Jewish High School. (p. 1)

Stein said that New Jew was trying to give its students “moments during the school year that emulate what they can do the rest of their lives, giving them moments in time that they can draw back on later.” He again referred back to the “Brandeis model of giving them something that they can implement when they go home.”

Powell (2010) wrote that “the New Community Jewish High School shabbaton is unique to our community. It is, to a large degree, the manifestation of who we are as a school and how we envision the development of a system for strong values education” (p. 1). He followed up that statement with due credit to his mentor: “As Dr. Bardin said, ‘the touching is for life’!” (p. 1). Powell identified the shabbaton as the epitome of New Jew’s identity, which was modeled after the Brandeis Method. This methodology aligned with Powell’s description of his tefilla philosophy of nishmah v’naaseh and kavanah over keva, and in turn with Rosner’s TKI tefilla program.

Stein told me that while the school cannot recreate the BBI during school due to all the obstacles he already described, “Brandeis Bardin is as much a way of doing things.” Indeed, on their website, the camp wrote that “The Brandeis-Bardin Campus is as much a feeling as it is a place” (American Jewish University, 2010). Powell, Rosner, and Stein all seemed to understand that camp cannot be recreated during school. Rather, the informal educational philosophy of camp (in this instance, Brandeis Bardin) *informed* the educational decision-making of the school’s tefilla program.

Powell's philosophy of tefilla in Jewish community high schools aligned well with Rosner's tefilla program. Without the philosophical foundations set by Powell, Rosner's program would not have had a home. The two leaders were similar in their philosophies. Rosner's goal, for example, clearly was not traditional prayer proficiency. Instead, his goal was creating meaning-makers, spiritual leaders, making a positive experience with tefilla and spirituality, and creating community. He was open to just about any method which would achieve those goals.

Powell and Rosner shared a broad view of what defined tefilla, although for different reasons. Powell, I observed, came to his conclusions based upon pragmatism about who his students were, and not because it was his own personal identity. In contrast, Rosner actually shared the same Jewish identity of many of his students, and came from their world. While Rosner acknowledged that some would call the tefilla sessions at New Jew "inauthentic," according to him "TKI tefilla is actual tefilla."

The TKI students were less sure if what they did was "actual tefilla." One student said, "There isn't real praying." When I asked him to explain, he said,

So we take one prayer and elaborate on the prayer. Like the last one we did was on the Shma. That was the prayer that we elaborated on and there's like always a theme that we focus on and do the prayers, because we don't spend most of the time praying.

Most of the students seemed to agree that what they were doing was not prayer. As one student said,

TKI is more discussion-orientated rather than just straight up praying. Tefilla, just literally it's always been described to me as prayer. Just straight up pray.

What we do here is more like focus on interpersonal relationships and basically getting to know people and knowing morals and knowing like values. Another student said, “I think it’s helping us learn *how* to pray.”

They also understood that most outsiders would not consider TKI tefilla to be actual prayer. One student commented,

If you asked like a rabbi that’s never been here and he comes in and sits in on one of our sessions and then you ask him is that tefilla, he’s going to say no right away because it’s just us talking to each other. But, I think, for us, from a student’s perspective, yeah, we weren’t praying, but we were talking about prayers. And, the next time we do that prayer, it will be a lot more meaningful. Because we’d talked about it and maybe had gotten new ideas about it and changed our view about it. So, it’s not really, it’s kind of like a supplement to tefilla instead of actual tefilla.

Another TKI student definition of tefilla: “I think when people participate and it becomes like meaningful to people, then it is prayer. But, when we can’t get anybody’s attention and we just perform, I think that’s not prayer.”

The non-TKI students differed on how they defined “real tefilla.” One student said,

I feel like as long as the prayers comes from your heart, it just makes it that much more meaningful. You don’t have to read it. If you just hear the song, and you really like it, and you kind of relate to it, and you really enjoy it, I mean, you’ll just pick it up like that [snaps fingers].

Another student agreed, “You don’t need to read a Bible to feel close to God. Or read from the siddur, or do your traditional melodies. It doesn’t matter what the melody is, as long as you’re praying from your heart.”

I asked them if there was anything a person could do that was *not* tefilla, as long as it came from the heart: “Jewish is what each person makes it. It depends on a culture, and Jewish is us as a whole.” Another student said, “It’s also the values, and you do a lot of Jewish stuff anyways by being an A+ human being, or learning about *chochmah* (wisdom).” I asked them where they learned about all of that, and they told me, “Dr. Powell.” Again, Powell’s story had reached another corner of the school.

Only one student in the non-TKI focus group disagreed with these other students’ assessment of what defines tefilla and authentic Judaism when she said,

I think since we’re going to a Jewish day school, we should all have our basic knowledge you know about the siddur and all the symbolism. It shouldn’t just be like an interpretive type of service. But, because we have this basic knowledge of what a service should be, and what a traditional service is, from there we can have a more interpretative type of service. So, if you go around the world, you’ll be able to join any service and you’ll know how to participate in it.

She was describing the keva-to-kavanah model that Powell and Rosner had abandoned.

Another student in the room took issue with her comments:

I’m not a religious person. I’m secular, but I like looking at other religions and stuff. I just find it interesting. But, I think, for me, the basis of me being Jewish is like learning moral values of what’s been driven in me since I was a kid. Just trying to be the best person you can be and like *tikkun olam* (improving the world)

is what Judaism is for me. It's tikkun olam. It's just try to make the world a better place and that's it. I feel like just every time I'm just being good, that's my prayer. It's like I'm closer to God. It makes me feel that much better. And, you know, I feel like if I continue just to do the right things, keep those values, I'm set with my Judaism. I don't need to pray in a synagogue.

"It's not tefilla," Rabbi Lev said about the TKI sessions. He called it "more like a 'tefilla happening' as opposed to prayer. But it doesn't bother me that they call it tefilla." He said that he agreed with the TKI goals and Powell and Rosner's philosophy and plans, although like Powell, he saw it as more of a pragmatic approach than anything else.

Other Judaic Studies teachers disagreed with Lev's assessment. Raanan Mallek proclaimed, "We cannot in the 21st century in community day schools tie prayer to the siddur." He mentioned that when he was interning at another Jewish community high school on the east coast, they offered a student-led

Communist minyan, where they have a picture of Che Guevara on the wall, and Lenin. And, they were talking about communist texts. Absolutely nothing to do with Judaism. Right? But at the same time, you know, there was this invigorating feeling of really having a real conversation about an issue that they, that you could even call it spiritually, that they connect to. So in my opinion that needs to be one of the motivators.

I pushed him if he would call the Communist minyan an actual minyan, prayer, tefilla, or something else. He answered,

I couldn't morally and spiritually make a distinction between tefilla and a spiritual experience. I think that they need to be integrated together. But, by seeing the

Communist minyan, at the end of the day, if we can have a student be spiritually inspired by virtue of anything within legal boundaries, of course, then all the better.

Rabbi Vorspan, though, appeared to sit on the fence regarding Powell and Rosner's philosophy of tefilla. For example, he answered "yes" to my question, "Would you say one of your goals is siddur proficiency and synagogue skills?" I asked him how he could balance that goal with the current TKI tefilla program that did not emphasize prayer proficiency. He responded with, "We know what a Jewish high school graduate should be able to do. But in the process of training them to do that, we may be destroying a part of their Jewish soul in the process." On the one hand, he advocated for siddur proficiency, while on the other, he acknowledged that a keva-centered approach was not good for his students. Vorspan told me that despite his goal of creating proficient daveners,

we probably will not graduate kids who are great daveners, who are great *lainers* (ritual Torah readers), who are great *baalei* tefilla (prayer leaders). But hopefully we will have touched a part of each student, hopefully regularly, so that they will know how they should be feeling when they have these worshipful experiences.

And then maybe be able to find that experience again outside these walls.

Comparing TKI Tefilla to the Previous Tefilla Model

How do the clientele react when an art gallery that focused on realism changes to being a gallery of impressionism and abstract expressionism? In this part of the New Jew story, I will compare the reactions of the clientele that experienced the old gallery versus

the new, and their perceptions of which was real art or better art. I asked Rabbi Vorspan to describe tefilla at New Jew before TKI:

I've conducted all of the tefilla up until last year. When we first started, we did a traditional minyan because a lot of kids were coming from the Jewish feeder schools. And so, we did the traditional minyan, but once every 3 weeks, we provided an alternative service. I discovered that all of the kids from the feeder schools went to the alternative services. So, I asked them why didn't you go to the minyan. You know, that's for you. They said we're tired of doing that. We want something interesting, not that boring stuff. So clearly being proficient in something doesn't mean that you are feeling the prayerfulness of it.

He described his approach to tefilla:

When I conducted services over the years, we ended up with 400 kids all having services at the same time. I would conduct it with my guitar and sometimes we would have other faculty that will help me. I created a more or less traditional service—with familiar prayers and songs—that was able to fit within the time span, but also it had a lot of music and a lot of participation.

When I asked Vorspan to reflect on how the students received the services he led, he said,

There were always kids in the periphery that would be talking. There's always this hub of noise going on. And there was a time that I would be very upset. I would keep stopping and gently reprimanded the kids. But it got to the point that I would see faculty come in, sit down, and talk to each other. And I realized, why am I trying to get the kids to be quiet, when the faculty can't be quiet?

He opted to play through the noise:

I decided I didn't want to make this a time for people to think they would only be lectured at, and the time to bring in tension, because it was yet another teacher up there orchestrating and shushing everybody all the time. So I decided, I'll just continue to do what I do. Kids will continue to quiet themselves down, or when they heard something they all liked to sing, they would end up all participating. And what I wanted them to do was leave at least having some residual effect on them. That they'll remember some of the melodies, that they'll look forward to coming because they're going to hear the melodies again, and that when we use those songs at another venue, they will be proficient in those.

Many of the students at New Jew thought back fondly on Vorspan's service, despite admitting that they did not pay much attention and observed the same continual talking and disruptions described by Vorspan. A non-TKI student I interviewed told me, "I would like to go back to the way things were with Rabbi Vorspan leading it. I enjoyed those, they were a lot of fun to be in." Vorspan heard the same comments:

What's interesting is that we've asked some graduates of the school what do they look forward to doing. And some of them say, we look forward to coming back to Rabbi V's services. And now we have to tell them Rabbi V's not doing the service anymore.

I wanted to know what the students remembered liking about the service even though many admitted not paying attention during it. Vorspan answered,

The kids who were talking through the whole thing, something was happening. I think they liked the singing. It was all singing. I think the TKI program now

doesn't have quite the same emphasis on singing, at least not yet, as much as to try to get people to understand the prayer and to bring the kavanah to them.

Rosner felt differently, though. He thought the students liked it because it had a party feel to it: "Like, hey I'm going to spend a half an hour sitting next to my buddy while this dude plays guitar and sings in the background!" On the one hand, it had the fun that Powell talked about in reference to tefilla during the Temple, but it was missing the gravitas of sacrificing your goat, to borrow Powell's analogy. Perhaps that explains why some of the kids liked it even though they did not pay attention during it; however, it did have some elements that Rosner wanted to carry over to the new TKI system: community, music, and fun.

The non-TKI students that I spoke to in a focus group compared the new tefilla model with the old one. A student said,

I think it's better now [with TKI] because we get to interact with them [the TKIers]. And sometimes you get to sing fun songs and do activities which is what is interesting. Because in ninth and tenth grade we did group tefilla, and we did like praying and stuff, but there's no interaction, and it wasn't very entertaining. So, people didn't look forward to it.

Other students felt differently: "You know, they [the TKIers] stand up the whole time and talk. It's not bad but like I liked it better when we had our rabbi up there singing his songs because I thought that was more interesting." As noted previously, several students voted to bring back Rabbi Vorspan because they thought it was more "fun." When I asked a student to explain that comment, she said, "TKI is just more

serious.” Another student clarified that comment with, “Well, they’re not *serious*, but they’re just kind of boring.”

Another student commented that she did not like having her peers leading her: “When a student is up there speaking, you just don’t care.” Another student agreed, “Yeah, and that’s true, because we don’t pay as much attention to them.” One student supported that claim by relating an experience teaching her peers to dance:

So, we had an Israeli dance class, and the teacher put me in charge, and as I stood in the middle of the circle trying to teach the dance, everybody’s just talking over me, being like, I don’t like this dance, can we just sit down? And I’m like, how do you know you don’t like the dance if you’ve never done it? Students can’t lead students...

Based upon these comments, it would appear that the TKI program had not trickled down from the student leadership team to the rest of the school. I mentioned this to Rosner, and he smiled and said, “It’s a process! We’re only in year 2 of a 5-year process!” I asked him to predict how things would change if the non-TKIers were only exposed to tefilla twice a month. He reminded me that if the goal of the program was much more kavanah than keva, then it mattered far less how frequently they got tefilla, and did not matter at all that students were not really exposed to a traditional minyan. Instead, Rosner felt that in time, all the students in the school would feel comfortable with the broad outline of a typical service.

I also noticed a discrepancy between how the TKIers perceived their peers’ reactions to the new tefilla program versus the actual consensus I heard from non-TKIers. One TKIer said,

I think they like it better because now we're able to like take more time. We make up fun songs where they sing along to and have arts and crafts activities that they can do. And, it just gets them more involved than just sitting there saying prayers where normally they'd be talking to each other instead of paying attention.

Another TKIer felt,

It would be like they're watching their friends up on the stage instead of just teachers. They're used to, like most of the tefilla services with their parents and their families, they're used to the whole traditional thing. And, I think we make it a lot more interesting because they know us, because we make it fun, because we could relate to them, because they're students and we're students.

Another student said, "It's way less intimidating than the head rabbi standing up there and leading prayers. It's like their best friend is up there, standing up there." The rest of the students in the room agreed.

Summary

New Jew's Tefilla program was reminiscent of abstract expressionism whose artists felt distrustful of organized governments trying to create a working world order. Many critics characterized the movement as being anarchic, rebellious, and highly idiosyncratic. This paralleled the identities of many of the New Jew students I interviewed: they wanted the teachers and administration to get out of their way so that they could do tefilla *their* way. They described a deep desire for empowerment and ownership of their tefilla program, one based upon fun, relevancy, community, morals and values, and student input.

Rather than criticize the students for being nihilistic like the early abstract expressionist painters were judged, the leadership team at New Jew accommodated their students' developmental needs and requests. They teamed with the students and helped them tell their story and build their tefilla program in their own messy and fun way.

Hebrew High School: A Mosaic Mural

Fourteen Hebrew High School students donned protective goggles and shattered thousands of colored glass tiles. For almost 2 years, students used those individual shards to make an 8-by-22 foot mosaic mural. Spanning nearly the entire wall of the school's Beit Midrash, their central house of worship, the mosaic encompassed the cycle of seed to fruit in the tree of life and the seven species of Israel. Undulating wind and sky led up to the Eternal Light above the cherry wood Ark doors, which housed the sacred Torah scrolls.

Hebrew High School viewed itself through the metaphor of the mosaic. The glossy marketing brochure on prominent display when I visited Hebrew High School on November 1 and 2, 2010, featured a picture of a mosaic on its front cover. I encountered a poem entitled *Pieces of the Vision* on the inside front cover:

In ten thousand pieces of broken glass
lives a broken world
and a world yet to be
that lives in shared possibility

A narrative that encompasses
the grain of sand in the grout and

in the big picture taking its shape

A place to piece the vision:
through mindful implementation

A community
working together
to shape the
shared experience
for each individual student

The mosaic is a mirror,
reflecting ourselves
in the multitude of faces here,
day to day, year to year
and it is a window
welcoming light
to encompass a larger vision
refracting into the many levels
of involvement
that shape us.

(Hebrew High School NOW, 2010, emphasis in original)

Hebrew High School's Rabbinic Director of 18 years, Rabbi Simon Kaplan, wrote an article in that same publication explaining the meaning of the poem's mosaic imagery, and in doing so, defined the Jewish mission of the school. A mosaic consists of many small, individual pieces of glass or tile, and when pieced together, they create a unified picture. Kaplan described each of the 600 students at Hebrew High School as being one of the individual tiles who make up the larger, unified mosaic of the school.

Rather than focusing on the *unity* of the individual pieces coming together, Kaplan instead focused on the value of *tension* between the tiles. He expressed pride in the "rich and fruitful tensions" between "the parts and the whole, diversity and unity...individual and the community, freedom and commitment, particularism and universalism" at Hebrew High School (Kaplan, 2010, p. 4). Kaplan referenced Robert Bellah's *Habits of the Heart* in his article, writing that "America has always reflected this ongoing tension between the celebration of individual rights and the pursuit of a common good" (p. 4).

At the core of Hebrew High School's mission was pluralism, Kaplan (2010) wrote. Although affiliated with a Reform temple, the school was officially non-denominational and pluralistic. He defined pluralistic communities as places where people with differing viewpoints live in tension with each other. In one sentence alone, he used the word "different" three times to describe the Hebrew High School community. Those harmonious *differences*, or the "sacred arguments" as he termed it, laid at the center of his vision of Hebrew High School's pluralistic spiritual community. "Hebrew High School's essence," he wrote, was not bound up with rituals like prayer: "What unites us are not specific Jewish beliefs or practices, but a willingness to engage in a rich,

ongoing pluralistic Jewish conversation” (p. 4). This belief in dialoguing about the rich variety of spiritual diversity in Judaism explained Hebrew High School’s focus on alternative spiritual practices in their tefilla program.

Without calling it by name, Kaplan advocated for a communal and individual postmodern Jewish identity in his article. It was probably not coincidence that the two students during my focus groups who self-identified as postmodern Jews took Kaplan’s Judaic Studies class. Rather than trying to choose one of the identities in tension, he suggested that we honor *all* of the conflicting identities within us. He termed this “interdependence,” meaning that all of the identities weave together, in contrast to being independent or dependent. Kaplan’s article ended with the sentence, “A vision of interdependence honors differences, while fostering joy through another’s flourishing” (2010, p. 4). His use of the mosaic metaphor supported the postmodern imagery of individuals drawing on combinations or patterns of contrasting tiles to make a whole identity.

Viewing Hebrew High School’s tefilla program as a metaphorical mosaic allows for simultaneous observation of individual and school-wide influences, similarities, and differences. In this portrait of Hebrew High School’s tefilla program, I examine the mosaic’s individual tiles, the overall effect of the whole mural, how the tiles influence the larger mosaic and vice versa, the process of creating the mosaic, the artists and their philosophies and methodologies, and critiques of the artistic method used.

The Overall Mural

I first describe Hebrew High School’s tefilla mosaic from the widest angle possible—an overview. The school devoted 40 minutes per week to tefilla. Ninth

graders spent their time each week learning about tefilla in classes of approximately 15-20 students, formed by combining two advisories at random. Advisories were used for general academic advising and small group cohesion. Taught by one of the Judaic Studies faculty, these ninth grade tefilla groups remained consistent the entire year.

The school devoted the ninth grade year to learning about tefilla instead of doing tefilla. Students learned what the prayers meant, how to navigate a siddur, how to lead a service, and other knowledge and skills related to traditional prayer. Ninth graders had no choice as to the structure of their tefilla program or curriculum. They practiced prayers by reciting or singing them aloud as a class, but it was in the context of a formal lesson and not as a separate prayer service.

Tenth and eleventh grade students chose what type of spiritual practice they wanted to participate in during tefilla time. These options often had little to do with traditional prayer. The choices at the time of my visit were Googling God (discussions about God and spirituality using a variety of media such as music), yoga groups, meditation groups, a music group (students play instruments and sing an eclectic mix of traditional Jewish songs, prayers, and contemporary music one would hear on the radio, while also having discussions about that music), the Pop Matters Minyan (discussions about spirituality through the medium of movies and other pop culture), the Doubter's Minyan (discussions about spirituality designed for atheists, agnostics, and other doubters), as well as the Ruach Minyan which had elements of a traditional egalitarian synagogue service. Traditional prayer services or classes were not required in these grades.

Twelfth grade students did not have a tefilla class like the ninth graders, or spiritual practice options like the tenth and eleventh graders. Instead, they used that time to write their “Senior Sermon,” a *davar Torah* (a speech which incorporates ideas of Judaism with something relevant from the life of the student) that they presented to their peers during assemblies throughout the year. Judaic Studies teachers mentored the seniors and worked with them in small groups to craft their Senior Sermons.

One of the mentors in this new twelfth grade program told me that it was only intended to last for a few weeks, and then the seniors were supposed to join the tenth and eleventh graders in tefilla groups, but “we’re extending it a little bit longer until we figure out what we’re going to do with them for the rest of the year. So, I’m not sure what’s going to be with that.” A twelfth grader in the middle of writing his sermon said, “So, once everyone is done writing, I guess that’s when we’re going to begin praying. We’re not really doing tefilla right now.”

Ninth Grade Mosaic Tiles

Rabbi Kaplan was the head administrator in charge of Judaism at the school, and he supervised Rabbi Judith Gamliel, the administrator in charge of tefilla. Gamliel escorted me to observe the tefilla classes offered to the ninth graders the morning of my first day at the school. We first entered Judaic Studies teacher Joseph Cohen’s room, which looked more like a science classroom due to the science-related posters on the walls. The teacher sat up front and his 13 students faced him in rows. He began class by taking roll, and some students arrived late. This did not raise any red flags at the time, but I would observe that students came late to most minyans I visited.

Cohen's topic for his class was "Why pray from a siddur"? He started class by asking them, "What's the logic that the rabbis said we had to pray from a siddur?" When the students met him with blank stares, he continued, "Last week we studied about how they prayed in the Tanach that we don't do today." I gathered from the conversation that ensued that they had previously studied about how Jews used to worship using animal sacrifices, but eventually moved away from this practice to the more familiar synagogue prayer services of today.

His overall method was using Biblical texts to compare and contrast prayer during ancient times versus today. For example, he reminded them of a text they learned the previous week about Abraham having a conversation with God in the story of Sodom and Gomorrah. He explained that "people prayed more from the heart back then," and not from a siddur like today. He asked his students whether a conversation with God can be considered prayer.

Gamliel indicated that we should be moving on to a different classroom. In order to get around to all of the ninth grade classes going on, I did not stay in any classroom for more than 5-7 minutes. We travelled next to see Joshua Herman teach his ninth grade tefilla class. His room looked like a history classroom, with a prominent picture of Confucius on the wall, and a variety of world history maps displayed. When I walked in, Herman asked the class to look at a Shacharit (morning prayer) guide on a wall, but I had trouble finding it amidst the clutter of maps and pictures. His 17 students had *Siddur Sim Shalom* (the Conservative movement's prayer book) open in front of them, as I also saw in all the tefilla classrooms.

Herman started his tefilla class by reciting the prayers that they had learned thus far together. He began: “Who would like to lead us in *Modeh Ani* (I am Thankful to God) today?” All students recited this prayer aloud. After finishing it, the teacher mentioned moving from soul to body, and the class sang the *Asher Yatzar* (thanking God for creating humans). They read this in English so that, as he explained, “everybody can understand it.” He asked them, “What’s a wondrous way you want to use your body today?” He suggested exercising, but one student said, “To sleep!” Herman motioned towards a sleepy looking student, “Jacob’s already there!”

Almost none of the students wore a kipah during tefilla in any of the different classes or spiritual practice groups that I visited. Rabbi Gamliel wore a little doily kipah. As far as I could tell, all of the male Jewish studies teachers wore a kipah *sruga* (knitted head covering), which is common among modern Orthodox males.

We moved on to music teacher David Lewis’s tefilla class, where I saw 23 students sitting attentively in the music room. They were in the middle of learning about *Birkot haShachar* (the traditional morning blessings) from *Siddur Sim Shalom*, reading them in Hebrew and then translating. As we walked in, one boy was attempting a translation with some difficulty but eventually got the Hebrew words out. They were discussing the phrase *Ee efshar l’hitkayem* (It is Impossible to Live Without You). Many of the students held musical instruments, like drums and shakers and some had guitars. It seemed like Lewis used music as the vehicle for discussing the siddur. The class then moved on to *Elohai Neshama* (My God, the Soul...), and he said “we’re going to niggun (sing a wordless melody) first.” He told the students they could use their instruments as

long he heard their voices over the instruments. Gamliel told me as we were leaving that Lewis “is a really beloved member of the community.”

Gamliel took me next to Rabbi Goldman’s class. Gamliel identified each teacher by denomination when she told me his or her name: “This is Rabbi Goldman, he’s a Conservative rabbi.” When I walked in, Goldman was using the “*Neshama* (soul) Journal,” which the school created for the ninth graders to reflect on tefilla. It was a 28 page, black and white, stapled, photocopied packet. As an example of its contents, on the top of page three it said, “*Asher Yatzar* is attributed to the fourth-century sages Abaye and Rav Papa, of the Talmud (*Brachot* 11a). It speaks of the intricate functioning of our bodies, warning us not to take them for granted, and recognizing them as a miraculous sign of God’s creation.” Below that sat a writing prompt, “What aspect of your physical life are you most grateful for? What do you take for granted?” The rest of the page was left blank for student writing and introspection.

Like Lewis, Rabbi Goldman was teaching his students about Birkot HaShachar, and they were reciting all of them together in unison in Hebrew. I did not observe a prayerful experience—the students instead were reciting the prayers by rote, like they would their multiplication tables. Rabbi Goldman had shown the student different English translations of the original Hebrew of each of those blessings, and he asked the students to share which translations they liked better. As I was walking out, he asked for key ideas in the blessings they learned.

Then I was taken to Reform Rabbi Bernie Shwartz’s class. I estimate that the teacher talked 85% of the time; students contributed only when they were asked a direct question. As I walked in, he said that “*Psukei D’Zimra* (the Verses of Praise) start with

what Heschel would call ‘radical amazement.’” (Heschel was a prominent twentieth century rabbi and philosopher who emphasized finding spirituality in the beauty of everyday life.) His class focused on the prayer *Baruch sh’amar v’haya ha’olam* (Blessed is He Who Spoke and the World was Created). His main point was that “speech and action follow one another” because God spoke, and the world was created. He asked the class, “Is there any way your speech causes something to happen?” He followed up this question by reminding the class that all humans were created in the image of God, and so we needed to act “Godlike” by assigning importance to our speech and actions. One student answered by saying that “when you use your words to welcome someone in school, it can help create friends.” And conversely, she said being negative affects herself and others. One student said, “If I give someone a complement it can make their day.” Another student mentioned the hurtful impact of gossiping.

Shwartz praised the students for their comments, and said, “The whole thing is about getting us to see how amazing the world is, even when it’s hurting like it is today.” He asked them to think to themselves and write in their Neshama Journals on this topic, and then after they all had something written down, they would come back together and share. As I sat in his lesson, I saw students outside his classroom windows milling around outside at all times.

The one time a student initiated a question or comment in any of the classes I visited came at the very end of Shwartz’s lesson, when he was talking to them about *Baruch Merachem* (Blessed Be the Compassionate One). A student asked him, “If God does exist, does God care?” The student said it was hard to believe in God at all if He did not show compassion, and she saw a “lack of compassion with all the evil on earth.”

The question came in the last minute of class, so he had just enough time to acknowledge it and mention that “Judaism believes in a caring God.” He said they would continue the discussion in the next class.

One of the common critiques that I heard from both students and teachers was that the ninth grade tefilla classes were “dry,” a word that was used many times over. Tefilla teacher Herman expressed worry about the ninth grade tefilla curriculum. He said, “I’m 2 months in, and I’m starting to feel like I’m losing them...It’s hard to simultaneously try to pray and learn in a short period of time. I definitely don’t have the feeling that my group of students are being inspired to lead this kind of service, or to participate with it on their own.” When I asked how a teacher *does* inspire students to pray, he sighed, and said, “I don’t know.” When I waited further, he again said, “I mean, I don’t know. I don’t. I think it’s a very hard thing to do.” He thought back to the last time his students felt inspired or spiritual, and he said last year he chaperoned a shabbaton that included praying on a beach. He said they walked away from a beautiful sunset feeling inspired, “but I’m not sure how much actual prayer occurred.”

When I asked Gamliel to critique these ninth grade classes, she said,

The kids will probably say “it’s not a real class” or “they treat it just like a regular class—there’s no spirituality.” Some will say “It’s not a real class, so I don’t care.” And other kids on the other extreme will say, “Stop treating it like any other class, I need to be davening!”

Another faculty member said, “As soon as you call it a class, then where’s the spirituality?” Gamliel gave credence to the problem of infusing spirituality into an academic class when she brought up the issue of grades. She hypothetically wondered,

“How can a class have any spirituality if grades are hanging over students’ heads?” She realized that “the culture of many strong academic schools is that if kids don’t get a grade for it, they value it less.” On the one hand, grading these classes might ensure attendance and that the students would take it more seriously. On the other hand, it may strip the feeling of spirituality and make it just another academic exercise. Ultimately, Hebrew High School decided not to grade tefilla. “We agree with the argument that grading tefilla is not a solution, it’s a crutch,” Gamliel said.

At the same time, one of the students in a focus group admitted the following:

I ditched minyan today to do my math homework, because I’m getting a grade in math, and that goes into my GPA. In the meantime in minyan all I get is a thumbs up, and I don’t get a written grade, so it doesn’t matter to me. I don’t care at all.

This is a horrible thing to say, but I think we should be graded in minyan. Or something, because I don’t care, I honestly don’t care at all.

A boy sitting in the room agreed, “That’s absolutely true.”

One of the school’s tefilla teachers expressed the strongest sentiments against the ninth grade program—“I’m very unhappy with this ninth grade program.” She claimed that “we did it before, and it failed abominably.” I asked why they would do something again that failed, and she responded with, “Gamliel’s new.” I asked her to explain what she felt was wrong with the ninth grade program. “It could be excruciating. I don’t know what they’re going to retain. There isn’t the repetition that one needs to learn a prayer. I just don’t think it’s a positive experience for the kids.” When I asked her what she felt the ninth graders should be doing instead, having been through this experiment before, she said,

I think that they're in high school now, and so what that they're in ninth grade, I think having different options would be terrific for them too. And, some of them will opt into a traditional minyan. Or a doubters minyan. Or a something else kind of minyan. But I don't know any of them that would choose a learning minyan that they're experiencing now.

Tenth and Eleventh Grade Mosaic Tiles

In contrast to the ninth grade program, the tenth and eleventh grade tefilla program was entirely experiential and based upon student choice. On the second day of my visit, I observed how this choice program ran. I first went to a group called Goodling God led by Joseph Cohen. I immediately noticed the noise level outside the room and I saw many students were roving around past the windows of his classroom. Cohen first asked his students the question, "What does it mean to be spiritual?" He tried to elicit from his students a distinction between being "Jewishly spiritual" and "generally spiritual." He tried to explore what he called the "very slippery concept of spirituality" through the medium of music. For homework, he had asked students to come up with their own music or songs that they found to be "spiritual." Examples that the students came up with were "Of Men and Angels," "We are the World," "The Sadness Never Ends," and "Say What You Need Today." Once he wrote the songs on his white board, he asked, "What makes a song personal to you?" Cohen put up on the board two headers, "Personal Meaning" and "Spiritual Meaning." His goal appeared to be using the students' music as a vehicle for coming up with a definition of spirituality and then to parse it further into a definition of Jewish spirituality. As I had seen in the other classes, the teacher dominated the discussions.

I then visited the yoga minyan in the Beit Midrash. To begin class, she told her students, “We have an observer to watch our spiritual practice in our minyan.” She used the words “spiritual practice” and “minyan” together in a yoga group that had very little to do with Judaism. Students arrived late and continued to chat with each other as the teacher struggled to get the class started. Seventeen boys and girls sat against the back wall on mats, and the teacher started them in the lotus position. After sitting and observing them for about 5 minutes, it seemed like she was leading them through a fairly regular routine of yoga. I saw no signs of anything I would consider Jewish or prayer-oriented; I could have been in any yoga class in the world.

I moved on to Rabbi Goldman’s meditation minyan in a quiet, dark classroom, and in fact I stumbled over a student’s leg when I entered. Students sat mostly on the floor around the room against the walls, with a few kids choosing to sit at the desks. I sat at the first available desk, and when I looked behind me, I saw a couple girls in the corner giggling and waving to me. The students were otherwise mostly quiet. In the background I heard meditation music playing, the kind of background music that I have heard many times playing in Indian restaurants. On the white board, the teacher had written their agenda: “1. *Bracha* (blessing); 2. Free form mediation; 3. Reflection.” From this, I assumed they began the meditation session by reciting a traditional Jewish blessing of some sort, although beyond that I did not observe anything overtly Jewish or prayer-oriented about the session.

Afterwards, I walked to the gym to see a second yoga class. I looked on from a distance—I did not want to intrude by walking clear across the gym to just stare at them for a few minutes. I heard the teacher say, “Roll back your shoulders. Breathe deeply

through your nose.” It seemed like another typical yoga class with students on mats in the lotus position.

When I exited the gym and walked in the general vicinity of the music room, I let my ears guide me the rest of the way to the music minyan, led by David Lewis. I saw about 30 students in there, by far the biggest tefilla group. I heard the music long before I reached the room. Lewis stood up front, with the students in rows facing him. He held a guitar, and many of the students were playing with him on bongos, shakers, drums, cymbals, and guitars. They were playing the pop rock song, “What If God Was One of Us.” I had fun just listening to it and watching everyone participating and enjoying themselves.

When the music ended, Lewis inquired what the song was trying to express, and the students tried to find the meaning behind the song. Lewis likened that process to finding the meaning behind prayer. The discussion wandered to “Who is God?” In contrast to the other classes I visited, these students contributed freely to the discussion. One student commented, “If we all treated each other like they are God, we would treat each other with a whole lot more respect.” The students discussed the Biblical idea that humans were created in the image of God, and Lewis asked them what exactly that meant: “Does He really look like us? Do we really look like Him?”

The final group I observed was Schwartz’s meditation minyan. He was trying to lead what he termed “*chesed* meditation,” which he was attempting to explain to the students; however, it was hard to hear him because of the loud music coming from Cohen’s Googling God minyan next door. In fact, he apologized to me as I walked in the door that he could not really conduct his meditation minyan because of all the noise.

Beyond the musical interruptions from next door, there was the usual din of talking outside from the constantly wandering students I observed at the school.

Later, I asked Gamliel what was going on outside with those students. She explained that students were given free periods to use as they saw fit: “The roving bands of teenagers that you saw probably did have their free period. It looked like tenth grade was just roving around.” She justified the informal feel of the school by saying that “kids need more free time, not less. Kids hanging out, totally wasting time, kids studying, kids talking, we have kids playing music during free time. They need to eat. They need to eat a lot. They’re teenagers.”

It is also possible to interpret what I observed as the “orderly chaos” of a mosaic, in light of Kaplan’s understanding of how to create a pluralistic community. After all, despite the seeming disorder I observed, students were in fact learning. Looking at their recent college matriculations confirmed this: Columbia, Haverford, Emory, MIT, NYU, Northwestern, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Yale, and Washington University, among others. One might be able to see the school’s atmosphere as being aligned with how he viewed the positive tension between individual freedom and the community’s structure, and the needs of the teenager to be free versus the needs of a school to create order.

Searching for the Traditional Tefilla Mosaic Tiles

When I was observing all of the tefilla choices that were given to the tenth and eleventh graders, I went on a search for the traditional prayer service. I thought that I had heard one existed. Perhaps, in retrospect, I just assumed that in a pluralistic school, there would be at least one actual prayer option in the tefilla program, and not just alternative options such as yoga and meditation. As I was walking around to all of the rooms trying

to find it, I asked many of the students who were hanging out in the hallways where it was located. Various people sent me in different directions, but no one knew for sure. Because I was running out of time to see it, I did not waste time wandering and went directly to the secretary to the rabbis, and asked her where I could find it. She was not certain, and she suggested I go find Gamliel. I could not find her, and in the end I gave up trying to find the traditional minyan.

After my failed search, when I met with Gamliel to interview her, I asked her where a traditional prayer service belonged in the pluralistic tefilla framework of Hebrew High School. She told me that “traditional davening” belonged at Hebrew High School, so I asked her if the school offered Orthodox davening for students. She responded with an immediate “no” and an “of course not!” expression on her face. She went on, “It’s egalitarian. If a group of kids asked for an Orthodox minyan, I don’t know...I’d have to ask Simon.”

Later, when I met with the students, a couple of students said there was some sort of a traditional egalitarian prayer option. At first, an eleventh grade student called it the Ruach (spirit) Minyan, and when I asked her to explain what that was, she said, “It’s kind of like traditional. We use a siddur but we don’t really do the prayers because we don’t have a full minyan.” I was confused, so I asked her if her minyan did a traditional synagogue prayer service. A young man wearing a kippah interjected and explained, “It’s a traditional egal sort of thing. We only have about seven people who show up, so we can never have a minyan. We just pray on our own.” He was referring to the fact that in traditional Jewish prayer, a quorum of 10 people are required to conduct a public prayer service; otherwise, if less than that are present then only individual prayer can take place.

They were using the word “egalitarian” because it was non-Orthodox prayer, in the sense that women were given equal rights to men in areas of ritual, such as leading the prayer service and having equal access to the prayer space itself (there was no separation of sexes, or *mechitza*).

This young man said that, as a self-described “traditional Jew,” he was not represented at the school and did not have a tefilla option available for him. He said that he “dislikes the minyan program” because

I’m somebody who davens every day with *tallit* (prayer shawl) and *tefillin* (phylacteries), and at Hebrew High School I’ve always had trouble finding a minyan that suits my need. We certainly don’t have a daily minyan. And the weekly minyan that we have has either been too small, or hasn’t followed the full matbaya tefilla. And for somebody who’s more traditional, this poses a problem, which is a similar problem to those people who don’t want to pray but it’s on the exact opposite end of the spectrum.

He expressed anger: “So I hate the minyan program as much as somebody who’s totally secular. For the opposite reason.”

Contrasting Colors in the Mosaic

These strongly-worded comments from the traditional students, and the comments about the place of an Orthodox minyan from Gamliel, led me to ponder the goals of the pluralistic tefilla program at Hebrew High School. This section looks at the contrasting goals of the school’s tefilla model, and how they lie in tension with each other like the various colorful tiles in a mosaic.

When I asked Gamliel to start from the beginning and explain the tefilla program at Hebrew High School, the first thing she mentioned was that “we have competing goals.” Among their many goals, she said, are

teaching kids the matbaya, giving them a meaningful experience, giving them a thorough educational experience, hoping to get student buy-in and interest, having a good, meaningful spiritual experience, getting kids to show up, accountability, creativity, choice, a sense of ongoing scope and sequence and arc of learning...All of those things and many of those values compete with each other and cancel each other out.

Similarly, soon after Kaplan began explaining the tefilla program to me, he mentioned that “there’s a lot of different values that are in tension or are at play. I think a tension that you probably saw in different ways this morning is, What kind of skills or language does a student need?” He was referring to the tension between making students know how to pray in a traditional way versus allowing them more freedom in how they expressed their spirituality. He confirmed that it was difficult for one program to do both well, although most schools try to somehow do both (as Gamliel was describing).

When one looked at all of her goals together, even Gamliel admitted that it was “crazy, and you can quote me on that.” She articulated the difficulty of combining traditional prayer proficiency goals in equal measure with a meaningful spiritual experience; creativity and tradition often times do not mix. Even Gamliel herself questioned having all of those goals mixed at the same time, yet she was trying to do just that in the program that she was leading.

Both Gamliel and Kaplan summed up the program as being founded upon the foundations of “learning, doing, and reflecting.” The first stage occurred mainly in ninth grade when those students learned the basic knowledge and skills of traditional Jewish prayer. The second stage occurred mainly in tenth and eleventh grades with the choice program, where the students actually practiced tefilla—defined broadly as spiritual practices ranging from yoga and meditation to actual prayer. The third stage occurred throughout a student’s high school career, such as with the Neshama Journal in ninth grade and through reflective discussions in the years afterward.

Kaplan described his goal for the students to take tefilla “beyond the head level.” He gave an example of something he tried a few years back after he had a conversation with the school’s health teacher. This teacher described her health curriculum and how it encompassed physical health, mental health, emotional health, and social health. Kaplan asked her, “What about spiritual health?” He saw a prime opportunity to make tefilla something less theoretical and instead give it a framework for becoming more practical. He therefore created a ninth grade workshop on spiritual health that would take place at the same time the health teacher taught about physical health.

In explaining the goals of Hebrew High School’s tefilla program, Kaplan referenced Michael Rosenak’s *Commandments and Concerns* (1987), described in the literature review, which outlined one of the core tensions of Jewish education in general. On one end of the spectrum, Kaplan told me, Rosenak described a “deliberative-inductive model, which is a very Dewian model, and it’s very much based on a child-centered education and a notion of evolving and adapting without an externally-imposed set of standards.” In Hebrew High School’s tefilla program, this would be the framework for

the choice model. “And then he’s got this what he calls a normative-ideational model, in which there is out there a model which we are attempting to you know fashion, socialize, impose on a student.” This would be the framework for the ninth grade tefilla class.

A criticism of this model, Kaplan acknowledged, was

one of the critiques that Dewey makes about himself. Dewey talks about a notion of there’s a danger in progressive education of becoming sort of scatterbrained.

Of not creating deep grooves, and not creating enough consistency and coherence so that you can build for future experience. And, I think that’s a real danger. Of, okay, I’ve had all these real experiences, and what can I make of it. So, I think I would think more about that, in terms of how much focus do you need for coherence in any given model that you’re involved in.

Nietzsche’s *Thus Spake Zarathustra* inspired another framework that Kaplan referenced in explaining the rationale for the tefilla program at Hebrew High School: “Nietzsche has this idea you go from being a camel, to a lion, to a child. The camel is bearing the weight of the tradition, and the lion is critiquing and saying ‘no!’, and the child is creating something new and saying ‘yes.’” Kaplan gave the following as an example: Many students consider traditional tefilla to be a “camel,” in the sense that the camel bears the heavy burden of tradition; he carries a big load on his back. The camel is an oppressive “you must do this, period.” In the “lion” stage, “Sacred Nay Saying” occurs, which is carefully and systematically critiquing and tearing apart the camel’s burden. In this stage, the student breaks down and critically analyzes exactly what she finds meaningful about tefilla , and what struggles she has with it. The final stage in this process (called “Eternal Child”) encourages students to move beyond simple rejection of

tefilla. To paraphrase Nietzsche's model, how do students move from "Sacred No" to "Sacred Yes"? Kaplan wondered, "How do we inject new meaning into old rituals?" For example, he said, perhaps a student will decide that meditation is how she will introduce relevance, spirituality, and connection to Judaism into her tefilla. Meditation *becomes* this student's tefilla.

Kaplan mentioned that Hebrew High School was up for reaccreditation and they were re-examining their vision of the ideal graduate. He emphasized that there was nothing in that vision resembling a statement such as "She engages in a regular pattern of tefilla." Rather, he pointed out the statement that "She is a God-wrestler who stretches herself spiritually." He said, "That's pretty indicative of trying to make the big statement about how we feel about tefilla and spiritual practice."

In big, bold letters at the bottom of the "Vision of the Graduate" document that Kaplan referenced was the statement: "SHE IS A BALANCED, CAPABLE, COMMITTED, RESPONSIBLE JEWISH HUMAN BEING." Above that was a section entitled, "Heart/Avodah/Spiritual Practice":

- She is a committed Jew, who feels claimed by her tradition, community, people, texts, language, the land of Israel, and the history and virtues of America.
- She is connected to the rhythms of Jewish time (Shabbat and Holidays).
- She is a God-wrestler who stretches herself spiritually.
- She possesses an appreciation of the divine and a sense of wonder, awe, gratitude, and joy.
- She is confident and humble, balanced and hopeful.
- She is creative and collaborative.

- She engages in ongoing self-refinement and transformation (*teshuvah*) and has a personal vision for the future (*kavanah*).

After reading this, I pushed Kaplan to flesh out this vision further. In particular, I asked him what exactly it meant by graduating “committed” Jews. How did he define “Jewish commitment”? One commitment he wanted each of his school’s students to have was talmud Torah, “you know, a relationship to Torah, capacities in Jewish learning, a desire to continue to learn, to see learning as part of one’s ongoing understanding, growth.” A second commitment for him was “definitely participating in chesed (good deeds) and *tzedakah* (charity and community service) of one form or another, as an ongoing practice.” Third, he said “building an ongoing relationship with Israel is a very strong value, but it’s a little different than an ongoing practice.”

Then I asked him to focus on what kind of spiritual commitments he expected of his ideal graduate, for example in tefilla. After some thinking, he said,

So it seems to me that it is more doable to create a relationship with Jewish time, you know with having some relationship with *Shabbas* (the Sabbath) or the *chagim* (the holidays), as a pattern of life, that feels to me easier to focus on than creating the ongoing tefilla or spiritual practice related to tefilla. I’m not thrilled about that at all. I’m just saying, if you have a relationship with Talmud Torah, a relationship with the cycle of the Jewish calendar and Shabbat in particular and the chagim, and you’re doing your chesed and tzedakah, and you connect to Israel... I don’t know exactly where I would put the question of you know, are you davening?

To make sure I understood him correctly, I clarified that prayer was not in his or the school's vision of the ideal graduate. He confirmed that this was the case, but "it's simply out of pragmatism, not necessarily importance. Not necessarily out of what has ultimate value. Reality..." He was describing his perception that the vast majority of Hebrew High School graduates would not pray traditionally, so it was unrealistic to have that as a goal that would remain unrealized; therefore, instead he had to write "spiritual practice" as a goal, which did not necessarily have anything to do with prayer at all.

Kaplan acknowledged that the ninth grade program was heavily subject-centered and not very student-centered, so I asked him about the long term prospects of such a program working. He candidly responded,

I honestly couldn't tell you how much of it sticks. You know, is that goal of having students be familiar, comfortable, reasonably proficient in just getting their mouths around the words, knowing there's a structure to tefilla...I don't know what the long-range effects of doing that sort of practice and drill is. I guess I just feel a certain responsibility that they should have had the experience of having learned that.

Without me asking them to comment on whether they should be required to pray, even if it may not "stick" (as Kaplan put it), the students brought it up themselves in the focus groups. They all agreed that learning about traditional tefilla and being exposed to it in practice was an important thing for them to have at a Jewish school. In fact, one girl who praised tefilla at Jewish camp (as so many of her peers did as well) mentioned that it was a good thing that traditional tefilla was "imposed" at camp, and should be at school too:

I feel at the beginning of camp, you're like "Ugh, we have to pray so much" but then, by the end you're so used to it that it becomes really natural, and you just enjoy it so much more. And just seeing everyone doing it. Everyone has to do it. Nobody is like, "You're lame because you're praying" because everyone is doing it.

For the teachers who were expected to lead the students in this tefilla program at Hebrew High School, the goals were muddled. I asked tefilla teacher Herman what the school wanted to see in its ideal graduate regarding tefilla, and he said he was not sure of the school's goals:

Sometimes we say we want our kids after 4 years to be able to go out and lead a formal prayer service. Sometimes we say we want our kids to go out to be able to generate for themselves wherever they go after graduation a personal and possibly communal spiritual engagement. Sometimes we say we would love in the future to develop a program that allows us to spiritually advise our students and develop their individual spiritual awareness.

I asked Herman to explain why, after 5 years of working at the school, he did not know the goals of the tefilla program: "Part of the reason has been there are two conflicting schools of thought about whether our decisions should be dictated by educators for the benefit of the student, or should we be student-responsive, but facilitated and developed by teachers." Without realizing it, he was echoing the same continuum that Kaplan had described when he referenced Rosenak's deliberative versus normative framework. To Kaplan, it may have been clear how Rosenak's paradigm framed the tefilla program at the school, but to Hoffman, it was confusing.

I knew from speaking with Kaplan and Gamliel that one of their goals was to graduate students who were literate and proficient in traditional prayer, one of the central reasons for instituting the ninth grade tefilla classes. Yet Herman contradicted this goal by saying, “It’s not our mission for our students to be comfortable and capable to engage in communal prayer, and to not feel alienated in those environments, that they should be able to walk into any minyan and know what to do. That’s never been a stated goal here.” When the mission of the tefilla program filtered down to the students, it became even less clear. A frequent comment from the students was that they did not understand the goals of the tefilla program. As one student said, “I mean, the biggest question is what is the purpose of minyan, after all? The school hasn’t really set that forward. They just see this as a period where they have time to do something religious, something spiritual.” When I asked others in the student focus group if they knew what the purpose of tefilla was at Hebrew High School, I heard a chorus of “no’s” and “nope’s.”

I pushed the students to guess what the goals were. One student ventured to try: The school’s goal is, I guess, to have us connect to ourselves, and connect to Judaism. But to me, I don’t feel that that’s 100% happening. I think that, I know in ninth grade almost everyone took it as a joke. There were a lot of people coming late. But, as we get older, I feel like it’s being taken less of as a joke, and it’s more serious, but then again people don’t really care. And they don’t get why it’s important. So, I think the school needs to stress the importance of it in a way and explain that there’s more to it than just sitting and doing yoga, or just sitting and playing music. There’s actually a spirituality behind it.

As I tried to understand the goals of Hebrew High School's tefilla program, I looked at what the school had written about the topic. In the mission and philosophy section of its website, Hebrew High School saw "Judaism as a pluralistic, moral, spiritual, and intellectual way of life which, in the context of community, refines the human being (*tikkun atzmi*) and repairs the world (*tikkun olam*)."

The foundation of Hebrew High School's Jewish ethos came from a quote from *Pirkei Avot* (Ethics of the Fathers), which was also etched into the walls of Hebrew High School's Beit Midrash: "The world rests on three Pillars: Torah, *Avodah*, and *Gemilut Hasadim*." According to its literature, Hebrew High School translated these three pillars as: "Learning (head), Service of the Heart or Spiritual Practice (heart), and Deeds of Loving Kindness or Ethical Practice (hands)." The school defined the spiritual practice pillar on that website as

orientation or direction (*kavanah*); the ways in which a person is connected to larger stories, patterns, and traditions. This pillar represents the ongoing exploration into the meanings of the Covenant and how an individual is related to and responsible for the self, the community, the Jewish people, nature, and God. Hebrew High School students practice traditional, liberal, and experimental forms of prayer and meditation. As a Jewish Community School, Hebrew High School is committed to identifying with and celebrating the cycles and rhythms of Jewish time. The School helps students develop their own *Aggadah* (narrative or story), so that they, too, can understand where they fit in God's plan.³

³ In order to protect the privacy of the research participants, I chose not to reference the websites I quoted from in the portraits of Hebrew High School or Jewish Academy. Otherwise, their privacy would have easily been compromised.

Even though the Hebrew word avodah is usually translated as prayer in this context, they chose to translate it as spiritual practice. This provided insight into Hebrew High School's orientation towards tefilla, which was not necessarily a synagogue service based upon the siddur. Instead, as it stated explicitly, avodah could mean "experimental forms of prayer and meditation."

This analysis of what I would term "the traditional prayer-alternative spiritual practice continuum" parallels one of the classic tensions of tefilla: striking the balance between using someone else's words by using a traditional siddur-based prayer structure, versus spontaneous, personal, original, inspirational prayer. As referenced in the literature review, the first one is known in Hebrew as keva, and the second one is kavanah. Ironically, it is keva which often creates kavanah, in the sense that it gives the person wishing to pray the foundation to create spirituality in their prayer. As Gamliel explained it, "You can't do impressionism (kavanah) until you've done your still lifes (keva). You have to do your scales (keva) if you're going to become a composer (kavanah)."

In explaining the rationale behind requiring the ninth graders to attend a tefilla class that they may not be interested in, and not giving them any choice in how they pray, Kaplan acknowledged that this was not an easy decision: "I think we've gone back and forth in terms of do you need to daven a certain matbaya, or lead a certain matbaya." He admitted that he knew the ninth grade year was more subject-centered, regardless of whether it would have any long-term effect. He calls it "a sort of naaseh v'nishmah sort of thing, where if we do it enough times, I want you to be able to either lead it in class, or

put it on an MP3 file for me and show me that you have the comfort to be able to do that.”

I asked Gamliel to consider the common critique that tefilla programs such as the one at Hebrew High School over-emphasize kavanah, that they are top heavy in alternative tefilla. Her quick response was, “I have to say that critique, partially I agree with it”; however, she followed that up by saying, “Our ninth grade program addresses that... We feel pretty strongly about emphasizing the keva in the ninth grade.” She tried to achieve balance in the keva-kavanah teeter-totter by giving the ninth graders a year of foundational learning (keva), and then allowing them to choose their own spiritual practice in tenth through twelfth grades (kavanah), even if they chose to never attend a traditional prayer service. At the same time, Kaplan acknowledged that “I don’t think we work at that hard enough, and I think that’s a really worthwhile goal for us, to balance all these things we’re doing.”

Ironically, some of the students felt the choice program should be dropped in favor of mandatory prayer for all students. A student who heard that proposal from her peers asked them whether any of the students would enjoy it, to which another student said, “You don’t have to enjoy it. It’s a Jewish school, but I’ve never prayed here before.” A student who was listening to this commented, “There’s a certain intellectual honesty to that, actually.” I told him that I would imagine the school administration was fearful of its student population resenting them if they forced students to pray. A student agreed with me, and said, “If you force someone, they’re not going to appreciate it.” Another student responded, “Big deal. You can’t make someone appreciate something.” To me, this was just a different way of arguing about the balance between keva (praying

rotely) and kavanah (enjoying and appreciating tefilla); the students intuitively saw the pros and cons of each and the difficulty in balancing the two.

Similarly, many of the students requested to spend *more* time learning about the traditional prayers, not less; they did not feel like it was an imposition. A senior who had been at Hebrew High School for his entire academic career said,

I think very few students, and I'm including myself, understand the point of prayers. I don't know why I pray. I don't feel anything after I pray, and it doesn't change my day or my life at all when I pray, and I think I can speak on behalf of my friends, because before I start praying, I need to know why I'm praying, and what I'm praying to, and how is this going to help me if I do it. Why should I be here? Why shouldn't I be in the library hiding and reading my book, which I've been doing actually because what am I going to get out of this?

Another student said, "Before people choose that they just want to sit in a room and do meditation, they should be given the tools to decide what would be best for them, not just be like, 'I feel like taking a nap today.'" Students argued it was Hebrew High School's *obligation* to teach them about tefilla—"Since we go to a Jewish school, if a Hebrew High School student leaves Hebrew High School not knowing how to lead a service, then I feel like Hebrew High School's not responsible." One student confirmed, "I feel like Freshman year should be about learning how. And then the rest of the years are implementing that in taking what you've learned and putting it towards yourself, so that you can put it out for others."

One of the seniors in the focus group expressed how grateful he was that he was "forced" to learn about all the options available to him in Judaism: "We went over

Reconstructionist, Reform, Conservative, Orthodox, and we looked through how they're different and how they're all similar. And, I think that at Hebrew High School, I learned the tools to relate Judaism to my everyday life." When asked to tell me more about his everyday life as it relates to Judaism, spirituality, and tefilla, he said,

Well, where I'm from, except for like High Holidays, religion is more voluntary, I guess...I gradually have become, you know, more religious. That's voluntary, I wouldn't say more religious. It's like, I went to Israel, and I came back, and I keep kosher now, not fully, but you know, my version of being kosher. I'm limited in my own way because my family doesn't keep kosher at all. And...I don't like to pray. That's my choice, but I still like to study.

When I pushed him further to define his Jewish identity, he described himself as "postmodern." I asked him what he meant by that, and he explained,

Being postmodern is kind of like after the Holocaust, and the creation of the State of Israel. How do we reconcile that you can't just be all tradition, and all reason. You have to bring them all together and tell your own story. Everyone's story is different.

Another student in the room agreed with him by saying, "It's just the atmosphere of Jewish life in the 21st century." I asked her what she meant exactly, and she described her identity to me:

Well, my dad is Catholic, and my mom is not. And when I talk to my dad, they want me to be Catholic, and they're like, oh, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus. And I'm like, yeah...I don't think he's our Savior. And my 9-year old sister debates these things with me. So, I'm kind of stuck in the middle that if there are so many

people that believe this, and then so many people who believe that, where do I fall in the scheme of things. I've grown on a path that's more Conservative Judaism, but then there are little hints of Reform Judaism and things that I don't fully understand, and things that I don't really care for. So, I pick and choose.

Pluralism and Authenticity

Thus far, I have looked at the Hebrew High School mosaic from a distance and described its overall shape and structure. I have also talked to some of its artists and discovered the rationale behind their techniques and methodology. Now, I turn to the materials they used to make up their mosaic. How did they select the tiles that would be included and excluded in their pluralistic mosaic?

The first item that Kaplan mentioned when I asked him to describe the tefilla program at Hebrew High School was that “it's built in response to having a pluralistic community day school, which has all kinds of students and families who have all kinds of different practices and beliefs.” The issues that he brought up—pluralism and authenticity—were hot topics at Hebrew High School. The students and faculty in my interviews frequently mentioned the diverse Jewish community, as well as debated what counted in their pluralistic community as authentic expressions of Judaism. During my 2-day visit to Hebrew High School, the topics of pluralism and authenticity were mentioned on 37 separate occasions.

The school consistently emphasized pluralism throughout its published materials. For example, on the school's webpage, I quickly noted the following: “Hebrew High School is unique in its commitment to a powerful vision of pluralism and community in both Jewish philosophy and practice.” The first descriptor of the word “Judaism” in its

mission statement was “pluralistic.” The first descriptor of the word “community” in its mission statement was “pluralistic.” In the main admissions brochure, under “Why Hebrew High School?” there was an entire page devoted to “developing the individual within the context of a thriving learning community.”

Kaplan referenced a comment that he heard Harold Shulweis, the rabbi of Valley Beth Shalom in Encino, CA, say, adding that he thought it was something they could definitely work on:

[Shulweis] said that pluralism doesn’t just mean you’ve got all these different things going on, I mean there are boundaries. We have a pretty broad notion of spiritual practice is engagement with some kind of Jewish spiritual text. There are things that you can’t do, even if you say this is what I think of as spiritual practice.

I pressed him to define the boundaries of his pluralistic Jewish community. In other words, how did he define “authentic Judaism” or “authentic tefilla”? He answered,

I would say that line of authenticity is expressed in the way we define spiritual practice as something that is in conversation with sources, with Jewish spiritual sources. I feel like that’s an anchor if you will in broad boundaries that we’re defining for spiritual practice.

He hesitated in thought before giving an example of what he was talking about:

Let’s say a teacher’s doing Jewish meditation, so I might go to that Jewish meditation session, and I’m listening for where are the liturgical, textual references. And I feel like if I go there and it feels to me like, wait a minute, that felt more like a general meditation session, but I don’t feel how that’s an

interpretive response to the Jewish spirit. I would feel like that's not Jewishly authentic as Jewish meditation. But, I don't think that I can really say you know what, you did different interpretations of the Shma in your meditation, but you didn't have the Amidah as part of...I don't think that's where the authenticity would lie.

When I observed the tenth and eleventh grade tefilla program in practice, I saw a broad continuum of what Kaplan described. If I were to evaluate the teachers based upon his criteria of "authentic tefilla," some of the teachers would fit within this framework and some would not. When I visited the two yoga groups, I observed nothing Jewish about them. While one may say that I was only there for a matter of minutes, my interview with one of the yoga teachers also indicated that she saw no connection between her yoga group and tefilla:

It's very different from prayer. When I started, I inherited yoga from someone who started it. And, she probably incorporated some prayer into it. I don't. What I do is I connect. I try to make it spiritual in that it's a way to get the students connected with their bodies, to relax them, center them, focus them, kind of calm them down and make them feel good and just aware of their bodies. So, they usually leave feeling relaxed and peaceful, which is really excellent. So as far as prayer goes, zero prayer.

She underscored her point when I asked her where she saw yoga as fitting into the tefilla environment at Hebrew High School: "I see it as an option for those students that aren't looking for a tefilla experience, that are looking to do something alternative and something creative, a little out of the box that they wouldn't necessarily have an

opportunity to do elsewhere.” Kaplan likely would not view her yoga sessions as authentic tefilla.

On the other hand, Rabbi Shwartz, one of the meditation teachers, incorporated Judaism into his meditation tefilla. He referenced the Torah, Jewish philosophers, and rooted his meditative practices deeply in the Jewish tradition. When I asked him whether he saw meditation as authentic tefilla, Shwartz mentioned being an active member of the Institute for Jewish Spirituality, which he described as

a nation-wide program for rabbis, educators, cantors, lay people, that has a four-directional approach to Jewish spirituality. One is traditional *limmud* (study), with *chevruta* (paired study), we do mostly Chassidic texts. The second is yoga, and we have specialists in Jewish yoga, who are for example able to bring language of Parshat HaShavua (the weekly Torah portion) into the movements. And then meditation, and tefilla, so it’s a four-directional approach. So the thing about it is that the meditation serves to deepen the tefilla, as well as deepens the awareness of the divine, out there and in here.

Later in our interview he said, “Meditation really helps deepen Jewish prayer. If they take it just to chill out that’s fine, but ultimately you want to take that chilling out and make it something deeper, more serious.”

Other tefilla teachers such as Herman felt that the ninth grade tefilla program went against the pluralistic nature of the school’s mission. He complained,

The only thing that we mandate is traditional prayer, so we’re saying to the kid that’s Reform that you need to know how the Conservative kids pray, but we’re not saying to the Conservative kid that you have to pray like the Reform kid

prays. We're prioritizing and that's not necessarily pluralistic nor is it necessarily preparation for the potential interdenominational future that's going to be their reality.

Herman also noted that tefilla may not be the appropriate vehicle to create a spiritual community. He said, "We identify ourselves as a pluralistic, community school. What is the function of tefilla to create community, and not to fragment community?" He was referring to the difficulty in having so many streams of Judaism all agree how to pray together. The tension that he described was between the needs of the individual versus the needs of the community, which was precisely what Kaplan had articulated as being part of his vision of pluralism. As a result of this tension though, Herman said,

We haven't really tried to create communal prayer. And, I know Simon (Kaplan) would love to, but we haven't cracked that nut, how to pull it off in a way that's authentic to a good deal. We're supposed to be a community school, but how much does the tefilla itself stratify kids away from each other? And how do you bring everybody together for tefilla without watering it down to be inclusive?

The students were blunter when it came to assessing the authenticity of the alternative tefilla groups at Hebrew High School: "So meditation and yoga...those are not minyans! Those are excuses for people to sit in a room and not do anything." In particular, the Doubter's Minyan piqued many people's interests during my interviews. Kaplan designed this group as an open forum for students who had doubts about God and the Jewish religion to come together as a community and discuss relevant topics. The teacher would bring in various media, such as movies or music, to start discussions. I gathered from Kaplan that the teacher was also expected to present and encourage

students to not simply reject God and tefilla, but to critically think about the topic and engage with tefilla in some other alternative way.

However, the Doubter's Minyan drew widespread criticism, not only from the students I interviewed at Hebrew High School, but also (without me even bringing it up) from people I interviewed in the other two schools that I observed for this research study. A teacher at Jewish Academy used it as an example of how schools put the word minyan after just about anything to claim they are "doing tefilla." A student at New Jewish Community High School of Los Angeles had a very similar comment.

A student currently in the Doubter's Minyan said, "It's changed a little bit, where before you would just sit in a room and watch movies that have nothing to do with religion, and that would be the minyan; this year it's a little more discussion about religion." Most students seemed to think it was designed this year to get them to become more religious: "I have friends in Doubter's Minyan, and they personally don't like it because they feel like they are being told this is what Judaism is. This is what you're supposed to believe, and you guys don't believe it." Another student commented, "It used to be like you'd just go watch TV and stuff. Then they try to make it stop them from doubting. I don't understand why they don't like just get rid of it."

One of the questions that Gamliel asked me was, "Do we want kids to go through 4 years of never really davening? If they want to do yoga for 4 years, is that legitimate? These are really awesome questions to be engaged in." When I asked her to answer her own questions, she said, "It is a 'success' if the yoga minyan is taught effectively. And if it is in fact a spiritual practice for this child." I tried to pin down how exactly she defined tefilla, and she responded,

We have a very broad understanding of spiritual practice. Think of it as two categories: doing and learning...limud and tefilla. But even that's extremely artificial because which one is yoga? So let's call it experiential or intellectual.

I asked a teacher of one of the alternative minyans whether he considered it tefilla or something else. His candid response: "It is complete B.S. You take the kids who don't want to be anywhere else, and you show them movies and ask them to cultivate meaning from that experience." I asked him how he reconciled his criticism with the fact that he taught the class. He responded, "I'll tell you, I have spiritual experiences with movies. But I believe I've been trained by the development of my Jewish lens. I also have spiritual experiences at music concerts." This reminded me of Kaplan's criteria for what an "authentic Jewish spiritual experience" included—whether or not there was a Jewish lens to it or not. It sounded as if a movie was viewed through a Jewish lens, it would be authentic tefilla at Hebrew High School, but if it was viewed as just another movie, it would not.

The same teacher told me an anecdote of going to a certain non-Jewish rock band's concerts, and "I orient myself with anticipation and within the moment that is a tefilla experience for me. You have to consciously put yourself in it. Almost the same way you have to do it when you go to shul on Rosh HaShanah." I asked him to bring his thinking back to the prayer program at Hebrew High School, and relate it to how his tefilla group could be made into authentic tefilla: "I think if I was more conscientious, I could make a movie watching experience become for a student a Jewish spiritual experience."

I then gave this teacher the not-so-theoretical possibility that a student could watch movies for his entire tefilla career at Hebrew High School and graduate with his entire spirituality being based on pop culture. I tried to make the example as extreme as I could and said to pretend that such a student graduated not keeping kosher, had no relationship with Israel, did not observe Shabbat, and his only vehicle for Jewish spiritual expression was through the movies. In his opinion, would that be counted as a success?

If that happens then I feel like everything we've done is worthwhile. You know?

Because actually it seems more of a problem with the kid who only goes to shul with his parents and sits there doing nothing. Because now we've given that kid a power, we've empowered that student to create for himself a spiritual moment.

That to me is more important than training a kid or socializing a kid to go to synagogue.

The students were quick to point to pluralism as a culprit for the difficulties with tefilla at Hebrew High School:

I think it's really difficult because we're a pluralistic school. So every denomination of Judaism is represented. So, there are students who want a lot more, and then some feel that even yoga is too much. It's like a really, really, really broad spectrum, which is a good thing, it's just difficult to have a tefilla program, that's all.

Apparently, the students had been told that part of being in a pluralistic tefilla program was that students had to attend a tefilla group but were not compelled to participate. Regarding that, one student said,

We're reinforced this idea of pluralism that we don't have to do this if we don't want to, and I mean when given the option of, you should do this, but you don't have to, it's kind of the general thing of why would I do this?

A critique the students raised about the pluralistic nature of the school was that "we graduate wishy-washy Jews." Another student echoed, "Hebrew High School is very reluctant to actually assert a belief." The students explained that they were disappointed that, in their words, Hebrew High School settled for the "lowest common denominator approach." I asked them to explain what they meant by that: "We're more like a Jewish studies department at a secular college. It doesn't state that anything is true or that anything should be believed in. It's very academic, there's no soul." Another student said, "A Jewish institution should assert the beliefs of Judaism. Otherwise, what is it? It isn't a Jewish institution then. And, we aren't a Jewish institution."

"To be fair," one student retorted, "that's also a strength of the program." When I asked him why he felt that it was a strength, he said, "Because it also leaves a lot of room for interpretation, which I think is incredibly important in a pluralistic school." Then the students engaged in a give and take that demonstrated a real depth of understanding about the intricacies of pluralism and authenticity:

Student A: But people will not take the initiative upon themselves to interpret, they're just lazy.

Student B: That's absolutely not true. If your interpretation is avoidance or non-practice, that's a valid interpretation.

A: Is it avoidance of practice because they *believe* in avoidance of practice or is it because they believe in doing what's easiest for themselves?

B: Is doing what's easiest for yourself not an interpretation of the law?

A: How is it? What's it based on?

B: What's Reform Judaism?

A: That's not Reform Judaism.

B: Reform Judaism is picking and choosing, and it's based on choice...

A: And doing *nothing*?

B: It's based on relevance, not the easy way out.

A: It's based on doing things that's Jewishly appropriate. It doesn't mean not doing anything.

A self-described "traditional" student: Reform Judaism is *not* based on taking the easy way out. I'm the furthest thing from a Reform Jew, but it's not about taking the easy way out.

A new student to this exchange: I can't speak for others, but I know that in the ninth grade there's a huge lack of maturity, and I think that some kids don't want to make the choice, they're not capable of making the choice because (a) they're not informed and (b) they don't have the maturity level they need to be decision-makers in religion. I think that plays a huge part in the whole praying thing—it's just not on their mind. What's on their mind is boys and clothes. They don't want to choose what they believe in life. And, sorry to say, but there's so many spoiled kids that have things given to them all the time that they don't question it. It's just given to them and they don't learn why.

A: Because Hebrew High School doesn't assert anything, they don't even assert the belief in God.

B: So?

A: So what is Judaism then?

B: Do you have to believe in God in order to be in a Jewish community? Do you? Do you?

A: It's one of the Ten Commandments. It's a fundamental tenet of Judaism that should be taught as such. We just ignore everything about Judaism. And, we just decide, and we say, "To accommodate for the people that don't, we're not going to teach anything at all." The thing is there are people that don't know what they want. In fact most people don't know what they want.

At this point, the students stopped their discussion and turned to me smiling and looking rather sheepishly, as if to say, "Oh, I guess we got carried away, didn't we?" A senior in the room took this opportunity to say,

Can I summarize something, and then kind of bring it back to something else? So we're basically all saying that it doesn't work. The only issue is that there's no way you can make it work. We've all agreed on that. So the thing is that we have it once a week, and they give you an option of what to do, and you can't get much easier than that, and nobody has said anything that would be an alternative to that.

There seemed to be about half the room which agreed to just leave tefilla as it was, with students learning about traditional prayer in the ninth grade program, and the rest of the years giving students the choice of whatever spiritual practice they wanted, regardless of whether it was traditional prayer or not. The other half of the room, which included both traditional students and students who self-identified as secular, agreed with a student who argued,

The school has to take some initiative in Judaism. The school has to say, okay you have to pray, try some traditional Jewish prayer, you know the things that our forefathers have been doing for thousands of years. Reform Jews pray, Conservative Jews pray, every Jew prays, that's like one of the things that we do. So you know what, it's okay for the school to say you have to pray once a month. The school doesn't want to take that initiative because they're afraid. The yoga minyan...no one cares about that. No one wants to do that. Give it once a month, you have to pray, the other three times, you get it free. You can do whatever you want.

In another student focus group, a separate set of students asserted that rejection of traditional Judaism was still an authentic choice. One student gave the example of an atheist who won the "Chosen Heeb" award, which she explained was an award for people who show exemplary understanding and who really show they had tried to understand everything and learn. And she flat out doesn't believe in God. She has all these reasons, and she's nearly convinced a bunch of students. So, Rabbi Kaplan had her in his Jewish law class, and he gave her the award as the best Jewish studies student basically.

As I was listening to all of these discussions about pluralism and authenticity, interviewees frequently interchanged the terms spiritual practice and tefilla, and they called spiritual practice groups that had almost nothing to do with prayer a minyan. For example, when I was interviewing Herman, he used all three terms (tefilla, minyan, and spiritual practice) synonymously in one sentence. I asked him if there was a difference between the terms:

Here's how I would best understand it. There are some people who would love to see all of our students actively engage in traditional prayer and communal structures that may be called a minyan, that would be the ideal. Recognizing that that ideal is not reality, but wanting to maintain the symbol of minyan, as traditional language, as communal language, called that time for engagement minyan even though the practices that are involved in the various groupings were not necessarily anything that would resemble communal prayer, like yoga, meditation, watching movies. Then, some people trying to have a little more integrity with the language used started calling it spiritual practice, even though it's not Hebraic, but at least it is kind of mission-oriented, and that we're trying to generate students who are engaged in a form of spiritual practice, even if it's not the ideal form of traditional prayer. Sometimes it is spiritual practice but everyone calls it minyan, sometimes it's minyan, but everyone calls it spiritual practice. Sometimes it's called tefilla time, sometimes it's called kehilla, the language of how we've identified it over time has changed. I'm not even sure what formally it's even called now. It's tefilla and you're going to go to your minyan during spiritual practice time.

He continually used the term spiritual, so I asked him to define it. He responded,

I don't understand spirituality. I don't think any kid in the school really gets what spirituality means. Do they see it as self-transcendence? Do they see it as an interpersonal, you know, do they see it as a relational thing? Do they see it as a mystical thing? You know? Do we get them to understand spirituality? Or are we just asking them to engage with it and then expect them to be intuitive?

Pick a Tile, Any Tile...

The single most mentioned characteristic of the tefilla program at Hebrew High School was its emphasis on choice. This section looks at the aspect of the mosaic which allowed the students to pick any part of it to explore. What were the rationales behind this approach? How did the students and faculty perceive it?

According to Shwartz, prior to 2004, tefilla at Hebrew High School “was sort of catch as catch can tefilla, as I remember it. This minyan system, where everyone had a specific minyan to go to, didn’t exist.” He referred to it as “chaotic” back then. He described the tefilla model then as happening once a week where students had “regular tefilla,” meaning that everyone in school prayed a traditional service together. He described it as unsuccessful and not engaging, and “it needed to be changed.” Kaplan then chose to move to the choice model which is so common today in pluralistic Jewish high schools. Shwartz remembers that “we began to have this smorgasbord of alternatives, different things that people could do. I think that Simon initially was just trying to settle into a kind of middle-of-the-road mode for the whole school, where everyone would daven.”

Gamliel said, “My sense is that they really appreciate choice...My understanding is that a lot of the kids have appreciated the fact that we are saying to them, ‘I don’t care how you’re practicing, you just have to be engaging your spirit.’” Kaplan said, “What I’ve found just talking to all the students is that what the students appreciate the most about tefilla or spiritual practice within the context of our school is the notion of having many choices.”

One of the rationales that Gamliel gave for choosing this choice model for tefilla was that it reflected the American culture from which the students came: “We live in this American culture of choice.” Another justification Gamliel gave for the choice model was the developmental appropriateness for teenagers:

We know teenagers, most of them developmentally are programmed to tell you where to put it, most of them are programmed to reject, to at the very least have their eyes glaze over, and at the very worst reject and run away from tefilla. So, I’m not sugar-coating it, but I do feel that we need to honor the counter-cultural instinct of a teenager, and at the same time intrigue them, engage them, while their brains are still developing, and their souls are still developing.

More than once, the students echoed Gamliel’s comments, such as a student who said, “I don’t want to be put in an environment where I have to say the prayers that you want me to say, and what you want me to do, because that’s not how I connect to God. You can’t force me to pray.”

Herman echoed Gamliel’s sentiments by saying that “prayer in general, especially structured prayer, is not developmentally appropriate for a teenager who’s not already conditioned to it.” He also cited this as a core rationale for the choice model. He felt that the problems motivating teenagers to pray cut across denominations: “I’ve worked in Orthodox settings where there are the same problems.” He said multiple times that tefilla was often not developmentally appropriate for teenagers, regardless of denomination. “It’s not the way they engage with the world around them. It’s foreign to them.”

Another rationale that teachers gave for going to this choice model was student empowerment. They felt that the more the school gave the students ownership over how

they spent their time in tefilla, the more receptive they would be to it. Still, some teachers did not feel the program was going far enough in terms of transferring ownership to the students. For example, Herman said, “We need to think more about student ownership. I propose if we’re going to have true student leaders for our minyans, you need to do training. We’ve never done that. We’ve got student leaders, but they’re kind of just like arbitrarily thrown in.” I asked him what he proposed that the school do about it, and he suggested creating a before-school leadership program:

I’m talking about take a week before school starts, the way you treat a student government, which we don’t even do, and train them what it means to lead a prayer, or a spiritual community. Lesson plan with the kids. We never make time for that. That would be beautiful to see.

Herman contrasted this student empowerment choice model to traditional prayer programs:

You and I can sit here and debate the benefits and drawbacks of traditional prayer, but what it is that traditional prayer often doesn’t do is empower people. It keeps one person in the front of the room, leading everybody else, who can be passively or actively engaged.

Herman felt that forcing a student to go to only a traditional minyan may just “train them to be passive.” He cited this as an “inherent conflict” between traditional prayer programs and student-empowered choice programs. A student in one of the focus groups agreed:

I really think that I can speak for a lot of other students. At least my friends, we really like being in the discussion group. That’s my favorite part, because when

you're just praying out of a siddur, it's kind of standard and you don't get to incorporate your own opinion. But, when we're doing discussion, I feel like we get a lot more out of it.

Shwartz noticed that since the establishment of the choice program,

You don't have as much of the resentment, "They're forcing me to do this, I don't want to do this". In other words, we've been trying to take out the *kefiyah* (forcing), to the extent that it's possible. In other words, you're obliged to be in a minyan, but here are x number of choices. That's a new modality that the results of which we don't know. Judith did a kind of survey, and she found that even after our giving them choice for several years, there's still this sort of a kind of feeling like I didn't learn anything. Or it didn't do anything for me. Kind of these negative reactions.

Those negative reactions quickly rose to the surface when I interviewed the students in a focus group. Despite the emphasis on giving the students as much choice about their tefilla experience, many felt they were being given a false choice: "We don't really have the right to *not* pray. We're told, 'You have to choose!'" As Shwartz described it, "*Ain atah ben chorin le'himanah*... You can't abstain. You have to choose. You are not free to not choose."

"I think it's natural to rebel against what's required," an eleventh grade student told me in a focus group. Some students extended their feelings of rebellion not only against the school but against their parents as well:

I think a lot of people through Hebrew High School are kind of like on the prescribed parents' path. So they try to rebel against that saying, I don't want to

do this. And a lot of people at Hebrew High School, I don't think a lot of people at Hebrew High School come because they're like, oh, I want to do Jewish studies and Hebrew. I think that's kind of like, yeah, you discover that like either you like it or you don't like it on your own. But, I think to just reject it right away, I mean, I probably did when I was younger.

Another student disagreed with this notion and said,

There really is this perceived notion at Hebrew High School that like Hebrew High School is trying to bear you down. I don't, I know it's not that way. And, I am...yeah, people complain a lot. And, they complain if you do this, and 20 minutes, it's not that big of a deal. It's literally once a week. Seniors don't even have to do tefilla, just Senior Sermon.

Because of these sentiments, some of the teachers assumed that the students would just want to get rid of tefilla if given the chance. But Herman cited a survey that his students conducted the previous year in which the student body was given options as to what kind of tefilla they wanted:

Very few kids said get rid of it entirely. Most kids said to make it optional. They said they wanted it to exist, and if they wanted to take part in it, they would. It seems that kids want there to be tefilla at this school. It's an identifier as a Jewish school. They just don't want it to be forced on them. But, are we willing to be okay if nobody opts in?

Perhaps an explanation for these student reactions, Herman felt, was that "tefilla is the most personal thing we try to touch in a Jewish related education. I think this is why it's the hardest thing we try to do." He explained that since spirituality, prayer and

tefilla are so intimate and personal, “if schools really respect their students we need to give them the space to practice it in whatever way they choose.”

Environmental Issues: Camp Versus School

It matters where the mosaic is situated in the larger art gallery of the school environment, and if the mosaic is placed in the wing of the gallery that supports the style. For example, perhaps a mosaic might clash if set in a larger environment of modernist paintings. The *environment* surrounding and supporting the tefilla program was mentioned frequently during interviews and focus groups. The example that people tended to give contrasted tefilla at camp and school. They mentioned certain camp tefilla characteristics which helped foster a spiritual environment conducive to tefilla, while they felt schools often did not have those characteristics.

My interviewees frequently suggested tefilla at Jewish camps as the best model for teenagers, and they often contrasted it to the tefilla found in the school setting. For example, Herman noted that the Camp Ramah students started school excited about tefilla, so much so that in the past they created a special Camp Ramah tefilla group. “But, the second we called it traditional prayer again, they didn’t want to go.” I pressed him to explain the contrast between what the kids experienced in camp versus at school: “It’s about setting. It’s about community. It’s about experience. It’s about enthusiasm and spirit. And, it’s consistent with the rest of their day.”

Herman elaborated that camps are able to control all of those factors he listed that schools, most of the time, cannot control. He said that camp settings tend to not have the same academic focus as schools do. Camps generally are full of green and outdoor places, and activities often happen in informal and inspirational settings, while formal

classrooms tend to dominate schools. Camps have far greater control over creating community with their campers because campers stay for extended periods of time, and camp is often synonymous with enthusiastic, spirited, experiential places. Herman contrasted those characteristics with the average high school that tends to value sitting quietly and attentively, listening to the teacher, regurgitating information, taking tests and doing homework, getting good grades, and getting into college. Also, tefilla can be easily incorporated into the more fluid and integrated camp schedule, in contrast to the highly structured and fragmented, bell-driven school schedule. For those reasons, he felt that tefilla was easier to accomplish in a camp setting than a school context.

In the middle of one of the student focus groups, one student said, “I’d like to say that I go to Camp Ramah,” and many of the other students in the room jumped in with, “Hey, I was going to mention that, too!” That student went on, “At camp sometimes we daven two, sometimes three times a day, and really people just don’t complain. People just do it.” Another student said, “You would think like, ‘Oh, well at camp people are different,’ but there are kids there who don’t have any Judaism in their lives or at home.” I asked what made camp tefilla different from school tefilla, and a student responded,

Hebrew High School hasn’t taken the step to say that tefilla is something that is important, and whether or not you’re going to do it at all in the future, it’s something that you should learn, and someone going to a Jewish school should at least have the skill set.

Interviewees also contrasted the physical camp and school settings. Herman expressed concern about the location of tefilla at Hebrew High School: “I would love to see minyan occur in a space that’s not a classroom. We’re in an environment that makes

them feel they're back in another class, but it's not a class." Similarly, a student in the yoga group cited the space as an impediment towards a spiritual tefilla environment: "I love yoga, but I feel that I'm not getting the spirituality in it because it's in a gym. And so, I feel like it's the environment we're in that takes away the spirituality." Herman said, "Even our Beit Midrash looks like a giant classroom. This is an issue: what kind of space do you create?"

Regarding the consistency of their daily schedule, Herman noted, "One of the things that's really interesting to think about is the rest of the day they are competing on an intellectual level. And then we're asking them to come into an academic classroom space and be spiritual." Kaplan also mentioned the lack of consistency in the students' day, going from academic classes to a class on spirituality and tefilla, an experience that he said would be hard for a motivated adult, let alone an unmotivated teenager.

The only type of tefilla run by the school which interviewees consistently praised occurred outside of the school context at shabbatonim, which are camp-like overnights where students go off of school property to celebrate the Jewish Sabbath together, very often at the Jewish summer camp properties. Herman explained, "I think shabbatonim are more important for tefilla than even what we call spiritual practice on a weekly basis because, when you put it in the Shabbat context, you lose that school context, which is often debilitating."

When I asked people if the camp tefilla experience could ever be recreated during school hours, not a single person said yes. In fact, Schwartz defined school as "a place where you have to learn in a certain way, coercion is built into schools, that's just what a

school is. It's a coercive place. But hopefully *l'tovatcha* (for your good). Camps are the opposite."

The Evolving Artistic Process

How does one create a mosaic? What is the process? The constantly evolving change process emerged as a consistent theme. When I began interviewing Gamliel about the tefilla program at Hebrew High School, the first three words out of his mouth were, "It's always evolving." The first words about the program by Kaplan were, "I think that there's a lot of experimentation in it. I kind of start with the challenge that this is one of the most difficult areas to be able to program successfully." I observed that all of the faculty and administrators I interviewed tended to view change as an important and positive part of the educational process.

Regarding the new ninth grade program which focused almost entirely on learning about tefilla rather than actually doing tefilla, Gamliel said, "It's in process. It's our attempt that we created. And, I think it will look very different a year from now." Later, she would say, regarding the Neshama Journal that the school created for the ninth graders to reflect on tefilla, "This is a work in progress. Maybe next year I'll staple together 30 blank pages. Or just images, or whatever. This is a work in progress."

I asked Gamliel to explain the process of how the school went about developing its tefilla program, and she responded,

It's totally guided by me, totally aided by everybody. Which is that I essentially own tefilla, but I can't say enough about the importance of collaboration and collegiality at this school. And I definitely lead, and I definitely guide my teachers. But, I definitely do not impose.

She explained that prior to the beginning of this year, she worked closely with her teachers in discussing the tefilla program: “Simon and I made some decisions about what we talked about. When the teachers got back to school for teacher work week, we rolled up our sleeves and we created lesson plans together.” The teachers collaboratively created the Neshama Journal, and they continually updated their tefilla lesson plan bank.

When I inquired how exactly Gamliel leads the faculty meetings about tefilla, she responded with, “What I’m doing every couple of weeks at our Jewish studies meetings is I’m saying, ‘What’s failing? What’s succeeding? Who’s gotten great feedback? Who’s got great tips?’” Gamliel noted that they also had a shared conference space on their web system to post ideas and lessons for each other. Yet again she noted, “It’s a work in progress, and it’s highly, highly collaborative... We’re all learning from each other.”

According to the school’s teachers, the process was considered to be less collaborative than Gamliel described; for example, one tefilla teacher stated,

It’s collaborative to an extent. I don’t think we have really had the tenacity yet to truly rethink our assumptions. So, we kind of just reorient the wheel. And that’s fine, because this gets us through the status quo year to year.

I asked exactly what kinds of assumptions were being made, and he replied, “We have to rethink our assumptions of who our students are. What’s the nature of them, and what we want to accomplish.” When asked what he attributed the status quo to, he said, “There is so much we’re trying to do in our department. We all know minyan is important, but because it’s so huge to think of how to really properly tackle it, we deal with it the best we can.”

Nonetheless, this teacher felt change was possible: “I’ve always said it takes 3 years; it would be a 3-year plan to completely overhaul the whole program.” Likewise, Gamliel said that she thought “it takes 3-years to effect actual culture change on a campus. I’d like to consider this as year 1. If this is year 1, then by the time these ninth graders are in eleventh grade, I’d like to think that our program will be even finer tuned.” From one teacher’s perspective, though, instead of a clear 3-year change process, he felt “instead we’re tweaking a grade level, and keeping other things the same, and then we tweak this or that. We need to really think of it in a 3-year plan.” Thus, there appeared to be a discrepancy between the vision of the change process as its leader saw it to how her followers perceived the change process.

I asked Gamliel to look ahead a few years, and think of what changes a visitor might see to the tefilla program. She said that she would like to see a spiritual practice class called Jewish Home Rituals:

Jewish Home Rituals [would include] Passover seder, *Birkat HaMazon* (blessing after meals), *Havdalah* (service after Shabbat ends), *shiva minyan* (mourner’s service), and Shabbat rituals. Because we do feel that it is our responsibility to graduate students every single year who have those skills and passions.

Here again, Gamliel was not giving up on her goal of creating both a knowledgeable, skilled student body, as well as a passionate and inspired one. In her view, “not every kid has to become a cantor or a rabbi, but we do want to increase the across-the-board competency level in the spiritual practice skills.”

Another change Gamliel wanted to see was “to have more student-led minyanim. But student-led minyanim of the highest quality.” In particular, she would like to see

more “gender-based spiritual practice groups.” She also mentioned that she would like “to see an increase in seriousness, student commitment, student ownership, not seriousness as in people frowning, seriousness as in depth of commitment, just like they have depth of commitment to sports, music, and arts.” I asked her how she saw those things happening: “It’s going to happen by these ninth graders becoming tenth graders, by these tenth graders trying some new things...It is a 3-year plan of higher quality, greater student buy-in, and a more rigorous student skill set in the beginning years.”

Summary

Hebrew High School’s mosaic consisted of many individual pieces of tile. Each one of these individual tiles made up the larger, unified mosaic of the school. Rather than focusing on the *unity* of the individual pieces coming together, the school instead focused on the value of *tension* between the tiles.

In this portrait of the Hebrew High School tefilla mosaic, I described the artists, their creative and ever-evolving process, their philosophy and methodology, the blended effect of the overall mural versus the tensions that existed among the smaller tiles, the importance of the placement of the mosaic in the art gallery as a whole, as well as critiques of the finished product.

Jewish Academy: A Minimalist Architectural Structure

Jewish Academy’s tefilla space looked to me like a gymnasium without the basketball hoops. Head of School Rabbi Akiba Meir described their tefilla room as follows:

I’m not sure why historically, given the beauty of our campus, we don’t have a dedicated sanctuary space. I’ve actually been impressed with our students that

when we do have tefilla, and this could be its own dissertation, that the students create a sense of sanctity in that naked space.

Jewish Academy's Director of Judaic Studies, Rabbi Lisa Levi, quickly pointed out as she toured me around the school that there was no sanctuary at the school, and she called the tefilla space "minimalist." A student in a focus group described this location by saying, "The room is so big and impersonal, it's just kind of like, the atmosphere...I mean, I don't know...it's just kind of like a plain auditorium."

These varied descriptions of the tefilla space, especially Levi's, indeed reminded me of the minimalist style of art. Minimalism evolved in 1960's America as a reaction to abstract expressionism. Abstract expressionist art, such as Jackson Pollock's, was often interpreted as wildly colorful and expressive, full of seemingly random paint strokes and splashes, and vividly emotional. In contrast, minimalist art is often described as stark, simple, and stripped to its barest essentials. I imagine that the tefilla space at Jewish Academy would have been created by a minimalist artist, and not Jackson Pollock.

Minimalist art has been both praised and criticized for its simplicity. Rabbi Meir, for one, viewed his school's "naked" prayer space as being the inspiration for his students' taking control of the space and making it their own. He praised that it empowered the students and gave them the freedom to create whatever interpretation they chose. The student quoted above, however, interpreted the space as a "plain auditorium." Where Meir saw art, the student wondered why it was considered art at all.

Jewish Academy's starkly simple prayer space—so reminiscent to me of the minimalist style of art—can be seen as a metaphor for the school's entire tefilla program. As will be described in this chapter, the school's tefilla program was like a canvas that

had only a hint of paint strokes on it, possibly as a result of its newness but also with some intention. What were the goals and philosophies of the artists behind the tefilla program? What was the process they used to create their artwork? How did the students, teachers, and administrators view the program?

Overview of Tefilla Program

Visitors to an art gallery first view the artwork from a distance and take in a broad overview, and I will do as well by looking at a general outline of Jewish Academy's tefilla program. The 147 students at Jewish Academy's high school had 20 minutes of tefilla every Tuesday morning. During that time, the school offered two options: the "community minyan" and the "traditional minyan." The majority of students chose to attend the first option, an egalitarian, abbreviated service loosely based on the Shacharit service. About 15% of the students went to the traditional minyan, which was based on a service that would be found in a typical Orthodox synagogue. Both of these options will be explained in greater detail, but first I will describe the history of tefilla at Jewish Academy.

According to my interview with Dan Wasser, the traditional minyan advisor, Jewish Academy originally required daily traditional prayer for all students; however, he said the students rebelled against it, so the school tried various experiments such as giving students options of different types of minyans to go to: "They were desperately trying to do something to get the kids interested. And for a while there was no tefilla at all. No tefilla at all." He said that about 5 years ago, the tefilla program was

just in shambles. Tefilla at that point was lectures. Every week a different rabbi would come and give a lecture, and that was called tefilla. So there have been 3

or 4 years of Jewish Academy students who when you say tefilla they think you mean “a rabbi giving a speech!”

Wasser said that the purpose of asking rabbis to give lectures

was to avoid tefilla. There were so many complaints about tefilla...this 20 minutes a week is the most contentious in the school, so they chose to do the rabbi speaking thing just to avoid any issues, and it was one of the easiest ways to just hit the lowest common denominator.

This was the tefilla program that Rabbi Lisa Levi inherited. She began her position in 2010 as Director of Jewish Studies, which encompassed being in charge of the tefilla program. Before this job, she had been a Reform pulpit rabbi. She explained the situation in which the Jewish Academy hired her:

I was told from the beginning and before school started that the tefilla program is broke and it needs to be fixed, do whatever you want to do. And so we played with all different models, and we're ready to move into the multiple minyanim model (where students are given different tefilla options to choose from, like at Hebrew High School)...Kids leading, I would love to see that.

She explained that she planned to have begun this new program by the time of my visit on November 3, 2010, but one reason it had not started was lack of qualified personnel to help her. Additionally, she mentioned some of the students (especially the seniors) disliked the idea of splitting the community—they opposed the idea of having multiple tefilla groups occurring simultaneously. She therefore thought, “Let’s not move into that wholesale right away.” Rather, she planned a transitional move to the multiple

minyan program: to have the existing regular community minyan be led by students instead of her or the faculty song leader.

Rabbi Levi shared an example of what she intended this transitional tefilla stage to look like:

Each time, we're going to have either a student group, or a faculty department, taking some leadership role. And we're going to try and do it thematically...For example the Red Cross Club that does blood drives could lead a tefilla...They might choose to talk about the overriding value of life in Judaism.

However, Levi lamented that nobody had signed up to lead a session yet, but felt it would happen soon. She predicted that after this transitional stage, the community would be ready to move to the model where students would have complete choice and control over their tefilla groups. At the time of my visit, though, none of this was happening yet. Instead, I observed the following tefilla sessions.

The Main Community Tefilla Service

At the main community tefilla service, Rabbi Levi stood in a tallit and kipah at the front of the multipurpose room. Jonathan, the music teacher and song leader, stood along side her with a guitar strapped around him. The auditorium held a couple of hundred card-table chairs lined up in rows, facing the eastern wall. At the front rested an ark that said in Hebrew *V'hagita Bo Yomam V'Lailah* (You shall talk about it day and night) which I presume held a Torah scroll inside. I also saw a table with a tallit on it from which they read the Torah, as well as a podium with a microphone. In one corner of the room sat a bookshelf with siddurim (prayer books). They used the prayer book *Siddur*

Meforash for their services. Otherwise, the room was empty of any decoration or any other distinguishing characteristics.

Students filed in to the auditorium from their last class, and it reminded me of a crush of students entering en masse into a lunchroom. Jonathan started singing the song *Ivdu et Hashem b'simcha* (Worship God with Joy) when he saw the students enter. The students' chatting emitted a collective hum, which was reminiscent to me of the din of talking before the curtains open to a play. I did not know who it was at the time, but the Dean of Students (who one teacher later told me was known as "the Dean of Discipline") stood guard at the front entrance watching the kids enter. Students sat wherever they wanted, but they mostly chose to sit by grade.

With most of the school present, Jonathan asked them to join in on the melodic "lai lai lai's" from the opening song. In particular, he asked the seniors to help him, and afterwards requested the freshmen to join in. Many students cooperated in helping Jonathan sing. Then he trailed off and Rabbi Levi picked up by talking about how students should use this tefilla time. She told them some of their options during the next 15 minutes—to pray if they wish, or just to take the time and make it "different" than the rest of their day, or simply to "use this time wisely."

Over the next 10 minutes, Jonathan and Levi led a sing-songy service with Jonathan leading the singing and playing his guitar, and Levi popping in every so often with introductions and explanations of the songs and prayers. The service they created did not match most normative synagogue services, although the songs were borrowed from the siddur or were thematically related to prayer and Judaism.

Jonathan opened the service with *Mah Tovv Ohalecha Yaakov* (How Goodly are Your Tents, Jacob). Before *Elohai Neshama* (My God, the Soul), Rabbi Levi talked about setting aside time to take in a deep breath and feel the breaths go in and out. After a few songs, Rabbi Levi led the group in a learning exercise. On every seat she had laid strips of paper that had a blessing from Birkot haShachar, the morning blessings. She asked students to turn to the person sitting next to them, read their blessings together, understand them, and share how they applied to their lives. Rabbi Levi explained the purpose was “to make us awake and aware of all the blessings in our lives.” After a few minutes of doing this with their partners, Rabbi Levi asked two students to share their thoughts. One student volunteered, read the prayer in Hebrew, and shared her thoughts on the blessing. Another chose to read the prayer in English.

As a bridge to come back to the prayer service from the learning activity, Rabbi Levi said, “Let’s celebrate all these blessings in our lives with Hallelujah,” and Jonathan returned to singing from the prayer service. They then sang some traditional sections of the Shacharit service: *Barchu*, *Shma*, *V’ahavta*, *Mi Chamocha*, *Adonai Sfatai Tiftach*, and finally the silent Amidah. They did not repeat the Amidah, nor did they sing the first paragraphs aloud, as is common. For the Amidah, Rabbi Levi gave the students about 2 minutes to say it quietly themselves, but most sat down right away and remained quiet. During this time, Rabbi Levi stood up front davening by herself with her back to the congregation.

When Rabbi Levi finished praying the Amidah, she nodded to Jonathan, who started his *davar Torah* (sermon on the Torah). A self-described “religious Reform Jew,” Jonathan spoke about finding spirituality in everyday places, beginning his *davar Torah*

by asking, “First of all, I want to know how many people think that music can be spiritual?” Some students raised their hands and he then explained how even non-Jewish music provided him with great spirituality:

What I want to encourage everyone to do is to find spirituality in their lives, and it can be found in many places. Like math! There are people who understand that numbers have a spiritual level to it. Numbers are keeping people alive in hospitals.

He continued by challenging students to find something in their lives that they could make spiritual; for example, he mentioned that dance could be spiritual. In the middle of Jonathan’s davar Torah, though, the bell rang to end the service. Jonathan talked about 30 seconds past the bell, but I saw the students clearly on edge to get out of there. When Rabbi Levi dismissed them, they hurried out to lunch.

Traditional Minyan

At the same time as the above service, Wasser led a separate, more traditional service in his classroom. Traditional students need a very specific framework for prayer, such as a mechitza (divider between males and females), traditional prayer books, a service in Hebrew, a service led by a competent cantor/prayer leader, 10 males of Bar Mitzvah age or older, and a kosher Torah from which to read. Halacha (Jewish law) does not allow for Orthodox students to pray in the non-Orthodox service described in the previous section and have that count as tefilla.

As such, Jewish Academy accommodated the more traditional students and teachers by exempting them from the main community tefilla service and setting up an Orthodox service for them. These services often were called “mechitza minyans,” which

basically meant that they adhered to Orthodox halacha. Wasser, the mechtza minyan advisor, identified the goal for this minyan as giving

students who come from more of a traditional background the opportunity to pray in a way that is meaningful to them. That's first and foremost. Second, it's for students who are not oriented that way, to give them a glimpse of what a traditional tefilla looks like.

Wasser referred to it as the “*bidieved* minyan,” which he described as meaning, “Try to imagine everything you would do if you were really, really, really, really late to shul.” He said they would get about 25 boys and about 10 girls each week. Their abbreviated Shacharit service consisted of a few of the morning blessings, Baruch Sh’Amar, selections from Psukei D’Zimrah, Shma, a communal Amidah, and they concluded with Aleinu. He said that he also tried to teach the meaning of the prayers as the service went along.

Goals of Jewish Academy’s Tefilla Program

Now that I have described the school’s tefilla gallery and provided a first encounter with the artwork, I will introduce the artists behind the program and illustrate how they portrayed their vision. Head of School Rabbi Meir told me that in order for a school to be successful in anything it does, it needs to have a clear and articulate mission, and have that mission infuse everything it does. He said,

Our goal is to educate and empower young men and women to participate meaningfully and purposefully in life. We enable them to see the benefits and joys of Jewish commitment. So the goal for tefilla is inter-related to the goals of

everything we do...I don't look at tefilla as having a purpose not consistent with what we do for everything else in this school.

He referred me to the school's mission statement:

...to teach our children to think creatively, challenge them to achieve to their fullest potential, prepare them to be leaders, strengthen their sense of Jewish identity and community, and equip them to live a joyous and meaningful Jewish life.

I observed a lack of understanding, though, in how the school's mission aligned with the tefilla program. For example, when I asked Rabbi Levi to describe her job, she said that she was responsible for coordinating tefilla, "whatever that means." She was "still trying to figure it out," and she described it as "ill defined" and "in process."

When I searched the school's website for any insights about the goals of the tefilla program, I saw no mention of it at all. I collected all of the printed literature available when I visited the school, and in the main Jewish Academy marketing brochure I found one sentence in the "Discover Heritage" section that said students "learn the meaning and significance of prayers, symbols, rituals and festivals." In that brochure, Jewish Academy identified six core attributes of their students and graduates: respect, kindness, repairing the world, justice, caring for the community, and truth. I could not locate any other mentions of prayer in the school's published literature.

One student also commented on what he termed the "disconnect" between the school's goals and the tefilla program, and he gave the example of the kipah policy that all males need to wear a kipah. I noticed this inconsistency myself, even without the student mentioning it. As I was walking around the school, I wandered into the library. I

noticed that every male wore a kippah. I approached one young man, and asked him if he was required to wear a kippah, and he said that boys had to wear a kippah all day except during sports. A student in my focus group pointed out that in a pluralistic school it was inconsistent to force students to wear kippahs at all times, especially as the school wished to move towards a tefilla program that empowered students and gave them more choice and ownership.

I asked the teachers and administrators to define their goals in terms of the ideal graduate of their tefilla program, and received varied answers. Rabbi Meir identified one of the goals of the tefilla program as,

The ability to be empowered, to participate in a minyan as an adult is part of where we want our graduates to be now. I would say any normative minyan... Yes, I do want our students 10 years from now, and 30 years from now to be empowered to participate in, create, and lead a minyan.

The person in charge of the tefilla program, Rabbi Levi, shared a contradictory goal. She said “in concert with our new Head of School” they had to choose one goal: either establish tefilla proficiency with a traditional prayer service, or create more of a spiritual connection in non-traditional tefilla experiences, such as discussion groups, or yoga, or meditation. As Rabbi Levi described it:

Do we want them to be able to pray, and maybe not have any connection? Or do we want them to have a connection and maybe not have as many prayer skills? And at a certain point, I guess we kind of went the way of the latter... The goal is for kids to feel a connection to tefilla and to feel some amount of engagement.

Rabbi Levi suggested that the question of the larger goals of the tefilla program remained an open question: “I feel like this is one piece of a much bigger picture we’re trying to paint in terms of what we want our graduates to look like. And so, we have to answer those big questions before we can really dissect tefilla.” When I asked if that process was actually happening, she responded:

It’s starting. But our Head of School’s only been here for a few months. This is what we need to do. And it’s going to take many years to have the right conversations with the right people, paint the picture and then act on it.

Rabbi Levi embraced this change process, calling herself “very much a process person” and referring to the tefilla program as being “in process,” but she admitted that at this point, “The process is pretty much in my head at the moment.”

Similar to the issue of merging the school’s mission with its tefilla goals, the school also had made attempts at aligning its K-8 and high school tefilla programs. As Rabbi Levi described it, “The lower school kids are engaged, the younger middle school kids are engaged, but the older middle school kids start to feel less engaged, and by ninth grade they’re done.” All of the faculty I interviewed said that increased alignment of tefilla goals between the school’s divisions would improve the high school tefilla program. “There’s been very little communication between the divisions in the years I’ve been here,” one teacher explained. He elaborated:

There were 12 years that the elementary school principal and the principal in the high school just didn’t talk, in fact, they hated each other. And for whatever its worth, they brought in an administrator that was disastrous for the school. And by January, both principals quit. And then in March, they fired the head of school.

Wasser also mentioned the lack of communication as a barrier to the success of the high school tefilla program. He recalled being part of a curriculum alignment committee where the school asked him to join with his K-8 counterparts in comparing school-wide tefilla curricula and programs. He laughingly remembered thinking that the lower school and high school programs were, and still remain, “worlds apart.”

I asked what was being done to fix this, and Rabbi Levi said, “There is no K through 12, at the moment.” She also mentioned the tension between Jewish Studies and secular studies at Jewish Academy. She described her perception that she should not be doing things “too Jewish,” and that the secular side of the school took precedence over the Jewish side of the school: “There is actually a perception that this (Judaism and tefilla) gets in the way of ‘real academics.’” Another Judaic Studies teacher depicted Jewish Academy as more of a “private school for Jews” than a “Jewish private school.”

Anyone Got the Time?

Participants in my focus groups and interviews mentioned issues relating to time more than anything else. Students at Jewish Academy go to school each day from 8:00 a.m. until 3:15 p.m., Monday through Friday, which amounts to 2175 minutes each week. Of that time, students have 20 minutes allotted to prayer on Tuesdays and another 20 minutes of community time called Kabbalat Shabbat on Fridays. Kabbalat Shabbat was not really a prayer service—it was more of a town meeting in which the community shared announcements, the Head of School gave a *davar Torah* (sermon), and a senior gave a *davar Torah*. As Rabbi Levi admitted, once the students got settled in for tefilla, “realistically you have 15 minutes once a week.” Thus, students spent roughly 0.7% of

their time at school in prayer. All the faculty I interviewed mentioned the paucity of time devoted to tefilla.

Additionally, students pointed out that the timing of tefilla during their school day was not conducive to a spiritual prayer experience. One bluntly said, “It’s not the right time. And you’re not in the right mindset to do it.” They said they had many other things on their minds such as tests, homework, college applications, boyfriends and girlfriends. Said one student: “It’s like, okay, I got an AP test next period, I have to go apply to colleges, so it’s like, you have so much on your mind.” In a word, a student called it “fragmented.”

Interviewees also frequently mentioned that the time allotted to something was an indicator of the importance of it. For example, Jonathan commented on the small amount of time devoted to tefilla each week:

How do you convince anybody that this is important if the school culture isn’t recognizing that this is important? The more time a school devotes to something, the more weight and importance it has.

Mechitza minyan advisor Wasser emphasized this point by drawing a comparison between how Jewish Academy views tefilla versus how it views physical education. He said that

if I were a soccer coach, and I said, you know what? I need \$500 to go for a weekend to learn to be a better soccer coach. I would get the \$500. And not only that, the athletic director would send me a note saying, hey, listen, there’s something else going on we want to send you to later on in the year. They’re investing in the soccer coach.

He felt that if the school viewed tefilla as being as important as sports, the school would say, “Tefilla is important to us, it’s important to school, and we want you to be good at tefilla, because we need you to be.” But, he conjectured that if he asked the school to give him time off to become a better prayer leader, the answer would be no. As Wasser said, “How many schools really *invest* in tefilla? You know?” To be fair to the administration though, Wasser felt the Head of School seemed to take an active interest in involving himself with tefilla: he addressed the school during Kabbalat Shabbat and gave a davar Torah, which all of the adults I spoke to mentioned as being an important show of institutional support.

When I asked him to identify the tefilla program’s goals, Wasser laughed out loud and said, “With 20 minutes a week, I don’t have much goal...The 20 minutes a week is just disrespectful. Okay? It’s pissing on it. I mean, it’s you know, we devote more time than that to the weekly announcements.” Indeed, one of the questions Rabbi Meir said he was considering was, “Do we spend enough time on tefilla? We spend 20 minutes, or 40 minutes a week, where we take an activity which adults don’t do well, and then impose it on teenagers.”

Calling All Campers

After comments about time, the second-most mentioned topic regarding tefilla at Jewish Academy was how it did *not* resemble camp tefilla services. As I will explain in further detail, I found that this was the students’ way of saying that they wanted a more relevant and engaging program, and that the school environment could not accommodate their needs as easily as camp.

Many of the high school students reported that they attended Jewish summer camp, identifying the most popular summer camps as Camp Alonim at the Brandeis Bardin Institute and the Conservative Movement's Camp Ramah, both in California. During one of my focus groups, one student said camp has "a lot more upbeat prayer service, and people like get up and dance." One student reminisced that at Camp Alonim, "they literally jump on tables. I'm not saying to jump on tables, but they get so excited. And even though I don't know what the words mean half the time, it's still fun to like get involved." Students also mentioned that they do not like being policed at school; one student mocked his teachers, "Sit straight! Turn forward in your seat! Don't talk! Put your kipah on! Say the prayers! Open up your prayer book!"

Head of School Rabbi Meir reinforced the notion that tefilla needed to be more engaging and exciting. He said,

For a Jewish day school to succeed, it has to be edgy. Parents are sometimes uncomfortable with edgy, board members are sometimes uncomfortable with edgy, but we run the school for the students. It's all about the students... We need to have tefilla that works for where we want the students to be.

Many of the adults I interviewed suggested the inclusion of more music to create an engaging tefilla. Jonathan referenced his experience as a camp song leader when he said, "The one thing that has worked beyond anything else is having music"; however, some of the faculty also noted that in high school, many students no longer enjoyed public singing. Rabbi Meir recognized that tefilla simply may not be a cool thing to do for high school students: "I know some of my colleagues on the faculty believe and probably have said that somehow it's not cool to participate actively or lead tefilla"; however, he was

quick to dismiss this notion, saying, “I don’t see that in this school.” Instead, he attributed their problems with tefilla to structural issues, such as how much time they allotted to it, how they set the program up, and clarification of their tefilla goals. Yet, one student bluntly said, “It’s an embarrassing thing to sing in front of everybody.”

I asked all of the students I interviewed whether they would get rid of tefilla at Jewish Academy if they had the choice. Not one of them would; they said they simply wanted it to be more engaging. They thought it was important to continue to offer it, even though many wished it were optional. As Jonathan said,

The vast majority of them want a fantastic tefilla program. And, we get more complaints here that tefilla is just not being done right. Not that they don’t want it. It’s not, you know, you’re wasting my time, it’s this should be done differently. And more effectively.

Rabbi Levi also mentioned this. She said that at the end of the year last year she conducted an open town hall with the graduating seniors. One of the issues the students raised by themselves was tefilla:

And about half of them said it would be better if we did it every day. And I was kind of like, really? Wow. So maybe they don’t like the current format, but they’re not willing to just dump it. They just want it to be better.

When I asked the students how to make it better, and how to bring the camp tefilla that they all seemed to enjoy into their school environment, one student responded, “We have to focus on school. During the summer it’s all just carefree. It’s like all-encompassing at a camp, and you have to go to different classes at school. Like you’re in the total environment at camp.” To which another student said, “Yeah, at school I’m

more worried about my homework, and class, and I have so much homework at night.”

The students described a camp environment that totally encompassed them: in camp, from the time they wake up until the time they go to bed, from eating to singing to sports to the way they talk, Judaism pervaded every aspect of their lives without distraction. And in this total Jewish immersion environment of camp, as one faculty member said, “tefilla fits in seamlessly. It’s hard for schools to do that.”

Camp Alonim’s website supported this notion:

By starting with activities a child already enjoys, we can show them how that activity might be Jewish, thereby making it a gateway to a Jewish connection.

For example, a camper who brings their electric guitar to camp will learn to play a Hebrew song. A camper who loves to play basketball will learn about Jewish values such as teamwork, humility, and fair play while they are on the court.

Jewish camping has been found to be one of the most effective methods of Jewish education, ensuring a Jewish identity in adulthood. It is so effective because it is a *complete immersion experience* where Jewish values are lived and modeled by the staff, where the rhythm of the week is anchored by Shabbat, and Jewish culture is brought to life through song, dance, and experiential education. The field of Experiential Education is characterized by creating *experiences* for the learner rather than asking them to connect with passively-presented material.

(American Jewish University, 2007, emphasis in original)

Another way of looking at the impact of camp’s “complete immersion experience” came from the reinforcement students received at home. As Jonathan pointed out,

We have to consider what they're going home to every day. If they're going home to video games and nannies, you know, because some don't even see their parents. I mean, nannies come to parent/teacher conferences and take notes for the parents. And the maid came once, and I'm like, Who are you? "I'm the maid." Really?

He reflected that it was difficult to expect much success if students had tefilla for 20 minutes only once a week, and most did not receive reinforcement at home. Jonathan stated it another way:

The underlying challenge, period, is that you have teachers making less than \$100,000 dollars a year trying to convince these kids that tefilla is an important part of their life. And then you have their parents, who the vast majority are making over \$200,000 to millions who don't do this, who never have done this, who aren't really that interested in this, and they've been in the eyes of these kids significantly more successful because they're rating success by financial gain.

Rabbi Levi reflected on the students' comments that they wanted a more exciting tefilla program: "The question of tefilla is somewhat a pedagogic question of keva versus kavanah." Keva denotes something requiring much work that does not result in an immediate payoff. A basketball player who practices hundreds of free throws repetitively is an example of keva. Learning about the mechanics of tefilla, learning how to navigate a prayer book, practicing prayers over and over again that are unfamiliar in order to achieve proficiency, are all examples of keva. These are not usually the very exciting parts of prayer, although they might be essential to do in order to make it exciting eventually.

The exciting tefilla experiences have kavanah, which is on the other extreme from keva. Kavanah refers to those “aha” moments of having a powerful tefilla experience. Perhaps experiencing a sunset at the beach would inspire a kavanah moment for many people. “Kavanah moments are what everyone wants, but are very hard to get, especially in the middle of a school day,” Rabbi Levi reminded me. I found that almost everyone at the school, from students to faculty to administrators, all craved that kavanah experience; however, there were so many *structural* obstacles to creating it (lack of time, lack of space, lack of reinforcement, etc.). It appeared that comparing school tefilla to camp tefilla was the way that the students expressed this sentiment.

Not only was it difficult to create spiritually engaging prayer services, but learning *about* prayer was also difficult according to Rabbi Levi. When I asked her to explain how students learn about tefilla, she let out an audible sigh and said, “This is the *big challenge*. We don’t know yet.” The students told me they did not mind learning about prayer—they just asked that it be taught in an engaging way. One student said, “Yeah, we can learn about it in Judaic Studies class.”

Rabbi Levi complained that despite her best efforts in teaching about tefilla, “I don’t think they hear it.” She recalled one class she was teaching about an aspect of tefilla over and over, and not one of her students connected with what she was saying or even remembered it in later classes. She remembered feeling, “I was like, *really?*” She acknowledged, “Ultimately the answer is creating a high quality curriculum.” She said the curriculum, like the program itself, was “in process. You know, when I stepped in, it was kind of like a tabula rasa. Right now tefilla is not part of the Jewish Studies curriculum. We have a scope and sequence that needs to be revisited.”

Choice Model: Empowering Students

My interviewees raised one consistent solution for the problems associated with creating a successful tefilla program at Jewish Academy: to build a “choice model” for tefilla. Essentially, the school would offer a variety of tefilla options for the students to choose from, ranging from traditional prayer options, beginner’s services, and a host of other alternative services which might include yoga, meditation, various discussion groups, and innovative prayer services. Students would either be given complete choice in which group they attended, or would be required to attend a traditional service for at least part of their experience and have complete choice for the rest of their experience. Most of the learning about tefilla would come in Judaic Studies classes.

Creating multiple, concurrent prayer options requires having many qualified prayer leaders. “A real challenge” that Rabbi Levi identified in this choice model was finding faculty to lead them. Jonathan noted as well the critical element of the faculty: “The most important element of this, I believe, is having a qualified, dedicated faculty member to do this.” Jonathan reinforced Rabbi Levi’s concerns by saying, “The challenge is the amount of planning that goes into this choice system is more man hours than most institutions have.”

Rabbi Levi identified “having kids take ownership of it” as a key to improving the tefilla program and a core rationale for the choice model. She also listed another rationale: “It makes good pedagogic sense,” and she likened it to using a “backwards design” in curriculum and lesson planning in general. Jonathan said that one of the most important ingredients he had seen in successful tefilla programs “is having kids lead, and

having kids up in front of kids. The success has always been having a group of students to lead.”

The school had made inroads into this philosophy of empowering students. According to a front page article in the school’s student newspaper, *The Lion’s Pride*, the senior class’s “first initiative” was getting more involved in tefilla: “They began sitting in the front rows, singing the first and last songs, and pushing the school to become more active in prayer. As part of this, the class led a school-wide Kabbalat Shabbat” (Grayson, 2010, p. 1). The student author of this article wrote, “If the seniors set the initiative, the rest of the school will follow” (p. 1). This article reinforced the notion that student ownership of tefilla had the potential to increase engagement.

One of the drawbacks communicated to me of this choice model was that it may break up the feeling of school community. Jonathan gave the analogy of what happened at a synagogue he worked at:

When there is a Bar or Bat Mitzvah, the regulars have their own service separately. And, I think that’s sad because this is their community and the Bar and Bat Mitzvah should be the people that they’re sharing their tradition with. So, I think that if you have separate services in one setting, it’s tough on the community feeling.

When Rabbi Levi presented the idea of having multiple prayer options to the seniors last year, the students rejected the idea because of that very reason: “They hated the idea of splitting the community.” Thus, Rabbi Levi decided to move much more slowly in instituting the choice program. Indeed, students in the focus groups indicated many times that the feeling of community was one of the characteristics of Judaism they

most valued. Thus, Rabbi Levi was trying to balance creating a sense of community with meeting the individual needs of her students, and she was finding that the two values many times conflicted.

At the same time that some students did not want to split the community apart, most students said that the ideal tefilla program would be one that gave them a choice of how to pray. One student said,

It would be a lot better if they made different types of tefilla groups that accommodate people who have different preferences. Some may not even be necessarily praying. It could be talking about prayer or learning about it. Or there could be different styles of praying.

To which a student responded, “Even if they’re two choices you really didn’t want to make, you would still feel better about it, if you at least had a choice.” Along those lines, a student said, “Don’t force them to sing or pray because that’s probably going to make them even more angry and even more negative about it. You have to let them do it their way, or else they’ll just resent it.”

The students suggested many examples of the types of tefilla groups they wanted to see created. One mentioned a “skits group” where students could do improvisation or dramatic interpretations of, for example, the Torah portion of the week. Many said they wanted discussion groups, which one student said “are a really great tool to help you understand and connect because not everyone can sing or do things like that—they connect through talking.” Most of the students recognized the value of having more intimate groups: “I think being split up into smaller groups of around 20 kids would be a lot more productive.” Many students who went to summer camp wanted to recreate the

singing they enjoyed so much during the summers. There appeared to be a friendly rivalry of sorts between the various camps, and they suggested splitting into specific camp groups, like “Camp Ramah tefilla” and “Camp Alonim tefilla.” Rabbi Levi mentioned other options such as a drumming minyan, a group which focused on the “psycho analytical understanding of the prayers,” an a capella group, and separate groups specifically for girls or boys.

Some of the students with camp experience suggested they wanted to bring more creative tefilla experiences into Jewish Academy. For example, one student said she loved doing biblioyoga, which uses Biblical texts as the basis for interpretive yoga, meditation, and movements. Another student wanted an “iPod tefilla,” where students would have to find any song on their iPod that related to a particular prayer as the basis for discussion.

One successful example of student empowerment in the tefilla arena that Jewish Academy had already implemented was the “Senior davar Torah,” in which seniors prepared an original sermon that integrated Judaism and their lives and presented it to the entire high school during Kabbalat Shabbat. One senior’s davar Torah was published in *The Lion’s Link*. She related the Torah portion of *Lech Lecha*, in which Abraham went on a physical and spiritual journey to Israel, to her own journey in high school. This senior wrote, “Finding yourself takes challenges. Don’t be afraid to try new things, even if you think you might stumble. Finding yourself is what high school is really about” (Gurson, 2010, p. 1). Everyone I interviewed deemed the Senior davar Torah a success. From students to teachers to administrators, they considered the Senior davar Torah to be

“great,” “successful,” “important,” and “a big deal.” They attributed its success to the fact that it was student-led.

Getting student feedback on the tefilla program was also critical, according to my interviewees. When I asked the student focus groups what they really wanted in their tefilla program, they consistently answered that they wanted the teachers to ask for their opinions: “I think it’s just really important to keep getting feedback from the students.” In their perception, this did not happen so often: “They kind of force it on people who don’t want to do it, without asking.”

Pluralism and Authenticity

I asked everyone in all of my interviews and focus groups to comment on creating a tefilla program in a pluralistic Jewish school. Interviewees were split over the impact that pluralism had on Jewish Academy’s tefilla program. For example, when I asked him whether the pluralistic nature of his school had any impact on the tefilla program, Head of School Rabbi Meir said bluntly, “No, it’s not a function of pluralism.” He attributed the challenges of tefilla to giving it the appropriate space, adequate time, making it meaningful and relevant for the students, bringing in music to make it relevant and exciting, having the right people leading it, and empowering students to have ownership of the program. He felt that if the school met these structural issues, tefilla would dramatically improve, whether in a pluralistic setting or a denominational one.

Mechitza minyan leader Wasser underscored this point by saying that the problems of tefilla described thus far were not unique to pluralistic community schools. He said that all Jewish schools had problems with their prayer programs, “even” Orthodox schools: “I’ll be honest with you, I worked in Modern Orthodox institutions for

12 years. And the situation there is not much better. The fact is that Orthodox tefilla has many of the same issues.”

When I asked him why that was, he said, “It’s too much text and too little time. And to be done well, it requires a tremendous amount of preparation and learning which most people don’t have.” He lamented that he was repeating the same mistakes that were made on him when he was a student. He recalled being inspired after reading about the wonders of tefilla as a teenager, and then being disappointed after entering a synagogue prayer service. The prayers were said at lightning speed, and he thought, “these people are mumbling” and then “before you even know what hit you, the service is over.” He mimicked in a mocking voice what he recalled hearing from the prayer leader: “blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah.”

Wasser echoed Rabbi Levi’s point made earlier that in order for tefilla programs to be successful, there must be good tefilla role models for the students. He pointed out that these issues of the quality of the program and the ability of teachers to lead tefilla effectively transcended any issues of pluralism or denominations:

How do you convey something to your students that you may not have yourself?

How many people, including Orthodox rebbes, but especially in a community day school, have a regular prayer life? So, it becomes ridiculous. Teenagers know when you’re a liar. They know when you’re not sincere. And, they know when you don’t know what you’re talking about, no matter who you are. So, if you’re talking about tefilla, and it’s theoretical because you go to shul three times a year, *they know*. And the filter goes up and they go, “Okay, this is bullshit.”

Still, Wasser said the fact that Jewish Academy was a pluralistic institution did not *help* its tefilla program. He said that he once gave his senior class a challenge to create “Jewtopia,” the ideal Jewish community. He only made one rule: it had to be pluralistic. According to him, they came back and said they could not do it.

I said, “Why not?” They said, “This pluralistic thing is killing us, we can’t do it. We can’t plan, it’s killing everything we’ve decided to do.” And, I think that that’s, you know, to a certain extent I think that that’s the situation of community day schools, of JCC’s, a condition of Hillels. Everybody was sort of stymied by this thing, what does it look like? Does it mean that we have multiple minyanim, does it mean we have no prayer at all, or just one tefilla? But what kind? You know?

Regarding having a diverse group of Jews pray together, he said,

I do think that there is common ground. The common ground is not tefilla, though. The common ground is talmud Torah (Torah study). My old *chavrusa* (study partner) was one of the local Reform rabbis, and that was perfectly fine. It was very comfortable. It was a nice, good relationship, but to pray together? It’s not going to happen. And so, I think that tefilla is the worst place for dealing with the issue of pluralism.

Wasser gave me some written thoughts on tefilla. He characterized where he felt each denomination stood with regards to tefilla, and summarized his views of the pluralistic world of Jewish tefilla in five key points, as follows in his own words:

Tefilla in Jewish schools is a reflection of the train wreck that is tefilla in Jewish communities:

- Orthodoxy has reduced tefilla to a daily exercise of mindless speed muttering of too much text in too little time, having sacrificed meaning and relevance for halachic propriety. Faced with boredom and meaninglessness, they use the relative lack of structured time to socialize.
- Conservative Jews mostly don't pray. If they do, it is a weekly nostalgic emulation of mindless muttering infused with meaningful bits and pieces and a few methodologies meant to make the prayer more interactive. (The ol' responsive reading which recalls Sephardi call/response tefilla but without the zest.)
- Reform Jews rarely pray. Reform services consist entirely of liturgical pieces set to folksy music or performed by cantors, arranged in an order that vaguely evokes the traditional order of the siddur. Ultimately, the flavor is as much low-church Protestant as it is Jewish.
- Reconstructionist prayer is bracketed off as an ultimately non-sensical folk activity. "Talking to" an impersonal deified humanity is just plain silly.
- Jewish Renewal ranges from some very clever experiments with traditional prayer (à la Reb Zalman's early years) to giving up tefilla entirely for ecstatic shamanistic practices or stoic Buddhist meditation.

He concluded with: "Given whole communities where people don't really 'get' davening, it's little wonder that their kids don't either."

Considering this was just one Judaic Studies teacher's summary of the pluralistic Jewish Academy community, I wondered what the rest of the community counted as authentic tefilla. For example, was it acceptable for a student to choose "iPod tefilla" for

4 years? Should students be required to attend a traditional prayer service at some point during their high school career? Should alternative groups such as yoga and meditation be called tefilla and minyans, or should they be called something else, like spiritual groups? Who got to make these decisions as to what was normative and authentic?

None of the students considered alternative, non-traditional tefilla groups to be inauthentic. One student who said she found most of her spirituality in dance, commented,

Look, I go to a Jewish day school, and I have a Hebrew name. I celebrate the high holidays, the majority of them. The values of Judaism are in my everyday life. Like for me, I'm not observant, I use certain things on Shabbat. It's more of, I take those values that Judaism has and use them in the world. And, I apply those to my everyday life.

She said that her way of practicing Judaism—which was not at all traditional and did not include siddur-based prayer—was just as authentic and spiritual as someone who observed Shabbat and prayed traditionally. The vast majority of students I encountered echoed this student's sentiments.

I pushed the students to tell me if *anything* someone did could be considered not Jewish. I even asked, “What about if you eat pork on Yom Kippur? Or what if you don't believe in God?” One student responded,

My dad's a rabbi, but I don't believe in God, but I'm still proud to be a Jew. I'm proud of our history, and I go to a Jewish camp, but I'm an atheist okay, but I like the community of being around Jews. So I still have a strong Jewish identity.

To which another student added,

It's really more about Jewish values. I think that's a huge part for me. It's really about living your life in a moral way...not whether you believe in God, or pray three times a day, or keep kosher, or do everything observantly. It's really more what lesson you take from it, and how you apply it to your life.

I asked the students what they thought about a student who never once during his 4 years at the Jewish Academy prayed traditionally, who perhaps just drummed for 4 years for his tefilla. Not a single student had a problem with this. One student said that since Jewish Academy was a Jewish school, it was important that students *learn* about traditional tefilla,

but they can learn about it in Judaic Studies class. I think there's a big difference between learning and doing. We could learn about that, but that doesn't mean we should be forced to do something we don't believe in. It would give people more a bad memory of it, than a good feeling about it. Everyone has their own views, everybody here has their own identification with Judaism.

The teachers responded differently than the students. Mechitza minyan advisor Wasser would not label the main community tefilla described earlier as actual prayer:

Aside from the plainly halachic (Jewish legal) issues, more than that, it's that it's the skin of tradition with no meat under it. There's nothing there that's going to give a neshama (soul) any nourishment. It's sort of semi-random pieces of Jewish text kind of strung together and kind of random musical styles, or a musical style that, as far as I can tell, sort of is meant to emulate kind of American folk music, or kind of, or I would say, a church youth group music. Once the traditional tefilla structures are sufficiently broken down it's no longer tefilla anymore. It's

something else. But, that something else could be a very nice thing. A *kumsitz* (sitting together and singing Jewish songs), for example. A kumsitz is a lovely thing. I mean, I have them in my house. You know, we do it all the time. But, I don't call it tefilla.

In contrast to Rabbi Wasser's opinions, Rabbi Meir's explained pluralism at his school as such:

Well, we study together. We create community together. We may observe in different ways. We may pray separately in tefilla. But we study, create community, we recognize and respect the authenticity of multiple normative approaches to Jewish life.

In light of his statement, I asked him if there could be anything considered not normative or not authentic regarding tefilla, and I asked him who in his school defined normative. He responded, "I would say that the collective conscience of catholic Israel (a term coined by Conservative Judaism scholar Solomon Schechter to describe the consensus of the entirety of the Jewish people) defines normative." I pushed him to define the boundaries of his pluralistic community and asked if a secular Israeli who did not observe any traditional Jewish laws or customs would be part of "catholic Israel." He said, "There may be multiple paths at the high school level" and, "In terms of our school's mission, no matter what there's a place at the table for Torah. There's a place at the table for tefilla. There is a place at the table for ethical moral Prophetic, capital P, behavior." He gave as an example that "really understanding a Bialik poem will contribute as much to someone being an engaged Jew in 10 years as forcing a student to sit through some sort of service."

I asked Rabbi Levi how she defined tefilla. She responded that she felt almost an obligation to teach her students traditional prayer and to have all of them graduate being able to pray traditionally. But in the end, she said,

You know, I don't know. I guess that's part of the problem. You know, we have our basic structure that we try to follow. But at the end of the day, you know, if somebody makes use of tefilla time in a prayerful way, if they're sitting and not talking and not participating, but they're sitting and experiencing *something* for those 20 minutes, then I'm okay with that. Then I'm okay with that.

According to Jonathan, tefilla was defined by one word: separation. He said, "It's separating the kids from the regular school day and putting them into a spiritual setting." I asked him if anything could *not* fit under that category of separation, and if he considered anything to *not* be tefilla. He answered,

We're not getting up and talking about the Yankees. You know? But, if we can talk about a particular guy in the Yankees and how he has succeeded through tikkun olam, well, that's okay, as long as it connects to tefilla and spirituality.

When I followed up and asked if he saw any difference between the terms spirituality and tefilla, he said:

Tefilla is more than spirituality. Spirituality is one aspect of tefilla...I feel that tefilla should involve text. I think tefilla should involve some history. But, I would be happy if we just achieved the spiritual goals.

I observed a continuum of what constituted authentic tefilla at Jewish Academy, from the majority of the students who felt that just about anything spiritual could be considered tefilla to Wasser who said that prayer must conform to traditional synagogue

services. A wide chasm separated those two poles, and the other adults (Jonathan, Rabbi Meir, and Rabbi Levi) stood at various points along the continuum.

Summary

In this description of the Jewish Academy tefilla program, I described its minimalist style (whether by intention or by default), the artists' philosophies and methodologies, the view of the painting from afar and up close, the relationship between the various brushstrokes as they hit each other at different angles, as well as critiques of the artwork which by the school's own admission was still very much wet and in many sections still unpainted.

Now that all three schools have been described, in the next chapter I present a cross-case analysis of New Jew's Jackson Pollock-style bench, Hebrew High School's mosaic, and Jewish Academy's minimalist architectural structure.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY: CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS

Tefilla at Jewish summer camps was nowhere on my radar when I wrote my dissertation proposal, or as I entered the three schools for my site visits. After conducting my interviews and focus groups at the schools, though, the tefilla experience of students at informal educational environments, such as camps, emerged as the most prominent theme of “good tefilla.” Over and over again, from students to teachers to heads of school, I was told that tefilla at Jewish camps was superior to that in Jewish schools.

I also was told consistently that it was impossible to bring camp tefilla into the school environment because of the structural impediments of schools that camps did not have. For example, in school, students are preoccupied with homework and tests, their schedules are dominated with academic classes, the physical locations of tefilla at schools are not often conducive to spiritual experiences, the time devoted to tefilla and Jewish experiences in general in schools are insufficient due to the emphasis on academic achievement, and so on. I was told that camps, in contrast, are more conducive for tefilla because they typically have none of those constraints just listed and are able to offer a continually-reinforced Jewish immersion environment focused on relevancy and meaning.

Therefore, instead of looking at how to square a circle (how to bring camp into school), I instead looked at what philosophical elements from the camp experience could realistically infuse and improve the tefilla experience of students in school settings. In the cross-case analysis which follows, I therefore use Chazan’s philosophy of Informal Jewish Education, described in the literature review, as the main interpretive lens because

so many of the cross-case themes I observed aligned closely with Chazan's philosophical framework.

Before beginning the cross-case analysis, I would like to remind the reader of my three research questions that also frame the following analysis. The case study narratives already presented earlier, as well as the upcoming cross-case study, all serve to answer these questions:

- What does prayer education and practice look like in Jewish community high schools?
- How is prayer education and practice perceived by key constituencies in Jewish community high schools?
- How do educators and students in Jewish community high schools describe authentic prayer?

Analyzing the Three Cases through Chazan's Philosophy of

Informal Jewish Education

When I took the common characteristics of "good tefilla programs" from the three case studies, all fit in to Chazan's eight criteria for IJE: (a) student-centered; (b) experiential; (c) sound pedagogy and curriculum; (d) interactive process; (e) group experience; (f) all-encompassing culture; (g) engaging; and (h) holistic leadership.

Student-centered

The students, faculty, and administration at all three schools emphasized the importance of student empowerment, student ownership, and creating a student-centered tefilla program. Rosner made it the defining characteristic of his "Tefilla Kehilla Institute" at New Jew, Hebrew High School employed a multiple minyan model largely

for this very reason, and Jewish Academy was moving towards the choice model for tefilla as well.

All of the faculty and administration I interviewed told me that the most successful tefilla sessions were ones in which the students were given control. Rabbi Lev, the Director of Jewish Studies at New Jew:

We believe that anything the kids can do, they should do. And we considered all of our past attempts [with tefilla], and what they had in common, in terms of their successes and their failures. The successes were the kids were leading...No matter what we did [with tefilla] it was not going to be one a rabbi or a teacher was leading. It had to be the kids.

The students also overwhelmingly mentioned that they valued choice over how they prayed. When I asked the students at New Jew what the most successful ingredient of their tefilla program was, one student responded, “Student involvement is key.” A student at Jewish Academy said, “Yeah, you have to make it a choice. If you get to choose between two things, you’re going to feel a lot better about it.”

I did not observe one single way in which students were empowered, which showed that there are many different ways schools can empower students in tefilla. New Jew primarily empowered a leadership cadre of students who in turn were taught to solicit feedback from the rest of their peers. Hebrew High School mainly empowered its tenth and eleventh graders to choose from a variety of prayer and alternative spiritual practice options, such as yoga, meditation, and various discussion groups. Jewish Academy was moving towards Hebrew High School’s model, and also enjoyed some

success in empowering their students such as by getting the seniors more involved in leading their peers, and with the Senior Davar Torah.

The common thread in each school was that the students were most responsive to tefilla in environments where they were given the most control over the creation and implementation of the curriculum and programming. I asked New Jew Judaic Studies teacher Raanan Mallek whether the TKI program could work in other schools. He said that the specific TKI program may or may not work in other schools but, “The transferability is in student-led tefilla programs.” This child-centered and child-friendly approach directly related to Chazan’s (2003) view of students as “active partners in the educational dynamic” and that the educators should “focus on personal interests, listening as much as telling, starting with questions, identifying interests, and collaborating rather than coercing” (p. 6).

A good example of this was Powell’s philosophy of *nishmah v’naaseh* at New Jew which was described in that school’s portrait. Prayer, he said, was “excruciatingly boring.” Powell’s emphasis therefore started with where the student was at, which as described in the narrative was likely not traditional prayer. He said that first he found out what interests the students had and then tailored their tefilla experiences to be as infused with *kavanah* as possible. Otherwise, he said that he would lose their interest. Powell’s approach aligned well with the student-centered nature of IJE, which “implies concern with affecting the learner’s *total* being... Thus, informal Jewish education does not see ‘Jewish growth’ as exclusively intellectual but rather as a synthesis of aesthetic, affective, moral, behavioral, and cognitive dimensions” (Chazan, 2003, p. 7).

The fact that Powell's statements fit well with Chazan's philosophy of IJE was no surprise: he was a product of the camping system of the Brandeis Bardin Institute, and he co-wrote an article in which he said the BBI philosophy was an early model of IJE. The educational philosophy of Powell's mentor, Dr. Shlomo Bardin, was "first we touch, then we teach, since the touching is for life" (Powell & Aaron, 2007, p. 7). Bardin's rationale was that first engaging the student on his or her own terms provided the foundations for any intellectual learning which was able to happen afterwards. Thus, it is important to note that this approach does *not* neglect the keva aspect of tefilla (such as siddur skills or understanding the prayers). Rather, it *permits* keva to occur *because* it places initial primacy on kavanah.

Experiential

Rabbi Kaplan of Hebrew High School mentioned in our interview that Dewey influenced the decisions he made in his tefilla program. In *Experience and Education* (1938), John Dewey insisted that neither the traditional nor the progressive way of education was adequate because neither applied the principles of a carefully developed philosophy of experience. Dewey framed the question in his book as follows: "How shall the young become acquainted with the past in such a way that the acquaintance is a potent agent in appreciation of the living present" (p. 23)? According to Dewey, traditional education just funneled knowledge into the student through books and instruction from a teacher without connecting to the student; hence, acquiring knowledge became the end goal of the traditional educational process. Dewey argued that providing the student with enjoyable and relevant learning experiences motivates them to continue

learning; this motivation matters just as much as the knowledge that is learned (1938, p. 34).

The influence of Dewey on Rabbi Kaplan explained why his tenth and eleventh graders were given much choice over how they engaged with spirituality, and Kaplan and Hebrew High School's tefilla coordinator, Rabbi Gamliel, both emphasized the importance of students having a spiritual experience. Gamliel said that one of her biggest goals was giving her students the experience of tefilla. She said she wanted her students to "come to us and say, 'I'd like to see a women's minyan', 'an XYZ minyan.'"

Similarly, Kaplan said that he wanted to

build more in terms of the ability of a Jewish studies teacher to empower, to facilitate a group of students, to create their own minyanim or spiritual practice, I would think that would make for greater success in what we're doing.

At the same time, Kaplan acknowledged that Hebrew High School's ninth grade tefilla program, which was entirely classroom-based and devoted to learning about prayer rather than experiencing it, was not based upon Dewey. He admitted that the school was "imposing" on the students, and described more of the traditional, passive education that Dewey criticized. This was the biggest critique I heard of Hebrew High School's ninth grade program in my interviews, that it was "dry," and that it may not "stick" (Kaplan's word) because the students may not find the information relevant or meaningful, and it lay outside of a student-centered experiential context.

Still, I did not encounter a single student in any of the schools I visited that advocated doing away with tefilla in their schools, or not learning about tefilla at all. They simply requested that the learning be relevant and engaging. New Jew's Head of

School, the one who called tefilla “excruciatingly boring” for students, did not suggest that learning about prayer should be removed from the curriculum. He simply said that it needed to be taught better, with more stories to make it come alive for the students, and to help them connect better to it.

Similarly, Chazan (2003) wrote,

The experience of study, the learning of ideas, if done well, is in itself an experience and one that can be very powerful. The unmediated confrontation with text, either individually or via havruta (paired learning), or a class with an exceptional teacher, are powerful examples of the central Jewish value of Talmud Torah (Torah study). Thus, the emphasis on experience is not a rejection of the experience of study; rather, it is a refocusing on the active engagement of a person with all his/her senses so that the learning comes from within rather than being imposed from without. (p. 7)

Likewise, Dewey did not reject that learning can (and should) be considered a valuable experience in and of itself; however, Dewey warned that teachers should not teach something irrelevant and impractical for the students’ present lives, with the hope that one day they might use it in the future. Dewey referred to the “water-tight compartment” in the back of students’ minds where impractical knowledge is placed that teachers say might be used in the future. The problem with this approach, Dewey wrote, was that this mythical future for which the information had been stored usually never occurred (1938, p. 48).

New Jew’s Rosner used an experiential model by crafting his program like the Passover seder. The seder itself is experiential—rather than being a service in which

people sit passively while a rabbi talks at them, seder participants (especially the children) are encouraged to experience the Exodus from Egypt as if they themselves are actually going through it. Seder participants are guided through an experiential evening in which they are asked to transport themselves back in time and actually move from being slaves in Egypt to being free people in Israel. It is common for modern seders to include references to similar current events such as trying to free people from the genocide in Darfur. With regards to the children involved, parents try to do anything and everything to make the seder as lively and experiential as possible.

Maimonides, one of the greatest rabbis and philosophers in Judaism, described the crux of the seder as being absolute experiential education:

In each and every generation, a person must present himself as if he, himself, has now left the slavery of Egypt, as Deuteronomy 6:23 states: “He took us out from there.” Regarding this manner, God commanded in the Torah: “Remember that you were a slave”—i.e., as if you, yourself, were a slave and went out to freedom and were redeemed. (*Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Chametz u’Matzah 7:6*)

Maimonides explained that on this night all of the seder participants’ efforts must be directed towards the vital goal of experiencing the Exodus “as if we ourselves left the slavery of Egypt.” This was one of the reasons that Rosner said he picked the Passover seder as the overarching metaphor for his tefilla program. He wanted every student in his school to have a first-hand spiritual experience, whatever that might be. He frequently noted that he tried to use as many “modalities” as possible, such as music, art, and technology, in order to reach as many students as possible.

Another New Jew Judaic Studies teacher and contributor to the school's tefilla program, Raanan Mallek, talked to me at length about the importance of meeting the students where they were at and being attuned to the unique developmental needs of the teenager. Referencing his background in psychology and in studying Piaget, he described what Rosner would call the "rebellious" children from the Passover seder that needed special attention:

I think that there is a natural feeling of teenage youth to have atheistic tendencies.

I would say that developmentally that's where they are. I very much think that it's a built-in type of thinking. A lot of teenagers seem to just follow along. You know, whether it's the anarchy group, there is going to be that contingent that gravitates towards being anti-God, being the anti-establishment.

Mallek was a big proponent of using nature to meet these students' needs, such as through programs like Outward Bound: "By those kids engaging more with nature, those kids will identify more with the force of *Elohim* (God), and if they don't identify with it as God, we're still getting them one step closer to a spiritual experience." He wanted for every student to have a traditional prayer experience:

But the reality of it is, is that many cannot connect to texts that were written by a different generation, like a different mindset of people. It does not speak to them.

And, I think if we're trying to find this language that will connect throughout the generations, nature is the only way for them to experience it.

Rosner agreed with Mallek, and told me he felt that there were students who would feel spiritually connected through being outdoors; therefore, they both convinced their school to donate a piece of land by the school, and they received money to build a

spiritual nature spot which would fit about 30 students. This is one example I observed of how a school was meeting the spiritual needs of its students by providing a student-centered, experiential component.

Another example of the power of experience that was frequently mentioned to me was the shabbaton. Jewish schools commonly go off campus for the weekend to celebrate Shabbat together at a shabbaton. At New Jew, for example, the entire school travels to the campus of the Brandeis Bardin Institute for a weekend of what is essentially Jewish camp; there is little that resembles school at shabbatonim. Students, faculty, and administration alike all described the shabbaton experience to be one of the most powerful Jewish experiences of the year. Chazan believed that this is because a shabbaton is so experiential—students are not learning *about* Shabbat, they are *experiencing* it. He wrote, “Jewish education lends itself particularly well to the experiential approach because so many of the concepts that we wish to teach, such as Shabbat, holidays, and daily blessings, are rooted in actual experiences...Jewish education is extremely well suited to giving experience primacy” (2003, p. 7).

As I heard more and more that one of the key ingredients of a successful tefilla program was making it as experiential as possible, my first inclination was to ask my interviewees how to make school tefilla more experiential, like camp tefilla. I kept running against the same brick wall—everyone told me that it was impossible. Then I interviewed Jared Stein, the music teacher at New Jew who helped lead their tefilla sessions. He told me that while schools cannot transform themselves into camps for obvious structural and logistical reasons, and it would be “impossible to square that

circle” as he termed it, what schools can do is let the philosophy of informal education *influence* their tefilla programs.

Thus, for example, Stein told me that he focused much of his efforts during the shabbaton on things that students could do on their own once they returned home. He gave the example of mealtime—he said that rather than doing a lot of praying which may be irrelevant to students, the big spiritual moments of the shabbaton often came during meals. These were the communal moments where everyone was together in an informal environment, and the singing that happened before, during, and after meals often was the most inspirational singing of the entire shabbaton. He said that since eating meals together was something from the students’ own experience and own lives, these spiritual moments of singing together during a meal were something that students could take back home with them. His point was that schools cannot bottle up camp and bring it back to school for the students in its entirety, but they can infuse their school programs with characteristics of the philosophy of IJE, and they can give students moments that they can look back on and try to recreate in their own lives.

Similarly, Professor Joseph Reimer, the Director for Informal Jewish Education at Brandeis University, and his doctoral student David Bryfman wrote,

We view experiential Jewish education as more than reinforcing of existing commitments. It should aim as well to inspire participants to experience Jewish living at its creative best... We are following the psychologist L.S. Vygotsky (1978) who proposed that educators think of creating a “zone of proximal development” in which participants can be guided and supported to try out new

learning that may move them towards the levels of their potential development.

(Reimer & Bryfman, 2008, p. 88, emphasis in original)

Sound Pedagogy and Curriculum

Usually, when one thinks of the word curriculum, it is in the context of schools—what subjects should be covered, what books should be read, what ideas should be learned, and so on; however, Chazan (2003) noted that “the more generic concept of curriculum as an overall blueprint or plan of action is very much part of informal Jewish education” (p. 8). He commented that there were a diversity of views regarding what that curriculum should be depending on the type of school, but regardless, having a curriculum was important for the success of IJE programming.

I observed this characteristic most prevalently at New Jew. Rosner, the school’s tefilla coordinator, identified the extremely structured nature of his tefilla program as one of its foundational components. Every adult I interviewed at New Jew mentioned how meticulously planned the program was, often comparing it to a classroom teacher with well-crafted lesson plans. The leadership students in TKI spent a great deal of time planning the tefilla sessions, carefully outlining them, literally minute by minute.

Rabbi Lev, New Jew’s Director of Jewish Studies, commented on the fact that Rosner was creating an educationally-sound system: “The idea of TKI is a lot like building a lesson plan. They have to think through goals and assessments and all that different stuff.” He also noted that student-empowerment is simply “good pedagogy.” He said he “trusts that the tefilla program is going to work because it has the other ingredients that have worked in schools before, like student participation and student ownership of the program.”

I also observed Rosner using other educationally-sound methods, such as differentiated instruction, authentic assessment, data-based decision making, and multiple intelligences, all of which were described earlier in New Jew's portrait. In short, Rosner approached planning tefilla like he would plan a curriculum for a formal class. He articulated a sound educational theory, considered what worked and did not work in the past, planned the program down to the minute, empowered students, assessed how it was going, made changes based upon data he collected, collaborated with other teachers, differentiated instruction, paid attention to student developmental needs and issues, and so on. As Rosner said, "All of the details that are essential to creating a good classroom are also essential to creating a good tefilla program."

Rabbi Gamliel of Hebrew High School also mentioned to me the importance of a scope and sequence for tefilla, and "an arc of learning." While such a curriculum was not yet in place at Hebrew High School, it was under works at the time of my visit. She told me that during her faculty meetings with the tefilla teachers, that was one issue they worked on—creating that scope and sequence, curriculum, and a lesson plan bank. Rabbi Levi at Jewish Academy also recognized the importance of this. While her program was just in its infancy, she nonetheless credited the eventual creation of a curriculum as a major goal.

Interactive Process and Group Experience

Chazan stated that informal Jewish educators not only teach a subject, but they also "shape a community that exemplifies the Jewish value of *kehilla* (community)" (2003, p. 9). Therefore, he wrote,

teaching groups is not simply about transmitting knowledge to all the individuals gathered in one room, but rather is very much about the dynamic role of the collective in expressing and reinforcing values that are part of the culture of the society that created the group...Informal Jewish education is as concerned with igniting the dialogic with the learner as it is with transmitting the culture. (p. 9)

A good example of this interactive process came when I observed the tefilla session at Jewish Academy. In the middle of the service, Rabbi Levi asked students to look at the pieces of paper that she had placed on each student's chair. On the paper was a blessing from Birkot HaShachar, the morning blessings. She asked the students to turn to their neighbors, understand the blessings they had in their hands, and then think of how they related to their own lives. Then the students shared as an entire group, and Rabbi Levi facilitated a discussion of the relevance of these blessings to the students' lives. This was the type of pedagogical action that Chazan supports. "The pedagogy of informal Jewish education," Chazan (2003) wrote,

is rooted in techniques that enfranchise openness, encourage engagement, instigate creative dialectic, and insure comfort of diversity and disagreement. For example, students may be asked what they think; how great rabbis of the past might have reacted; what the Jewish contents means for their lives; and what they agree or disagree with. (p. 9)

I observed each of the three schools I visited struggling to create community through their tefilla programs. While all three schools put a primacy on community, they went about it in different ways. Rabbi Kaplan at Hebrew High School, for example, felt that his mosaic model of pluralism meant that by allowing all of the tefilla groups to exist

separately, he was creating a cohesive spiritual community; all of the different tiles came together to form a unified mosaic mural. Some faculty and students at Hebrew High School, though, noted the tensions inherent in such a model, and told me that they felt a lack of community feeling.

Tefilla teachers at all three schools questioned the whole notion of using tefilla as a unifying factor in the community at all—they said such a divisive denominational ritual actually does more to break a community apart than bring it together. This is why, one tefilla teacher at Hebrew High School said, the entire high school never came together for tefilla, and the students at Hebrew High School commented that this lack of community during tefilla was noticeable. Still, Rabbi Kaplan seemed to describe this tension between the individual and community as being a positive attribute of the foundation of his vision of Jewish pluralistic communities.

At Jewish Academy, Rabbi Levi described that she wanted to move towards the multiple minyan model that Hebrew High School was already employing; however, she told me that she received pushback from the students, especially the seniors, who did not want to split apart the community by creating many different services happening at the same time. The faculty song leader also expressed this concern. As a result, Rabbi Levi was much slower at implementing the change model and noted the tensions she felt between attending to individual needs which would be met in the multiple minyan model, versus attending to communal needs, more easily met in a larger group environment.

Rosner at New Jew also told me about the concerns he had in creating a cohesive community. The reason he chose to not turn to the multiple minyan model was precisely because of the issues with community that Hebrew High School and Jewish Academy

were facing with that program. Instead, Rosner chose to keep the entire community together for tefilla. His basis for doing that, again, was the Passover seder. He explained to me that even though there are many different types of Jews, they all sit together at the Passover table. While I still heard comments on the tension between communal versus individual needs at New Jew, they were far fewer and less intense than the other two schools. I also heard less at New Jew about tefilla being divisive than the other two schools, perhaps because there was no real attempt at making the tefilla sessions traditional prayer services.

All of the schools, each of whom identified in some way as pluralistic or community schools, were statistically dominated by non-Orthodox students. I estimate that less than 5% of the overall student population might self-identify as Orthodox. One question that arose at each school was the place of those more traditional students in the larger community, and whether their needs were being met. It appeared that the focus in all three schools was on engaging the non-Orthodox students, while giving the Orthodox students—if they wanted it—their own space to conduct traditional services. Still, I heard rumblings of discontent from self-described Orthodox students and faculty that the more traditional students were being ignored.

All three schools, on the one hand, recognized the importance of creating community, while on the other hand have encountered understandable difficulties or tensions in doing so through tefilla. Nonetheless, the group experience is a defining characteristic of IJE. As Chazan (2003) noted,

There is also great power to a positive collective communal Jewish consciousness, as evidenced by Jewish involvement in the movement for Soviet Jewry and the

Civil Rights movement in the United States, as well as Jewish support for Israel over the years. Informal Jewish education attempts to harness that power. (p. 10)

All-encompassing Culture

Comments about milieu were common at all three schools, especially comparing the physical locations for tefilla at camps versus schools. For example, interviewees commented that the location of tefilla services at all three schools were less than ideal for creating a spiritual feeling. One student at Hebrew High School told me that doing yoga in the gym took away from her enjoyment of her experience. A tefilla teacher at that school noted that teaching his students about tefilla in a room normally devoted to science made it an obstacle to overcome in creating a spiritually appealing physical environment. Multiple students and faculty at Jewish Academy complained about the multipurpose room used for tefilla. These interviewees made the stark comparison between school environments and the often awe-inspiring environments of camp settings such as at the Brandeis Bardin Institute and Camp Ramah, two of the most popular camps that students at these schools attended. For example, campers sometimes compared the rolling hills of BBI to the lush Judean Hills outside of Jerusalem.

Location of tefilla is only one factor among many that determines the overall culture. According to Chazan (2003),

“Culture” here refers to the totality of components that make up educational contexts: architecture, styles of dress, codes and norms of behavior, seating patterns, physical and aesthetic decor, norms of human interaction, language patterns, and many others...Informal Jewish education focuses on all aspects of an environment in order to educate for Jewishness...What the room looks like;

what food is served and how; what happens at recess; how staff members interact with each other. (p. 10)

One example of the culture of tefilla at schools was time and schedules. Time issues were one of the most common themes that I heard from all three schools. The time allotted to tefilla at schools was often very scant—between 20 minutes per week to 30 minutes every other week. Also, interviewees often commented that tefilla was scheduled poorly. As Rabbi Levi at Jewish Academy described it, tefilla was “just plopped in the middle of the day. That is what a lot of the students articulate is the challenge: they’re stressed out about their test that’s the next period. A lot of adults would find it difficult, let alone a kid.” The overall theme was that tefilla received far too little time for it to be considered important, for reinforcement to occur, for a good rhythm of instruction to develop, and that it was put at a significant disadvantage by the way it was scheduled.

Another example of culture I saw repeated at the schools was how students entered the room for tefilla. At the TKI service led by New Jew, I observed that they orchestrated the beginning of that service to create a warm and welcoming environment as the middle school students walked into the room for tefilla. The music they heard and the smiles they saw created what I perceived as an anticipatory mood for an upbeat and engaging session. According to Chazan, “logistical and organizational considerations are neither incidental nor secondary to the educational program; they are themselves inherently educational issues” (2003, p. 10). Thus, the first few seconds of a student entering the tefilla room are an educational issue, and not just an organizational one, as I sometimes observed at other schools.

Beyond being attuned to every single aspect of an educational setting, Chazan wrote,

“Educational culture” also implies that education is not limited to specific locales such as classrooms or school buildings; it can occur anywhere. As we learn in the most concise and most powerful text on informal Jewish education ever written, Jewish education takes place “when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up” (Deuteronomy 6:4–9). (2003, p. 11)

I observed this idea most clearly with New Jew’s Head of School, Dr. Bruce Powell, who told me that his primary responsibility was to insure that his school’s mission, vision, and philosophy “permeates every single corner of the school, without exception.” He explicitly mentioned that the mission needed to infuse every single person in the school, including secretaries, athletics coaches, even janitors, and not just the teachers and administrators. His main job, he told me, was “to be the school’s storyteller.” I observed the school culture, which he identified as being founded upon Jewish values, in many places such as the school newspaper, on the soccer field, in the classrooms, and in the teacher’s lounge, as described in the school’s portrait. In other words, values were not just present during a tefilla session, a Jewish studies class, or a davar Torah. They infused every corner of the school, and created a school culture where the students were quoting to me the school’s Jewish mission without me even asking them.

I did not observe that any one mission worked better than others. What I perceived as most important was that a clear, articulate, and transparent mission needs to

pervade every part of the school, and that everyone in the school owns. Regarding this, Chazan (2003) wrote,

Such a culture can be created wherever Jews are found: in community centers, Jewish family service offices, and sports clubs; at retreats and conferences; during meals and bus rides. Some of these places may well be ideal venues for Jewish education because they are real settings where Jewish experiences can be lived out. The task of the educator is to shape all settings so that they may serve the larger educational vision. (p. 11)

Engaging

A common comment I heard from students at all three schools was that tefilla at their schools was boring, and they used words such as “ugh,” “disdain” and “resentful.” Indeed, even New Jew Head of School Bruce Powell called prayer “excruciatingly boring.” He told me about one of his mentors, “an Orthodox rabbi who is now 63 years old.” Powell related to me that this rabbi told him, “I pray a couple thousand times a year. I hit kavanah (a spiritual moment) maybe 5% of the time. Five percent of a couple thousand might be high, but if you only daven five times a year, 5% of five times a year is not very big.” In sum, praying with any sense of spirituality is a rarity, even for an Orthodox rabbi who prays multiple times a day for decades.

Yet, according to Chazan (2003),

Informal Jewish education intensely engages and even co-opts participants and makes them feel positive about being involved. Because of its focus on the individual and on issues that are real to him/her, informal Jewish education is often described as “fun,” “joyful,” or “enjoyable.” (p. 11)

It was for this reason that Powell believed that high school students needed to be exposed to the most exciting and engaging (kavanah) parts of prayer right away. He told me that they could not be taught the rote parts (keva) of prayer and then be expected to delay all gratification for later. He called this putting kavanah before keva, and nishmah v'naaseh. He justified this by way of analogy to the ancient Temple service, which he felt must have been "one great party." The students at all three schools agreed that tefilla needed to be more engaging and relevant. A rough count of the word "fun" or similar words such as "engaging," "relevant," and "enjoyable," came to around 75 separate mentions in all of my interviews. For example, a student at Hebrew High School said, "I wish it was more enjoyable." A near identical recommendation came from a student at New Jew: "Make it enjoyable."

Making tefilla enjoyable, Chazan (2003) wrote,

should not be taken as a sign of frivolity or lack of seriousness. As Erikson and others have taught us, identity is in part a sense of positive feelings about a group or a frame of reference; and positive feelings about a Jewish experience play an important role in the development of Jewish identity. (p. 11)

Chazan also pointed to the high degree of participant satisfaction with informal Jewish education as compared with other spheres of Jewish life. He compared informal Jewish education to play and sports by saying that all of those emphasize "the involvement and engagement of the learner; the joy in the moment; the immediacy of it all; the positive memory; and the warm associations. What seems mundane may be sublime" (p. 11).

One concrete example of "fun" tefilla that I saw at all three schools involved the use of music. At Hebrew High School, the music minyan was the most attended tefilla

there, and I observed the students being the most attentive and engaged during it as compared to the other minyans I visited. At New Jew, Rosner utilized music to reach those students who he felt were alienated from the traditional prayer service by buying percussion instruments for them, and also by playing popular music. The students reported that they liked this and felt engaged by the addition of relevant music to the services. Jewish Academy Head of School Rabbi Meir similarly noted, “The one thing that in all of my years as a Head of School has worked is music. The more music, the more student engagement.”

Holistic Leadership

Chazan’s (2003) final characteristic of IJE is that the educators holistically embody all of the previous seven characteristics. He wrote that the IJE educator should be:

1. “A student-centered educator whose focus is on learners and whose goal is their personal growth” (p. 12).
2. “A shaper of Jewish experiences” (p. 12).
3. A creator of “opportunities for those experiences and to facilitate the learner’s entry into the moments” (p. 12).
4. A promoter of “interaction and interchange, which requires proficiency in the skills of asking questions, listening, and activating the engagement of others (p. 12).
5. “A creator of community and kehilla: he/she shapes the aggregate into a group and utilizes the group setting to teach such core Jewish values as *klal Yisrael*

(Jewish peoplehood), *kvod haadam* (the dignity of all people), *shutfut goral* (shared destiny), and *shivyon* (equality)” (p. 12).

6. Engaging to “those with whom they work and make their learning experience enjoyable. The stimulation of positive associations is part of the informal Jewish educator’s work” (p. 12).
7. “A creator of culture; they are sensitive to all the elements specific to the educational setting so that these will reflect values and experiences they wish to convey. The task in this instance is to make every decision—big or little—an educational decision” (p. 12).

Chazan listed an additional attribute of the ideal informal Jewish educator:

He/she needs to be an educated and committed Jew. This educator must be knowledgeable since one of the values he/she comes to teach is Talmud Torah—Jewish knowledge. He/she must be committed to these values since teaching commitment to the Jewish people, to Jewish life, and Jewish values is at the heart of the enterprise. Commitment can only be learned if one sees examples of it up close. (p. 12)

This was consistent with what I heard at all three schools in different ways. At Jewish Academy, the mechitza minyan advisor wondered aloud to me whether a person should be leading tefilla who did not actually have tefilla as a consistent part of their lives. He strongly told me that unless a teacher was committed to tefilla, students would not pay attention to him or her. At New Jew, all of the adults I interviewed commented on the importance of role modeling. In other words, unless the tefilla leaders were tefilla role models, the tefilla sessions would not be as strong. At Hebrew High School, Rabbi

Gamliel commented that one of the strengths of that school's program was that each person leading their particular minyan demonstrated a commitment to the specific type of spiritual practice they were modeling for the students. For example, Rabbi Shwartz not only taught meditation, but he meditated in his own life and saw it as a legitimate form of tefilla.

I also observed other common elements of leadership in the three schools I visited. When I was at New Jew, Head of School Bruce Powell asked me if I was familiar with Jim Collins' book, *Good to Great* (2001), described earlier in the literature review. He said he tried to practice "Level 5 leadership. Lee Iacocca was Level 4. It was all about him. I am desperate to make this not all about me, but only about the story. I happen to be a good story teller, but it's not my story. It's a Jewish story." Rosner, New Jew's tefilla leader, described the same thing without calling it Level 5 leadership.

While it was difficult to assess people based upon only observing them for 2 days, I saw elements of Level 5 leadership in both Rosner and Powell. Some examples included Rosner's bulldog resolve to succeed no matter what; his wish "to disappear" after he creates his program; Powell's reflections on creating a New Jew story as opposed to a Bruce Powell story; both leader's humility and hesitation to talk about themselves; and neither one blamed or said anything negative about others, yet both shared the school's successes with their colleagues.

Every single adult that I interviewed, especially the administrators, were reflective and process-oriented. After all, I had over 30 hours of interviews of school personnel being reflective about their tefilla programs. Rabbi Levi at Jewish Academy called herself a "process person," and I observed her embracing the process of changing the

tefilla program as a positive experience. At New Jew, the faculty described making mistakes as a critical part of the learning process, and that they considered reflecting with the TKI students on what worked and what did not work as a key part of their students' educational and spiritual journey. At Hebrew High School, Rabbi Kaplan saw the entire tefilla journey that his students were going on as a reflective process, as evidenced by his use of Nietzsche's three-stage process of making tefilla meaningful, described earlier in that school's portrait. The common thread throughout all three schools was that the leaders were reflective and encouraged such reflection in their students as a way of developing a connection to tefilla.

Another common leadership attribute I observed was that none of the leaders used authoritarian solutions to solve the problems they faced with tefilla. In other words, none of them resorted to simply demanding that students pray and step in line or else receive a punishment. Instead, I observed that all of the faculty and administrators were adapting to the situations before them, were diagnosing the issues in light of their students' needs and institutional values, and were confronting issues head on. I observed no one trying to make simple solutions to the complicated questions with which they were confronted. These observations paralleled Heifetz's (1998) work on adaptive leadership, described earlier in the literature review. For example, Rabbi Levi at Jewish Academy had planned this year to move to the multiple minyan model, but when she interviewed the senior class and heard them express fears of changing the program so drastically, she modified her plans to include them more in the decision-making process and delayed implementing the change.

While I found evidence that the educational leaders at each school were reflective and were making plans to revisit their assumptions about tefilla education and programming, I did not observe anything that suggested this paradigm shift had yet taken place. As demonstrated throughout each case study, the students were often quite articulate in critiquing the tefilla programs. The school leadership teams at each school were at the beginning stages of partnering with and empowering their students—either through verbal articulation, or through deeds like Rosner’s TKI program.

The faculty and administrators at all three schools commented on the fact that change is difficult, takes time, and is a process; however, even though I observed that they all embraced change and were process-oriented, reflective practitioners, I still noticed that many of the educators were struggling with how exactly to make the change process work. For example, when I asked Rabbi Levi to describe the change process she was employing, she said “the process is pretty much in my head at the moment.” I asked the tefilla song leader at Jewish Academy how he could re-create the tefilla that he said was more successful a few years back, and he was unable to articulate how that process could be accomplished.

I observed that for the most part, with the exception of Powell and Rosner at New Jew, the leaders and educators I interviewed could articulate the importance of the change process, but did not seem to have the tools or expertise to lead that process, or at least were unable to describe the process to me. The vast majority of these administrators and faculty reported never receiving training in how to effectively plan and implement a change process. Their change process appeared to me to be arbitrary, what I would call a trial and error approach in contrast to a systematic approach to change.

Summary

The tefilla experience of students at informal educational environments emerged as one of the central themes of “good tefilla.” In this chapter, I performed a cross-case analysis which utilized Chazan’s philosophy of Informal Jewish Education as the main interpretive lens because so many of the cross-case themes aligned with Chazan’s philosophical framework. I looked at what philosophical elements from the camp experience could infuse and improve the tefilla experience of students in school settings. In the next chapter, I take these analyses from the previous two chapters and use them to craft implications and conclusions about the research study.

CHAPTER 6

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Since I began writing this dissertation, whenever I told a colleague in the field of Jewish education that I was studying tefilla, their ears perked up and they asked me what I found out, as if I might have found some clues in the search for the Holy Grail. Since beginning my research, I was contacted by many schools to help them improve their tefilla programs. I received emails from Jewish colleagues in universities, expressing interest in my research, and asking if I found out anything new regarding how to improve tefilla in schools. Since concluding my on-site case study observations, I also received emails from some of the faculty and administrators I interviewed. They asked if I had any answers yet, and were curious about how I viewed their schools.

This “pressure” from my colleagues—those I know and those I have never even met—was not expected. I realized that I was not just researching a subject, but had a great responsibility to report my findings accurately and ethically, with as little bias as possible, being as sensitive as possible to the people and schools I was describing, and being as helpful as I could to the many educators who were looking for guidance in their tefilla programs. I originally began this dissertation for my own personal development as a Jewish educator leading tefilla in a pluralistic Jewish high school; as I ended this project I understood I had much more weight on my shoulders. I saw that my “exit” from this dissertation would have far-reaching ramifications for the people who would read it—the individuals who I interviewed, the schools I portrayed, and those who will use it for their own professional development.

Ultimately, though, the intent of this research remained unchanged since I began it. I was curious how pluralistic Jewish high schools were engaging Generation Y postmodern students in tefilla. I wanted to research the increasingly widespread use of alternative methods of engaging these students. I posited that if I documented and explained these alternative prayer programs in Jewish community schools, the findings could better inform the decisions of Jewish philanthropic organizations, Jewish teacher training programs, researchers and site-based leadership interested in prayer improvement efforts.

Thus, the purpose of this qualitative study was to describe and analyze prayer programs in Jewish community high schools, as well as professional leadership practices relating to prayer in these schools. In particular, I sought to document and explore alternative approaches to prayer and spirituality, and the impact of these approaches on students. In this chapter, I begin with a review of the study's design followed by a summary of my research questions, and findings relating to those questions. Finally, I infer implications for Jewish educational leaders and future research.

Review of Methodology

Qualitative research was chosen for this study because there has been no academic study of alternative prayer practices in Jewish community schools, thus necessitating descriptive and exploratory research into this phenomenon. The particular type of qualitative research that best suited this study was a qualitative multiple case study design. This approach was utilized to examine three Jewish community high schools in the Western United States with non-traditional Jewish prayer programs.

Case study methodology offers insights which can be construed as hypotheses that help structure future research; hence, case study plays an important role in advancing a field's knowledge base. The multiple case study approach utilized in this study was more compelling and more robust than a single case study approach because it followed replication logic that enhanced the validity and generalizability of the findings. There was no assumption that the data collected in this study could be expected to reflect the experiences of all Jewish community schools. Rather, this exploratory and descriptive study was designed to serve as an opportunity to lay the groundwork for future research.

Multiple methods of data collection were employed in order to increase triangulation; the study included collecting and analyzing documents on each school such as websites, printed marketing materials, and news articles. The main source of data from each school was observing their tefilla programs, and conducting on-site interviews of faculty, administrators, and students at each school from November 1-November 5, 2010. I spent 2 days each at New Jew and Hebrew High School, and 1 day at Jewish Academy. The semi-structured interview protocols (see Appendices H and I) were developed based on my review of related literature, the research questions guiding the study, and my own experiences working in Jewish community schools. The flexibility of this semi-structured, open-ended interview format allowed respondents to engage and expand upon their feelings and emotions throughout the interview process, which was important to this study since "the elaborate responses you hear provide the affective and cognitive underpinnings of your respondents' perceptions" (Glesne, 1999, p. 93). Prior to actual use of the interview protocols described above, I practiced interview techniques and piloted the questions on colleagues and professors to gain greater clarity and focus

with each interview. Revisions were made to the interview protocols based on colleagues' and professors' feedback.

During those site visits, I observed as much as possible at each school, including the prayer services, classes relating to prayer, and I conducted interviews and focus groups with stakeholders, especially students, and faculty in charge of prayer. My method of selecting students to interview involved requesting that the schools ask for volunteers; I interviewed whoever volunteered. The various stakeholders were asked to describe their programs in their own words, and these narratives were used to develop typologies of the programs, to describe each program in rich detail, and to guide the construction of an explanatory model articulating whether these programs are beneficial to Generation Y, postmodern Jews in Jewish community high schools. Due to the large amount of recordings collected from interviews, a professional transcriber transcribed the interviews.

Once I collected all of the data, I coded it. Coding is the process of “conceptualizing the data, raising questions, providing provisional answers about the relationships among and within the data, and discovering the data” and “breaking the data apart in analytically relevant ways in order to lead toward further questions about the data” (Glesne, 1999, p. 31). Throughout the data collection process, I recorded the categories, patterns, and themes that manifested themselves among the collection of interview transcripts. I organized categories and themes that emerged collectively from the interviews and observations. The research analysis was guided by Marshall and Rossman's seven phases for analytical procedures, which include “(1) organizing the data, (2) immersion in the data, (3) generating categories and themes, (4) coding the data,

(5) offering interpretations through analytic memoirs, (6) searching for alternative understandings, and (7) writing the report or other format for presenting the study” (Marshall and Rossman, 2011, p. 209).

I coded data by hand because I felt this was the best way to reflect the nuances and stories I heard. I also found that it helped me write much richer narratives of each school as I sifted through and analyzed all of my data. In the style of Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot’s *A Good High School* (1983), I analyzed the three cases by describing their narrative portraits, and then drew a single set of cross-case conclusions in search of a “good” tefilla program. My interpretive framework for the cross-case analysis was Barry Chazan’s philosophy of Informal Jewish Education, which I felt best captured the overwhelming comments I heard from my interviewees that school tefilla should be more like camp tefilla.

Critique of Methodology

Initially, I was planning to spend only 2 days visiting two schools, but to make the study more rigorous I arranged to spend 5 days visiting three schools. If I was not working full time and did not have my family commitments, I would have increased the number of schools in my study and the amount of time I spent in each school.

I also was unsure if my analyses and conclusions would resonate with other Jewish schools. In other words, I had no way of empirically proving to what extent the three schools I observed were similar or different from other Jewish schools around the world. While the three schools I visited cannot be representative of all pluralistic Jewish high schools, I hoped that many Jewish educators might empathize with these case

studies and recognize their students, schools, and struggles in them. Increasing the size of the study would have helped alleviate this issue.

Throughout the process of analyzing the data, I discovered that one could interpret the data in a variety of ways. I realized that the large amount of interview data might have been interpreted in different ways by different researchers; thus, I was concerned that my analysis would show my biases and subjectivity. In retrospect, I would have conducted a more extensive peer review in response to this critique.

Summary of Findings and Understandings

Coupled with my review of relevant research and literature, there were three research questions which guided the research, and ultimately, the findings reported in this study. These questions served more as a heuristic than concrete questions requiring definite answers. I used those three questions to guide the following summary of my research findings.

Research Question #1: What does prayer education and practice look like in Jewish community high schools?

This research study began by asking how an educational leader in a Jewish community school spiritually could engage a student who calls herself a “hetero, eco-feminist, vegan, Jewish, history major,” or a boy who refers to himself as a “grande soy vanilla latte with cinnamon, no foam Jew”? What should Jewish educators be doing in their tefilla programs if they want to engage their postmodern students who are used to unprecedented choices and being treated as a customer or consumer? My first clues to those questions were from a seminal study by Cohen and Eisen (2000) who found that the construction of Jewish meaning in America was personal and private, and that communal

loyalties and norms no longer shaped Jewish identity as they did several decades ago. Additionally, Greenberg (2006) found that young Jews felt existing Jewish institutions had become increasingly irrelevant to the way they were living their lives, tended to experience Judaism informally rather than through formal religious practice, and did not distinguish between “American” and “Jewish” values. These representative studies and others noted in chapter two were instrumental in triangulating the data from the case studies.

Overwhelmingly, these were the Jews I met when I visited the three schools in my case studies. As is supported by the research from my literature review and the findings from the case studies I conducted, many Generation Y Jews form their Jewish identities and commitments in alternative ways. I found many young Jews who were turned off by traditional prayer services and were seeking alternative ways of constructing their Jewish identities and commitments. The fact that there are so many alternative tefilla programs in Jewish community high schools demonstrates that traditional prayer services are no longer relevant to a great many Jewish teenagers today. I entered these three pluralistic Jewish high schools to see how they were engaging and nurturing the Jewish identities of their postmodern teenagers who previous generations might have dismissed as assimilated.

The first school I visited, New Jewish Community High School of Los Angeles, reminded me of a Jackson Pollock painting. I classified their program as being in the abstract expressionist style which exuded individualism and spontaneous improvisation, whose artists were comfortable with freedom of expression, and whose personal and communal identities were raw, unshaped, free flowing, and ever-changing. This style

described the identities of many of the students I interviewed: they wanted the teachers and administration to get out of their way so that they could do tefilla their way. They described a deep desire for empowerment and ownership of their tefilla program, one based upon fun, relevancy, community, morals and values, and student input. The leadership team at New Jew accommodated their students' developmental needs and requests. They teamed with the students and helped them form the "Tefilla Kehilla Institute," a student leadership cadre who were empowered to create their own tefilla sessions for the entire student body. These sessions were meant to be creative, interpretive, engaging, and informative, while at the same time keeping their diverse community united like the four children at the Passover seder.

I observed many contrasts at New Jew: between keva and kavanah; naaseh v'nishmah versus nishmah v'naaseh; individual opposed to communal needs; and old ideas butting up against new. In answer to the age-old question, "In order to be spontaneous, does one first need to learn and practice by rote?" New Jew gave a clear answer: "No!" In answer to the hypothetical question, "Should a teacher of a teenage Jackson Pollock force him to practice still lifes and realism?" New Jew answered, "No! Meet him where he is at, and make tefilla as engaging as possible first. The keva will come later."

The second school I observed, Hebrew High School, viewed itself through the metaphor of the mosaic, with each of its 600 students being one of the individual tiles who made up a larger unified mural. At Hebrew High School, I observed many tensions, which the school's Rabbinic Director actually embraced as a positive foundation of pluralism. He referred with pride to the "rich and fruitful tensions" between "the parts

and the whole, diversity and unity...individual and the community, freedom and commitment, particularism and universalism” at Hebrew High School (Kaplan, 2010, p. 4). His use of the mosaic metaphor supported the postmodern imagery of individuals drawing on combinations or patterns of contrasting tiles to make a whole identity.

The way that Hebrew High School chose to implement this philosophy was through a multiple minyan system, where most of its students chose what type of spiritual practice they wanted to participate in during tefilla time. These options often had little to do with traditional prayer. The choices at the time of my visit were Googling God (discussions about God and spirituality using a variety of media such as music), yoga groups, meditation groups, a music group (students play instruments and sing an eclectic mix of traditional Jewish songs, prayers, and contemporary music one would hear on the radio, while also having discussions about that music), the Pop Matters Minyan (discussions about spirituality through the medium of movies and other pop culture), the Doubter’s Minyan (discussions about spirituality designed for atheists, agnostics, and other doubters), as well as the Ruach Minyan which had elements of a traditional egalitarian synagogue service. Traditional prayer services were not required in any grade.

Hebrew High School devoted the ninth grade year to learning about tefilla instead of doing tefilla. Students learned what the prayers meant, how to navigate a siddur, how to lead a service, and other knowledge and skills related to traditional prayer. Ninth graders had no choice as to the structure of their tefilla program or curriculum. They practiced prayers by reciting or singing them aloud as a class, but it was in the context of a formal lesson and not as a separate prayer service.

The final school I observed, Jewish Academy, was starting its tefilla program from scratch at the time of my visit. Jewish Academy's Director of Judaic Studies pointed out to me that there was no sanctuary at the school, and called the tefilla space "minimalist," which I felt aptly described the school's overall tefilla program. For other "minimalist" schools that are just starting out or are revamping their programs, Jewish Academy might provide some insight.

At the time of my visit, the school offered two tefilla options: the "community minyan" and the "traditional minyan." The majority of students chose to attend the first option, an egalitarian, abbreviated service loosely based on the Shacharit service. About 15% of the students went to the traditional minyan, which was based on a service that would be found in a typical Orthodox synagogue. The school was in the process of converting to a multiple minyan model which resembled the Hebrew High School program described above.

Research Question #2: How is prayer education and practice perceived by key constituencies in Jewish community high schools?

When I asked the students in one of the focus groups what they liked about tefilla, instead of answering that question, a boy asked me if he could "speak bluntly." I told him that he could, and he said, "I think there's a general disdain for the minyan program." Many of the other students in the room nodded their heads and one shouted out "True!" He went on and said, "I think minyan or prayer is spoken with or regarded with some sort of disdain and resentment."

He stopped there, but I asked him to continue and explain why he thought this. "Why? Because there's a sort of disdain for Judaism a lot and a sort of rebellious feeling

going here, right?” Almost everyone in the room concurred and said, “Yes” or “Yeah.”

Another student who had not yet talked said, “I don’t want to pray. If someone says, What’s next? And someone says, ‘minyan’, I’m like ‘Ugh!’ For whatever reason a lot of people’s feelings surrounding the idea of Judaism or Jewish practice definitely are not good feelings.”

I asked the students to explain their comments and another student answered my question with, “Because it’s forced upon us.” Other students said one right after the other:

“Yeah!”

“It’s rebellion.”

“We get a lot of Judaism pushed at us.”

“It’s forced on us. People say ‘All right, I don’t want to go.’”

“Here, it’s something that’s more imposed on you.”

The idea that prayer was boring at school and fun at camp was one that came up often at all three schools. For example, one student at Jewish Academy phrased it as, “The camps are fun and exciting, and then you come to school and it’s so different. It’s disconnected.” Rabbi Levi of Jewish Academy recalled being on faculty at a Jewish summer camps, and “when I’m there with them, they’re engaged. And they walk into tefilla here at school, and they cross their arms.” During one of my focus groups with the students, I asked them to describe tefilla, and one student immediately said, “It’s not like camp!”

As explained at the beginning of the previous chapter, the reason that I chose Chazan’s philosophy of IJE as the interpretive framework for the cross-case analysis was

the overwhelming perception I heard expressed from stakeholders in all three schools—especially students—that the “broken” school tefilla should resemble the more engaging camp tefilla. Chazan’s framework addressed these comments, recommendations, and critiques that I heard from the students, faculty, and administration I interviewed at all three schools. Thus, one of the benefits of using a paradigm such as Chazan’s was that it implied there was no one single model of a “good” tefilla program; different schools can use the eight characteristics of IJE in different ways.

Regardless of what a school’s mission is, or its stance on pluralism in Judaism, or how far to the left or right it defines authentic tefilla, schools can improve their tefilla programs by utilizing the synergy of the Chazan’s eight characteristics of IJE. Any school would do well to ensure that the program is student-centered. Any tefilla program could be improved by trying to make it as engaging as possible for their students. A tight curriculum coupled with educationally-sound pedagogical decisions based upon solid educational research could benefit any tefilla program. Focusing on community-building, and making tefilla as experiential as possible, might be good attributes of any tefilla program.

Research Question #3: How do educators and students in Jewish community high schools describe authentic prayer?

Dr. Powell termed the student-centered approach of New Jew’s tefilla program as “constructivist” on more than one occasion in our interview. Constructivism, one of the conceptual frameworks of this research study explained in chapter three, is a philosophical and epistemological approach that holds that reality is not directly knowable and can only be inferred or assigned by convention or consensus. Instead of

having the students relying on someone else's information and accepting it as truth, the constructivist learning theory supports that students should be exposed to data, primary sources, and the ability to interact with other students so that they can learn from the incorporation of their experiences (Hatch, 2002). Constructivism states that knowledge is constructed by the learner, meaning is negotiated and constructed internally, and truth is contextual. Those last three words may well be the antithesis of the Orthodox or traditional Jewish approach, which places a very strict hold on the truth. Being student-centered (and not dominated by other commonplaces such as the subject or the teacher) runs the risk that that students ultimately may not conform to tradition. It may well be impossible to employ this constructivist approach in a school that demands that students are required to pray traditionally, or sees non-traditional Jewish spiritual practice as inauthentic tefilla.

There was a tremendously wide range of answers to the question of what constituted authentic tefilla. Some such as the mehitza minyan advisor at Jewish Academy felt that tefilla could only be defined by Orthodox halacha (Jewish law). The vast majority of students I interviewed felt that anything could qualify as tefilla; more important to them than adherence to halacha was the universal value of being a good person. Most students I interviewed at all three schools seemed to agree with a student's comments at New Jew:

I feel like every time I'm just being good, that's my prayer. It's like I'm closer to God. It makes me feel that much better. And, you know, I feel like if I continue just to do the right things, keep those values, I'm set with my Judaism. I don't need to pray in a synagogue.

Some of the adults I interviewed such as Rabbi Kaplan at Hebrew High School felt that non-traditional prayer could count as authentic tefilla as long as it came from a Jewish lens. For example, a meditation session might be tefilla if mediated through a Jewish lens. Still others like Rabbi Lev at New Jew made a clear distinction between tefilla (which he classified as traditional prayer) and what most of his students were doing (which he classified as a “tefilla happening”). Those like Rabbi Lev embraced these alternative tefilla happenings because they achieved the best buy-in from the students, but not necessarily because he believed it was prayer. Like Dr. Powell, his support of alternative spiritual practices was more based upon pragmatism and the reality of the students before him than acceptance of its authenticity as prayer, as described in the portrait of New Jew.

Regardless of where one falls on that broad continuum of what constitutes authentic tefilla, the constructivist approach advocated by Chazan’s framework of IJE would mean that educators not enter with preconceived notions of how they want their students to understand or practice tefilla. The IJE approach asks the educator to be more of a guide in meeting the tradition, in contrast to imposing the tradition upon the student. Meeting students where they are at would imply that educators facilitate students in their spiritual growth, no matter if that translates as alternative options such as yoga or traditional choices such as a mechitza minyan. Educators in this framework even need to be prepared for students who choose to opt out of tefilla entirely. Seymour Fox, one of the founders of the Conservative Movement’s Camp Ramah, wrote regarding campers who ultimately chose not to pray traditionally at the camp, “Rejection is always an option, as long as it’s thoughtful and considered” (Fox & Novak, 2001, p. 30). The IJE

framework leaves ample room for interpretation of how exactly to define “community” and “authenticity” and “pluralism” while giving enough guidance to create a uniformly good tefilla program in pluralistic Jewish community high schools.

Ideally, Jewish educators will strive to fuse Rosenak’s (1987) poles of authenticity, the normative and deliberative models that were detailed in the literature review. Jewish schools need to incorporate and blend *both* models, and should strive to integrate authenticity with relevance.

Implications for Practice and Future Research

Setting a research agenda for Jewish education, no matter how refined the topic, was at the same time an easy and a daunting task. There simply was not much academic Jewish research to find, so the agenda was daunting but what made it easy was that there had not been much change in Jewish educational research over the decades, so the agenda largely had remained consistent and unchanged for many years. In 1929, there was an article written about an agenda for Jewish educational research, and in 1940, another Jewish education researcher noted, “Eleven years have passed...but substantially the list can still stand...” (Resnick, 1982, p. 16). In an article by a Jewish education researcher in 1983, he wrote, “Thirty nine years have passed and there is some temptation to simply reproduce Golumb's paper [from 1929]” (Resnick, 1982, p. 17). Another 28 years have passed, and it remains tempting to copy and paste the same agenda for research in Jewish education from 1929, and 1940, and 1983.

As I was brainstorming the implications from this dissertation, I found a great amount of overlap between the implications for practitioners and implications for researchers. For that reason, as will be demonstrated below, I chose to merge the two

sets of implications together.

With the exception of just a couple of people I interviewed, I sensed a great deal of ambiguity, contradictions, and lack of clarity when I asked students, faculty, and administrators to define their school's philosophy of Jewish pluralistic education, and their rationale or philosophy of prayer. Thus, one issue worth empirically investigating surrounds the absence of a clearly articulated philosophy of Jewish pluralistic education in K-12 community schools, in particular high schools. It goes without saying that there also is not a clearly articulated rationale or philosophy of prayer in Jewish community schools. This makes it hard to chart a course toward a goal or assess whether a program or intervention is meeting its goals. In this absence, researchers have tended to create their own goals for schools. Schools need to create baselines from which future changes and research can be measured against. What knowledge, skills, attitudinal, and observance goals are desired? What are the goals for students at graduation and a few years beyond? What aspects of the curriculum are meant to attain these goals? Are the school's mission and goals for tefilla understood, owned, and implemented by all of the school's personnel? While practitioners are undergoing the process of refining their missions and goals, researchers could be documenting the process and comparing and interpreting the results.

Another study that is needed is a description of what is actually taking place with regards to prayer in Jewish community day schools, vis-à-vis expectations from funders, parents, boards, and so on. This would not be the usual census-taking or demographic survey study. Rather, it would be a rich, ethnographic descriptive study of a sampling of the Jewish community schools in America. What do their prayer programs look like?

How many graduates know how to pray at graduation? How many continue to pray after graduation? What accounts for this sustained behavior? Are all stakeholders pleased with the results? Why or why not? Such a study would be fruitful for generating hypotheses and interventions. It may shed light on such amorphous and as yet undefined goals of prayer programs such as “sustaining Jewish continuity,” “creating Jewish community,” and “enriching Jewish identity,” which sound nice but ultimately remain empty marketing terms. This could be the beginning of a much-needed longitudinal study of educational effects in Jewish schooling, including tefilla.

A third implication focuses on interventions. Jewish education is wallowing in attitudinal surveys and censuses, but there is little data-based academic research on behavioral change. This emphasis on change should be prominent in Jewish research studies, namely in an interventionist (action research) model focusing on systematically studying change in schools.

One way to do this would be to organize a cohort of action-researchers in Jewish community schools, similar to the type of action research study described by Golombek (2004) earlier in this paper. Action research refers to any systematic inquiry conducted by teacher-researchers to gather information about the ways that their particular school operates, how they teach, and how well their students learn. The information is gathered with the goals of gaining insight, developing reflective practice, effecting positive changes in the school environment and on educational practices in general, and improving student outcomes (Sagor, 2000). These studies could dovetail into a much-needed effort to support current students and graduate alumni of Jewish teacher training programs and all teachers in the field who are working on prayer, to engage them with

this issue and provide practical, data-based ideas for improvement via professional development.

Another implication is the use of Chazan's interpretive framework of informal Jewish education. This framework could be utilized by both practitioners to improve their tefilla programs as was suggested previously, and also those researchers in universities and foundations trying to analyze tefilla programs. What Chazan (2003) proposed was not that informal Jewish education usurp formal education, or that camps are better than schools. Rather, he wrote that "informal Jewish education proposes acting as a viable and vibrant partner" with formal Jewish education (p. 15). He believed that the two disciplines

should work in tandem. We cannot afford a Jewish education that is only formal, just as we cannot afford a Jewish education that is only informal. We should look forward to the day when these two kinds of education work side by side, hand in hand, and interchangeably, to touch the young and old learner alike, and from all sides. (p. 18)

The implication is that the philosophy of informal education could inform decision-making by both school practitioners and researchers in the field of tefilla, and Jewish education in general.

Schools will need specific guidelines for how to implement Chazan's philosophy of Informal Jewish Education. While Chazan may have articulated the philosophy, and my research suggests that it should be used as a framework for creating good tefilla programs, the details of how precisely to do that remain somewhat abstract. Thus, one recommendation is to map out precisely how practitioners in a Jewish school can use

Chazan's theory to improve their tefilla programs. Hall and Hord (2011) advocate the use of Innovation Configuration (IC) maps to clarify what a new program or practice (the innovation) is and is not. IC maps create a vision of what the innovation looks like in use, make clear what is expected from teachers, and allow school leadership to more easily assess and provide support in implementing the innovation.

An IC map is similar metaphorically to a road map in that it summarizes different ways of getting from one point to another. IC maps identify and describe what one would observe in a setting in which the innovation is in use. For example, Hall and Hord (2011, p. 48) give a sample IC map component from a new science program:

Component 1: Units Taught

- (A) All units and most activities are taught
- (B) Most units and activities are taught
- (C) Some units are taught
- (D) A few selected activities are taught
- (E) No units or activities are taught

This IC map was chosen by Hall and Hord, they write, because of its simplicity. Real IC maps would have much richer component descriptions. My recommendation is to create an IC map for each of Chazan's eight characteristics of IJE. While an interested researcher may create a generic tefilla IC map, it would be more useful for each school to create their own tefilla IC map because it would bring the teachers together to discuss, debate, clarify, and build consensus around improving tefilla.

Another possible study related to my findings revolves around student empowerment. In my interviews, students and teachers alike overwhelmingly pointed to

the power of student empowerment as a method of improving tefilla programs. Yet, in my literature review I could not find a single study conducted on empowerment in Jewish education, let alone tefilla. Thus, exploratory research could examine the nature of student empowerment in tefilla programs, which would contribute to a greater understanding of the nature of student empowerment in Jewish education.

In addition to providing guidance for site-based leadership interested in prayer improvement efforts in their schools, documenting and explaining these alternative prayer programs in Jewish community schools may also provide valuable research that might inform the decisions of Jewish philanthropic organizations. Such organizations I have been in contact with are looking for ways to spend their money wisely, and this research may provide them with ideas such as funding action research projects and longitudinal studies.

Finally, it would be informative to replicate this study using Chazan's interpretive framework of informal Jewish education in other pluralistic Jewish schools. As noted earlier, although this study has offered many findings which may be helpful to both practitioners and researchers, the limitation of the scope of the study suggests that replications of this research would provide a more rigorous data set from which to either support or refute the findings.

Conclusions

It would be hard not to empathize with the challenges that face religious and educational leaders who are in the business of spiritually engaging young people in today's world. Leaders need to consider postmodern trends in religion, think deeply

about how religious identities are now formed, and how communal settings such as schools should be tailored accordingly.

In the end, what is a “good” tefilla program? I think the literature and schools that I observed all point to the following: students should be embarking on a deep, reflective process to form their own Jewish identities, a process which emphasizes making traditional Judaism relevant by connecting it to their lives. This process actively finds ways of making traditional Jewish thought, practice, and text learning engaging and exciting, and just about anything can be used in this paradigm to construct Jewish identity: literature, music, food, Torah, family, work, nature, volunteering, Israel, language, dress, ideas, art, dance, philanthropy, politics, overcoming struggles, and more.

As a parent of three children in Jewish day school, and a long-time teacher and administrator in Jewish community schools, I often wonder if this type of Judaism I described can be successfully transmitted from generation to generation. Will my grandchildren be like me? I think the answer is both yes and no. The literature and the data from my research suggest that we can no longer rotely pass on rituals and dogma from generation to generation, as many are used to. But it suggests that we *can* pass on a process of meaningful identity construction, and the importance of making good choices. The outcomes may be different from my own identity and commitments, but ultimately I will be happy with whatever Jewish choices my children (both my biological ones and my students) make. This is because I am committed to the process, and have confidence that my children are the next generation in an ever-evolving tradition that will not only help them live purposeful lives, but will be enhanced by what they, in return, have to offer.

APPENDIX A

LETTER OF AUTHORIZATION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT FACILITY

<Head of School Name>

<School Name>

<School Address>

Office of Research Integrity – Human Subjects

University of Nevada Las Vegas

4505 Maryland Parkway Box 451047

Las Vegas, NV 89154-1047

Subject: Letter of Authorization to Conduct Research at <School Name>

Dear Office of Research Integrity – Human Subjects:

This letter will serve as authorization for the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (“UNLV”) researcher/research team, Yonatan Yussman and Dr. Edith Rusch, to conduct the research project entitled “Prayer in Jewish Community High Schools: Generation Y Jews in an Era of Unlimited Choices” at <School Name> (the “Facility”).

The Facility acknowledges that it has reviewed the protocol presented by the researcher, as well as the associated risks to the Facility. The Facility accepts the protocol and the associated risks to the Facility, and authorizes the research project to proceed. The research project may be implemented at the Facility upon approval from the UNLV Institutional Review Board.

If we have any concerns or require additional information, we will contact the researcher and/or the UNLV Office of Research Integrity – Human Subjects.

Sincerely,

Facility’s Authorized Signatory

Date

Printed Name and Title of Authorized Signatory

APPENDIX B

LETTER TO HEADS OF SCHOOL

October 1, 2010

Dear [Head of School],

We are proud to tell you that your school has been chosen to take part in a research study on tefilla (prayer) in Jewish community day schools. The purpose of this study is to describe prayer programs in Jewish community high schools. We invite your school to participate in this study and would greatly appreciate your contribution to this very important research project.

We will be in touch with you in the next few days to answer any questions you may have. After answering any questions, we will ask that you sign and return the enclosed "Letter of Authorization to Conduct Research at Facility Form." When we speak, Yonatan will schedule a convenient time to conduct an audio-taped phone interview of approximately 60 minutes to hear your opinions about the prayer program at your school, and to plan Yonatan's visit to your school. During that visit, he will observe your prayer program, and (with written parental and student consent) will interview a select number of randomly-chosen students and faculty involved in your prayer program.

We will protect your and your school's identity by using pseudonyms in any of our publications, and we will never reveal the name of your school or any of the participants that we interview. We will not share your comments with anyone else. This consent process will be explained in detail over the phone; we are attaching the various consent forms for your perusal. Please keep a copy of anything you send us for your records.

If you have any questions, please email or call us, and we would be happy to discuss anything further with you. We appreciate that you are partnering with us in this effort to make tefilla as strong as it can be.

We look forward to talking with you in the coming days.

Thank you,

Yonatan Yussman
Doctoral Student, University of
Nevada, Las Vegas
yussman@gmail.com

Dr. Edith Rusch
Professor of Educational Leadership,
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
edith.rusch@unlv.edu
702-895-2891

APPENDIX C

LETTER TO FACULTY

October 1, 2010

Dear [faculty member],

We are grateful for the permission your Head of School gave us to include your school in a research study on tefilla (prayer) in Jewish community day schools. We would greatly appreciate your contribution to this very important research project.

The purpose of this study is to describe prayer programs in Jewish community high schools. Your participation in this study will be a deeply important move in helping improve the spiritual lives of your students, and in strengthening the world of Jewish education.

What do we need from you? Yonatan will be in touch with you to schedule a convenient time to conduct an audio-taped phone interview of approximately 60 minutes to hear your opinions about the prayer program at your school, and to plan Yonatan's visit to your school. During that visit, he will observe your school's prayer program, and (with written parental and student consent) will interview a select number of students and faculty involved in your prayer program.

We will protect your and your school's identity by using pseudonyms in any of our publications, and we will never reveal the name of your school or any of the participants that we interview. We will not share your comments with anyone else, including your colleagues and supervisors. This consent process will be explained in detail over the phone; we are attaching the consent form for your perusal. You will need to sign and return a copy to us in the enclosed envelope. Please keep a copy of anything you send us for your records.

If you have any questions, please email or call us, and we would be happy to discuss anything further with you. We appreciate that you are partnering with us in this effort to make tefilla as strong as it can be.

We look forward to talking with you in the coming days.

Thank you,

Yonatan Yussman
Doctoral Student, University of
Nevada, Las Vegas
yussman@gmail.com

Dr. Edith Rusch
Professor of Educational Leadership,
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
edith.rusch@unlv.edu
702-895-2891

APPENDIX D
LETTER TO PARENTS

October 1, 2010

Dear [name of parent],

We are grateful for the permission your Head of School gave us to include your school in a research study on tefilla (prayer) in Jewish community day schools. We would greatly appreciate your child's contribution to this very important research project.

The purpose of this study is to describe prayer programs in Jewish community high schools. Your child's participation in this study will be a deeply important move in helping improve the spiritual lives of Jewish students, and in strengthening the world of Jewish education.

What do we need from your child? Yonatan will be visiting your school to interview students (chosen at random) for approximately 60 minutes to hear their opinions about the prayer program at your school. We will protect your child's identity by using pseudonyms in any of our publications, and we will never reveal the name of your school or any of the participants that we interview. We will not share your child's comments with anyone else.

If you agree for your child to be interviewed, please sign and return the enclosed consent form in the enclosed envelope. Your child will also need to sign and return the enclosed consent form for minors. Please go over this letter and the consent form with your child. Please keep a copy of anything you send us for your records.

If you or your child has any questions, please email or call us, and we would be happy to discuss anything further with you. We appreciate that you are partnering with us in this effort to make tefilla as strong as it can be.

We will follow up this correspondence with another email in the coming days to see if you have any questions.

Thank you,

Yonatan Yussman
Doctoral Student, University of
Nevada, Las Vegas
yussman@gmail.com

Dr. Edith Rusch
Professor of Educational Leadership,
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
edith.rusch@unlv.edu
702-895-2891

APPENDIX E

ADULT INFORMED CONSENT FORM

INFORMED CONSENT FOR FACULTY/ADMINISTRATORS UNLV Department of Educational Leadership

TITLE OF STUDY: Prayer in Jewish Community High Schools: Generation Y Jews in an Era of Unlimited Choices

INVESTIGATOR(S): Yonatan Yussman, Student Researcher; Dr. Edith Rusch, Faculty Advisor

CONTACT PHONE NUMBER: 702-895-2891 (Dr. Edith Rusch)

Purpose of the Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to describe prayer programs in Jewish community high schools that also use alternative approaches to prayer and spirituality.

Participants

You are being asked to participate in the study because you work at a Jewish community high school which offers alternative approaches to traditional prayer, and you are involved in those prayer services.

Procedures

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to answer questions presented in either a one-on-one interview or a group interview, facilitated by the researcher. You will be asked your opinions on the prayer program at your school. The interview will be audio taped and should only take 60 minutes to complete. You may also be asked to participate in a 5 to 15 minute follow-up phone conversation with the researcher to clarify any information you provided in the first interview.

Benefits of Participation

There may not be direct benefits to you as a participant in this study. However, we hope to learn how Jewish community schools can improve the spiritual experiences of their students, especially regarding prayer.

Risks of Participation

The risks associated with participating in this study are very minimal. It is possible you may become uncomfortable answering some of the questions asked. If so, you are encouraged to discuss this with the researcher, who will explain the questions to you in more detail. Please note that all information gathered in this study will be strictly confidential and your identity will be kept private.

Cost /Compensation

There will be no financial cost to you to participate in this study. The study will take approximately 1 hour of your time. You will not be compensated for your time.

Contact Information

If you have any questions or concerns about the study, you may contact Dr. Edith Rusch at 702-895-2891. For questions regarding the rights of research subjects, any complaints or comments regarding the manner in which the study is being conducted you may contact **the UNLV Office of Research Integrity – Human Subjects at 702-895-2794 or toll free at 877-895-2794 or via email at IRB@unlv.edu.**

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate in any part of this study. You may withdraw at any time without prejudice to your relations with the university. You are encouraged to ask questions about this study at the beginning or any time during the research study.

Confidentiality

All information gathered in this study will be kept completely confidential. No reference will be made in written or oral materials that could link you to this study. All records will be stored in a locked facility at UNLV for three years after completion of the study. After the storage time the information gathered will be destroyed. If you participate in a group interview, then confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, although you can withdraw your participation at any time.

Participant Consent:

I have read the above information and agree to participate in this study. I am at least 18 years of age. A copy of this form has been given to me.

Signature of Participant

Date

Consent to Record

I consent to have my interview/focus group recorded by audio or video means.

Signature of Participant

Date

Participant Name (Please Print)

APPENDIX F

PARENT INFORMED CONSENT FORM

PARENT PERMISSION FORM **Department of Educational Leadership**

TITLE OF STUDY: Prayer in Jewish Community High Schools: Generation Y Jews in an Era of Unlimited Choices

INVESTIGATOR(S): Yonatan Yussman, Student Researcher; Dr. Edith Rusch, Faculty Advisor

CONTACT PHONE NUMBER: 702-895-2891 (Dr. Edith Rusch)

Purpose of the Study

Your child is invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to describe prayer programs in Jewish community high schools that also use alternative approaches to prayer and spirituality.

Participants

Your child is being asked to participate in the study because he or she is a student at a Jewish community high school which offers alternative approaches to traditional prayer, and is involved in those prayer services.

Procedures

If you allow your child to volunteer to participate in this study, your child will be asked to answer questions presented in either a one-on-one interview or a group interview, facilitated by the researcher. He or she will be asked to share opinions on the prayer program at school. The interview will be audio taped and should only take 60 minutes to complete. He or she may also be asked to participate in a 5 to 15 minute follow-up phone conversation with the researcher to clarify any information provided in the first interview.

Benefits of Participation

There may not be direct benefits to your child as a participant in this study. However, we hope to learn how Jewish community schools can improve the spiritual experiences of their students, especially regarding prayer.

Risks of Participation

The risks associated with participating in this study are very minimal. It is possible your child may become uncomfortable answering some of the questions asked. If so, he or she will be encouraged to discuss this with the researcher, who will explain the questions in more detail. Please note that all information gathered in this study will be strictly confidential and identities will be kept private.

Cost /Compensation

There will be no financial cost to participate in this study. The study will take approximately 1 hour. Your child will not be compensated.

Contact Information

If you have any questions or concerns about the study, you may contact Dr. Edith Rusch at 702-895-2891. For questions regarding the rights of research subjects, any complaints or comments regarding the manner in which the study is being conducted you may contact **the UNLV Office of Research Integrity – Human Subjects at 702-895-2794 or toll free at 877-895-2794 or via email at IRB@unlv.edu.**

Voluntary Participation

Your child's participation in this study is voluntary. Your child may refuse to participate in any part of this study. Your child may withdraw at any time without prejudice to your relations with the university. You or your child are encouraged to ask questions about this study at the beginning or any time during the research study.

Confidentiality

All information gathered in this study will be kept completely confidential. No reference will be made in written or oral materials that could link your child to this study. All records will be stored in a locked facility at UNLV for three years after completion of the study. After the storage time the information gathered will be destroyed. If your child participates in a group interview, then confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, although your child can withdraw his or her participation at any time.

Participant Consent:

I have read the above information and agree to participate in this study. I am at least 18 years of age. A copy of this form has been given to me.

Signature of Parent

Child's Name (Please print)

Parent Name (Please Print)

Date

APPENDIX G

MINOR ASSENT FORM

ASSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Prayer in Jewish Community High Schools:

Generation Y Jews in an Era of Unlimited Choices

1. My name is Yonatan Yussman.
2. I am asking you to take part in a research study because I am trying to learn more about prayer in Jewish high schools like the one you are at.
3. If you agree to be in this study you will be asked to share your opinions with me about the prayer program at your school. You may be interviewed one-on-one, or with other students. The interview will be audio taped and should only take 60 minutes to complete. You may also be asked to participate in a 5 to 15 minute follow-up phone conversation with me if I have any questions about the answers you gave.
4. If you are uncomfortable with any of the questions I ask, just let me know. I'll explain the question to you in more detail, or just skip the question. I will not share your name or what you say in a private interview with anyone else. Although if you do a group interview, I can't promise that what you say will stay private.
5. I hope to learn how schools like yours can improve how they run their prayer programs.
6. Please talk this over with your parents before you decide whether or not to participate. We will also ask your parents to give their permission for you to

take part in this study. But even if your parents say “yes” you can still decide not to do this.

7. If you don’t want to be in this study, you don’t have to participate. Remember, being in this study is up to you and no one will be upset if you don’t want to participate or even if you change your mind later and want to stop.

I hope to learn how schools like yours can improve how they run their prayer programs.

8. You can ask any questions that you have about the study. If you have a question later that you didn’t think of now, you can call me or Dr. Edith Rusch at 702-895-2891. If I have not answered your questions or you do not feel comfortable talking to me about your question, you or your parent can call the UNLV Office of Research Integrity – Human Subjects at 702-895-2794 or toll free at 877-895-2794.

9. Signing your name at the bottom means that you agree to be in this study. You and your parents will be given a copy of this form after you have signed it.

Signature of Participant

Date

Consent to Record

I consent to have my interview/focus group recorded by audio or video means.

Signature of Participant

Date

Participant Name (Please Print)

APPENDIX H

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS (FACULTY)

1. First of all, tell me a little bit about yourself (e.g. name, age, religious background)
2. How would you describe your tefilla program to someone who knows nothing about it? How do you think your students would answer that question?
3. Do you have any choice over how you pray at your school? What alternatives exist to formal prayer services?
4. What do you think about the tefilla program at your school? Explain what you like and dislike about it, what you would keep and change, and why. How do you think your students would answer that question?
5. Do you think your students could pray traditionally in a synagogue service, if they wanted to?
6. What would you say is the goal of the tefilla program at your school?
7. To you, what does it mean to be Jewish? How do you define tefilla? Spirituality? How do you think your students would answer those questions?
8. If you had to describe yourself in ten words or less, how would you do it? How do you think your students would answer that question?
9. If you could build your ideal tefilla program, what would it look like? How do you think your students would answer that question?

APPENDIX I

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS (STUDENTS)

1. First of all, tell me a little bit about yourself (e.g. name, age, religious background)
2. How would you describe your tefilla program to someone who knows nothing about it?
3. Do you have any choice over how you pray at your school? What alternatives exist to formal prayer services?
4. What do you think about the tefilla program at your school? Explain what you like and dislike about it, what you would keep and change, and why.
5. Do you think you could pray traditionally in a synagogue service, if you wanted to?
6. What would you say is the goal of the tefilla program at your school? How do you think your school would answer that question?
7. To you, what does it mean to be Jewish? How do you define tefilla? Spirituality? How do you think your school would answer those questions?
8. If you had to describe yourself in ten words or less, how would you do it?
9. If you could build your ideal tefilla program, what would it look like?

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