

Blog Post: Navigating the Live Action of the Classroom

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In the teaching of Jewish studies, we have few shared understandings of how we get from point A to B, what those points even are, and what happens in between. We don't really have a richly developed "grammar of practice"—that is, shared "language and structures for describing practice," (Grossman, 2011) which can give us some basic common referents upon which we can reflect and build. In recent years, work on the teaching of Tanakh and rabbinics has begun to provide language for different orientations toward teaching these subjects, along with benchmarks for success. Nevertheless, we still lack a fully fleshed-out vocabulary for the pedagogy of Jewish studies that can help teachers and learners reflect on and navigate the live action of the classroom and improve and deepen their practice.

In the [Beit Midrash Research Project](#), we have developed a number of frameworks for understanding the collaborative study of Jewish texts. Our [most recent paper](#) details what we call "Havruta Inspired Pedagogy." This pedagogy is appropriate for teachers who engage in collaborative text based learning in small and large groups alike. The paper arises out of our research over the course of a year with the faculty of a supplementary school and the multiple ways in which teachers in their classrooms cultivated and supported rich text-based learning. This *havruta* inspired pedagogy is comprised of three overlapping domains:

1. a teaching and learning stance
2. pedagogical structures
3. core learning practices.

The paper details these elements with vivid classroom examples.

We have also begun to work with select groups of educators to give them opportunities to test out and refine our developing frameworks and language. We are collaborating with the Pardes Educators Alumni Support Program and are working with a group of their alumni. The group gathered at Brandeis over the winter for an introductory series of workshops. We introduced them to language for describing the structural flow of *havruta* learning and the practices in which learners engage. Participants had an opportunity to rehearse core *havruta* skills and practices in their own extended *havruta* learning sessions, and to examine and consider ways to teach these skills and practices to learners.

Over the course of the year, participants are drawing on what they learned in their teaching, trying out shared experiments in their divergent classrooms and analyzing the results with one another. Through these exercises, the common language and frameworks will become tools for teachers to use to reflect on and enrich the live action of their classrooms.

