THE IMPACT OF THE DELeT PROGRAM ON
STUDENTS’ IDEAS ABOUT GOOD TEACHING

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Introduction

We have all spent many hours as pupils in classrooms, learning about teaching by participating in classroom life, observing what teachers do, and forming images and beliefs about what teaching entails. This is particularly true for prospective teachers who enter teacher education programs with strongly held beliefs about teaching and learning which may not serve as reliable guides for their future practice (Lortie, 1975). One central task of teacher education programs is to raise to consciousness these ideas and help aspiring teachers examine them critically and, where necessary, replace them with more dependable ideas about good teaching (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). Unless teacher educators attend to the taken-for-granted beliefs prospective teachers bring to their preparation, they may continue to teach as they were taught. A related responsibility is helping prospective teachers develop a repertoire of core practices which enable them to enact their vision of good teaching in the classroom (Grossman et al, 2009; Feiman-Nemser, Tamir & Hammerness, 2014).

This study explores the impact of the DeLeT program on prospective teachers’ entering beliefs about good teaching and their ideas about the kinds of teaching practices they anticipate enacting in their classroom. It serves as a formative assessment of the DeLeT program and its effects on beginning day school teachers. It also provides insights for a broader audience of funders, day school leaders and Jewish educators concerned about the quality of beginning teachers in Jewish day schools.

The DeLeT Program

The DeLeT (Day School Leadership Through Teaching) program was established in 2002 in response to three decades of expansion in non-orthodox Jewish day schools. The demand for teachers prepared to teach in such schools led to the creation of a handful of Jewish teacher education programs (Feiman-Nemser, 2011). The two sister DeLeT programs, one at Brandeis University in Waltham, MA, and one at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Los Angeles, CA, were part of that movement. In the fourteen years since the program’s inception, DeLeT has prepared over 200 new teachers who are spread across the nation in eighteen states and more than forty-six day schools.

From the beginning, the DeLeT program served as a laboratory for ongoing research. At the heart of this research program is a longitudinal survey of DeLeT graduates from Brandeis and HUC administered every other year to all alumni. Beginning in the summer of 2007, a shorter survey was given to DeLeT students upon entry and graduation from the program. Past studies have examined DeLeT graduates’ perceptions of program quality and their readiness for teaching (Tamir & Pearlmutter, 2014) as well as their working conditions and
career aspirations (Tamir et al. 2010; Tamir & Magidin de Kramer, 2011; Tamir & Lesik, 2013). DeLeT has also been the site for a comparative study of three mission-driven, context-specific teacher education programs (Feiman-Nemser, Tamir & Hammerness, 2014; Tamir, 2009; 2013; 2014) and for a program of research on text study in hevruta (Holzer & Kent, 2014).

Studying DeLeT Students’ Ideas About Good Teaching

The purpose of this study is to understand how DeLeT students’ ideas about good teaching change over the course of the program. By this we mean how DeLeT students describe effective teaching and what teaching practices they anticipate enacting in their classrooms to realize that vision. We are particularly interested in whether and how these ideas and practices reflect the vision of good teaching articulated within the program’s standards. This inquiry thus serves to deepen our understanding of how DeLeT students change during their preparation and to evaluate the extent to which DeLeT graduates hold the ideas about good teaching and its enactment which the program espouses.

Other studies have looked at the extent to which DeLeT graduates report that they draw on ideas and practices encountered in the program even after several years of teaching (Tamir & Hammerness, 2014). While those studies tell us what happens to DeLeT alumni over time, it is difficult to disentangle the effects of school contexts on teachers’ practice from the impact of the program itself. In this study, we consider questions about teaching which appear in both the entry and graduation surveys and use the data to look at changes in participants’ ideas about teaching. By analyzing data gathered at the beginning and end of the program, we can infer that changes are due primarily to the impact of the program, rather than subsequent classroom experiences.

Data come from surveys filled out by DeLeT students in cohorts five through 12 at both Brandeis and HUC. DeLeT students encounter the survey during the first week of their first summer in the program and then revisit the survey during the final week of their second summer, just prior to graduation. We began with 235 completed surveys, 131 completed by entering students and 104 completed by graduating students. We chose two sections of the survey for analysis because they provide glimpses into the DeLeT students’ ideas about teaching.

1 For more details about the longitudinal survey of DeLeT graduates, go to: brandeis.edu/mandel/projects/delettracking.html
2 For more details, see: DeLeT Program Teaching Standards and Continuum for Teacher Development.
The DeLeT Program’s “Vision of Good Teaching”

Among the features associated with high quality teacher education programs is a clearly articulated vision of teaching (Darling-Hammond 2012; Darling-Hammond 2002). Such a vision increases the coherence among separate courses and between courses and field experiences which increases the likelihood that the program will have a desired effect on teacher candidates. A shared vision of teaching also provides an image of the possible to guide and inspire new teachers as they continue developing their practice on the job. In previous analyses of longitudinal study data, DeLeT graduates overwhelmingly agreed that DeLeT has such a vision (Tamir et al, 2010; Tamir & Magidin de Kramer, 2011).

In developing the DeLeT program, leaders from both sites collaborated to create a set of standards that embodied their conception of high quality Jewish day school teaching, building on existing standards in the field of education. While the programs at HUC and Brandeis University adopted slightly different versions of those standards, the core ideas remained consistent. Both sets include ideas about the importance of teachers knowing their students and their content deeply, creating a respectful classroom culture that supports learning, engaging in thoughtful planning, and teaching for conceptual understanding using pedagogies centered on learners and learning.

The HUC standards are called the DeLeT Framework for Teaching. Students study these during their first summer in the program. Then the standards are invoked and elaborated across the school year in DeLeT courses and used as a basis for ongoing reflection and assessment. Students, mentor teachers and supervisors use the Framework for Teaching during the internship as they reflect on their work during their preliminary, formative, and summative assessment conferences.

At Brandeis the standards are called the DeLeT Teaching Standards. As at HUC, students are introduced to them in their first summer. Then, during their internships, they are expected to focus on different standards at different points in the year. Coursework and internship expectations explicitly reflect those foci. A continuum has been developed to describe what the teaching looks like at different levels of expertise and mentors and interns use the relevant standards and continuum as a formative assessment tool in their assessment conferences.

Below we present analyses of two sections of the survey. For each, we describe the data collected, methods, and findings.

1 For more details, see: DeLeT Program Teaching Standards and Continuum for Teacher Development. Brandeis University. Retrieve at: http://www.brandeis.edu/programs/delet/about/standards_continuum.pdf

2 See Appendix A for full versions of the standards.

3 For more details, see the document cites in footnote number 2.
DeLeT Students’ Ideas About Good Teaching: Open Ended Responses

Source of Data

To elicit students’ conceptions of good teaching, the survey asks the following open-ended question: “What are the most important aspects of being an effective teacher?” This question is placed towards the beginning of the survey so that remaining questions do not influence students’ responses. Responses varied in length and complexity and ranged from single words or brief phrases to fully articulated ideas.

To consider how students’ ideas changed over the course of the program, we compared what students said when they entered with what they said upon graduation. We were particularly interested in identifying ideas that students expressed at the end which they did not articulate at the beginning. Then we considered how well those ideas correlated with the program’s vision of good teaching. To carry out this individual comparison, we eliminated cases where responses to the question were missing on either the entrance or graduation survey, for any of a number of reasons. This left us with 77 complete pairs of responses from students in Cohorts 6 - 12.

The 77 pairs of responses were analyzed through a qualitative analysis program, Atlas.ti. We compared the entry and graduation responses for each student and tagged new ideas within the graduation survey text. If an idea appeared in both the entry and graduation surveys, it was not tagged, on the assumption that the student entered the program with that idea. Responses could be tagged with multiple codes if more than one new idea was contained within a response.

After comparing the ideas about teaching embedded within the responses and coding for new ideas related to the DeLeT vision of good teaching, we found that 52 of the graduating survey responses (68%) contained one or more new programmatic ideas.

Codes

Our codes, listed and described below, were based on the program’s vision of teaching. Each coding category is explicitly connected to the DeLeT vision of good teaching.

1. Knowing children: This code comes directly from the program’s vision of good teaching which includes “knowing children” as a core requirement. Survey responses which were coded under “knowing students” included ideas such as “understanding of child development stages and brain development,” “careful

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3 Missing responses occurred for various reasons. In some cases students were absent on the day the survey was administered. Occasionally students skipped the open-ended question. A few students left the program and therefore did not fill out a final survey. Also when we launched this survey in the summer of 2007, students in Cohort 5 had not had the opportunity to complete the survey upon entry so they only received the graduation survey.

4 HUC: Know Jewish Students as Learners and Use this Knowledge to Inform Teaching; Brandeis: Knows Children as Learners.
observation,” and “seeing students.” Because this aspect of the program’s vision also includes knowledge of families and the need to learn about children in a holistic manner, ideas such as “being sensitive to school culture and family needs” and “caring for the whole child” were tagged with this code. Since listening is promoted within the program as an important way to learn about students, we also included in this category ideas about listening, such as simply the word “listening” or phrases such as “listening to each student.” Some students even paired observation with listening: “observing and listening to your students.” These responses could also have been coded as “teaching for understanding” (code 5 below) since one practice central to teaching for student understanding is listening to students.

2. Creating a learning community: This code also derives directly from the program’s vision of teaching as articulated in the Brandeis standards and HUC framework. We associated a range of responses with this code, including ideas about the centrality of the teacher-student relationship, ideas about behavior management, such as “feeling comfortable and confident as an authority figure,” ideas about the importance of rules and routines, such as “structure, because children need to know what is happening on a regular basis,” and descriptions of a desirable classroom culture, e.g. “making it clear to your students that they can feel safe, calm, and comfortable in this learning environment.”

3. Knowing content: This code and the next one are closely related. In the HUC Framework, knowledge of content and the capacity to plan effectively are combined into one framework. Elements within that framework clearly refer to the importance of content knowledge for teaching. In the Brandeis teaching standards, content knowledge is listed as a separate standard. Due to the large number of references to knowledge of content and effective planning, we gave them separate codes. The code knowledge of content included responses such as “knowledge of material,” “subject mastery,” “knowing the content you teach well and loving that content,” and “understanding of subject matter.” In addition, single word responses such as “knowledgeable” were included in this category with the assumption that these responses referred to content knowledge.

4. Planning effectively: As described above, the HUC framework combines this aspect of teaching with content knowledge. In the Brandeis teaching standards, planning has its own standard. Responses tagged with this code included brief words and phases such as “prepare,” “planning,” “being intentional in your practice,” or “have a purpose for teaching,” as well as more elaborated ideas such as “Planning with the end result in mind and focusing on the bigger picture,” or “Planning and being...

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5 HUC: Create and Sustain a Classroom Learning Community Based in Universal and Jewish Values and Ideas; Brandeis: Builds a classroom learning community rooted in Jewish experiences and values
6 Design/Adapt Curriculum and Plan for Teaching
7 E.g. Know what's important for students to learn in the subjects they teach; Plan learning activities based on an understanding of content and curricular expectations; Knows subject matter for teaching.
8 Plans for student learning.
thoughtful about your objective and main goal in what you are teaching; teaching to what is most important.”

5. **Teaching for understanding**: Both the HUC framework and Brandeis teaching standards highlight this idea with nearly identical wording. A close examination of the elements contained within this category reveals that the DeLeT program promotes the kind of teaching which builds on students’ prior knowledge, mobilizes intellectual engagement, and fosters understanding rather than just recall. This vision is often described as learner- or learning-centered teaching. Responses that were tagged with this code sometimes included shorter phrases, such as “educate for understanding.” More often, these ideas were slightly elaborated and included aspects of teaching such as: “Providing students with constructivist and inquiry driven learning environment,” “Remember to put yourself in the place of the learner,” “Helping students listen to each other,” “Teaching towards the students’ learning abilities, interests, and goals,” or “Being open to ideas that students generate and following them.”

6. **Attending to learner differences**: References to differentiation or meeting the needs of all learners are found in several different sections of the DeLeT programs’ visions, including those focused on knowing students, planning, and teaching. Therefore, this aspect of teaching was assigned its own code. Many responses took the form of a single word, “differentiation” or “differentiate.” Others were phrases such as “meeting the needs of all learners” or “ability to differentiate lessons to individual learners.”

7. **Engaging in ongoing learning**: This code and the one that follows are both aspects of DeLeT’s vision of what it means to be and become a professional educator. Both the HUC framework and the Brandeis teaching standards explicitly highlight the importance of teachers continuing to learn about content, pedagogy and Judaism. In addition, DeLeT promotes reflection as one tool for ongoing learning. Responses tagged with this code include words and phrases such as “being a learner,” “reflection,” “ability to reflect on practice,” “openness to feedback,” and “learning from your mistakes.”

8. **Collaborating with colleagues**: Collaboration or working productively with colleagues is another aspect of professionalism explicitly endorsed in both the HUC and Brandeis standards. DeLeT emphasizes making teaching public as a means of strengthening teachers’ practice. Responses tagged with this code include the single word “collaboration” as well as phrases such as “being open to the ideas of other professionals,” “working with other adults: staff and parents,” or “being open and talking about your teaching with other teachers.”

9. **Advancing the Jewish day school mission**: While the ideas above pertain to all teaching contexts, embedded within the DeLeT standards and frameworks are several ideas unique to the context of Jewish day schools. Responses that included these ideas,

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9 HUC: Teach for Understanding; Brandeis: Teaches for understanding.
such as “integration” or “inspiring and challenging my students to enhance their lives and Jewish identities” were tagged with this code.

Patterns in DeLeT Students’ Responses

The coded responses yielded some distinct patterns. Table 1 shows the frequency various codes appear and the percentage of teachers who mentioned them.

Table 1: Number of responses that were tagged for each code and percentage of how frequently that idea emerged among the relevant group of teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Number of student responses including this idea</th>
<th>% of teachers responses that contained this idea&lt;sup&gt;10&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of children</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capacity to plan effectively</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of content</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create a learning community</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teach for understanding</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ongoing learning</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differentiation</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish day school teaching</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The idea that emerged most frequently was the importance of a teacher’s knowledge of children. Well over 1/3 of the responses (37%) included this important aspect of teaching. It is no accident that it appears first in students’ articulation of good teaching. Deep knowledge of the individual children in a class as well as knowledge of how children learn is at the foundation of any learner-centered pedagogy and opportunities to learn about children are embedded within the DeLeT program. For example, all DeLeT students take a course in child development and carry out a child study project in which they use observations to learn deeply about a single child. Students are expected to develop a well-rounded understanding of the child and develop strategies for supporting his or her social, emotional, academic and spiritual growth.

One out of four (25%) students whose responses contained new ideas mentioned the importance of planning as an aspect of effective teaching. As pupils in elementary and secondary school, we do not “see” the careful, intentional work that skilled teachers engage in as they create short and long term instructional plans. The DeLeT program makes this aspect of the intellectual work of teaching visible and valued. DeLeT students spend considerable time learning to plan lessons and units and have multiple planning experiences that are supported by coursework, instructors, and mentor teachers.

<sup>10</sup> This percentage is calculated out of the 52 responses that contained new ideas.
Nearly one out of four (23%) of the students whose responses contained new ideas included a statement about content knowledge. While pupils can tell when a teacher lacks content knowledge, many prospective elementary teachers underestimate the degree and kind of content knowledge necessary for effective teaching. The nature and importance of teachers’ content knowledge is widely discussed within the program. When students develop curricular units, their first step is to deepen their subject matter knowledge. As they begin planning lessons, DeLeT students often express surprise at the amount of subject matter knowledge necessary to successfully design lessons and units and implement them effectively. For example, in a course paper, one student wrote, “I was very impressed with the depth to which [my mentor] explored telling time to the minute with the students. I used to think that it would have been enough to teach students the correct way [to set] the time on a clock… I now think that teachers need to have a wealth of understanding about the subject matter they are teaching so that they can explore various misconceptions, answer student questions, and enhance student understanding.”

The same percentage of students (23%) included ideas about building a classroom community that supports learning. Novice teachers often struggle to manage classrooms and develop a productive culture of learning. DeLeT strives to teach basic behavior management skills while also providing a deeper understanding of the ways that classroom structures support the creation of a culture of learning. Students study the “Responsive Classroom” approach and read *Teaching Children to Care* by Ruth Charney In addition, they study how their mentor teacher creates a productive classroom community. During their year-long internships, DeLeT students are expected to practice their newly learned skills by introducing and reinforcing rules, routines and expectations and by drawing on Jewish values to create a culture of learning.

Almost one out of five graduates (19%) included new ideas related to teaching for understanding which reflect the learner-centered pedagogy that DeLeT promotes. While the rate of inclusion of this idea is lower than those previously mentioned, it still reflects the program’s emphasis on the kind of teaching that promotes deep student understanding. Students use an approach to instructional planning called “Understanding by Design” (UBD) to formulate their pedagogical purposes. This inquiry based philosophy of planning and teaching embraces understanding, not simply the acquisition of knowledge, as the ultimate goal of teaching.

As discussed above, engaging in ongoing learning and collaborating with colleagues are linked within DeLeT to the concept of professionalism. Five graduating students included the idea of teachers as learners as an important aspect of effective teaching, four included collaboration, and another four included both. Therefore a total of 13 students (25%) included at least one idea involving professionalism. Note, that this open question may focus DeLeT students’ attention on instruction as the focus of “effective teaching” and not on the conditions that enable such teaching. That could help explain why relatively few mentioned this aspect here, but when asked about collaboration identified it as an important professional dimension (see scaled responses below). Indeed, DeLeT students work collaboratively with their mentor teachers as well as their peers. They regularly use collaborative protocols to analyze classroom videotapes, provide feedback on lesson and unit

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11 Jenna Adler, Planning for Student Learning: Assignment 1, October 17, 2012
plans, and to look at student work. In addition, mentor teachers model the process of ongoing learning by making their questions and efforts to improve their teaching transparent. In many ways DeLeT promotes the idea of teachers working together to strengthen their teaching and their students’ learning.

Eight students (15%) included the idea of differentiation or teaching in ways that meet the needs of all learners. While this idea was not mentioned as frequently as some of the others, it fits with a pattern in the responses that places learners and their needs at the center of instruction. Students learn strategies for differentiation in various courses and are expected to build differentiation into their lessons in order to support the learning needs of all students.

Surprisingly, only three students (6%) included ideas related to teaching in a Jewish day school. The general framing of the question “What are the most important aspects of effective teaching?” rather than “What are the most important aspects of effective teaching in Jewish day schools?” may be responsible for this result. Students may well have interpreted the question as calling for a response that would apply to any teaching situations. The responses that were specific to the Jewish day school context included ideas the program addresses such as curricular integration and supporting the development of students’ Jewish identity.

DeLeT Students’ Ideas About Good Teaching: Scaled Responses

To explore further how students’ ideas about good teaching change over the course of the program, we analyzed a second section of the survey. This section contains two series of scaled questions about teaching. We used the data from the scaled survey questions to add to our understanding of changes in DeLeT students’ beliefs about the importance of particular teaching practices and commitments and their anticipated use of these practices in their future classrooms.

Source of Data

One series attempts to ascertain how students perceive the importance of various purposes and practices associated with teaching in Jewish day schools by asking the following question: “In your role as a day school teacher, how important are the following?”

- Integrating general and Jewish content
- Being a Jewish role model for students
- Preparing students for active citizenship
- Helping children to succeed academically
- Being a school leader
- Collaborating with colleagues
- Continuing my own Jewish learning
• Developing my practice as a teacher
• Living a Jewish life
• Teaching about social justice
• Transmitting Jewish values

Each of the eleven possibilities was scored on a 5 point scale: 1=not at all important, 2=slightly important, 3=somewhat important, 4=very important, 5=extremely important. The items were included either because they reflect a stated goal of the program (e.g., integrating general and Jewish content or being a teacher leader) or because they relate to a core purpose of teaching in the United States (e.g., preparing students for active citizenship or helping children to succeed academically).  

A second series of eight questions asks about which teaching practices students anticipate using in their classrooms: “When you picture yourself teaching, what would an observer see you doing, and how often?”

• Asking open-ended questions
• Making connections between general and Jewish studies
• Involving families in children's education
• Engaging students in the study of Jewish texts
• Teaching Jewish values
• Encouraging risk-taking
• Facilitating student collaboration/hevruta learning
• Collaborating with a colleague

These options were also ranked on a 5 point scale from 1=never, 2=rarely, 3=sometimes, 4=often, 5=very often. They, too, were chosen because they reflect teaching practices and commitments taught in the DeLeT program.

Data Analysis

We compared students’ mean responses to these questions before they entered the program and after they graduated. Rather than seek individual changes, we were interested in identifying general trends and thus used the computed means of all the survey responses. Data were imported into the SPSS statistical software and a chi-square analysis was conducted to discover how student responses before entering the program and after graduation were either similar to or different from each other, and whether those differences reached a level of statistical significance. In the context of such comparisons a difference that reaches statistical significance between beginning and graduating students may suggest that the program experience influenced students and changed their behaviors and/or beliefs.

12 The original question and several of the items were taken from a survey of teachers conducted by Center X at the University of California Los Angeles.
Looking at the series of questions about the importance of certain purposes and practices suggests that students rated highly almost all of these questions when they enter and when they graduate. Means for these 11 items demonstrate that on average, students rated these aspects of teaching as very important. The means for the two highest scoring items, helping children to succeed academically and developing my practice as a teacher, indicate that a majority of students rated these as extremely important. While some means decreased slightly and others increased, out of the eleven questions in this section, only one demonstrated a statistically significant difference in the mean response upon graduation: collaborating with colleagues. Students rated this of higher importance when they graduated compared to their rating upon entry (see Table 2).

Table 2:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey item</th>
<th>Mean upon program entry</th>
<th>Mean upon program graduation</th>
<th>Chi-square (P-value)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In your role as a day school teacher, how important are the following?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrating general and Jewish content</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>4.05</td>
<td>3.17 (.075)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being a Jewish role model for students</td>
<td>4.47</td>
<td>4.33</td>
<td>1.63 (.201)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparing students for active citizenship</td>
<td>4.07</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>.144 (.705)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping children to succeed academically</td>
<td>4.64</td>
<td>4.66</td>
<td>.048 (.826)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being a school leader</td>
<td>3.94</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>.87 (.351)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborating with colleagues</td>
<td>4.16</td>
<td>4.38</td>
<td>* 4.7 (.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuing my Jewish learning</td>
<td>4.29</td>
<td>4.15</td>
<td>1.637 (.201)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing my practice as a teacher</td>
<td>4.65</td>
<td>4.66</td>
<td>.003 (.954)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living a Jewish life</td>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>3.93</td>
<td>2.143 (.143)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching about social justice</td>
<td>4.01</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>.015 (.902)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transmitting Jewish values</td>
<td>4.46</td>
<td>4.45</td>
<td>.004 (.947)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: variables meeting accepted levels of significance (p-value ≤ .05) are denoted with *.

The other set of eight survey questions ask students to anticipate which teaching practices an observer would see them using in the future. Again, the means tended to be high, demonstrating that students believed a future observer would see them engaging in these practices often. In this set of questions, the mean response to four of the prompts remained

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13 Chi-square significance was calculated using the “linear by linear,” which is considered an accurate test for measuring significance in cases involving ordinal and categorical variables (Howell, 2001).
statistically stable while four of them demonstrated statistically significant change in the mean between the entry and graduation surveys. [See Table 3.] Three of the practices showed a statistically significant positive change: asking open-ended questions, encouraging risk taking, and collaborating with a colleague. In other words, on graduation, students believed an observer was more likely to see them engaging in these practices compared to the time they entered the program. One of the practices demonstrated significant negative change: engaging students in the study of Jewish texts. Upon graduation, fewer students believed an observer was likely to see them engaging in this practice.

Table 3:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey item</th>
<th>Mean upon program entry</th>
<th>Mean upon program graduation</th>
<th>Chi-square (P-value)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asking open-ended questions</td>
<td>4.21</td>
<td>4.42</td>
<td>*4.585 (.032)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making connections between general and Jewish studies</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>3.96</td>
<td>1.794 (.18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involving families in children's education</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td>.829 (.363)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaging students in the study of Jewish texts</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>3.51</td>
<td>*5.277 (.022)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Jewish values</td>
<td>4.43</td>
<td>4.24</td>
<td>3.378 (.066)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouraging risk taking</td>
<td>4.26</td>
<td>4.47</td>
<td>*4.365 (.037)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborating with a colleague</td>
<td>4.16</td>
<td>4.46</td>
<td>*8.838 (.003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitating student collaboration/hevruta learning</td>
<td>4.16</td>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>.011 (.917)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: variables meeting accepted levels of significance (p-value ≤ .05) are denoted with *.

Patterns in DeLeT Students’ Responses

It is notable that the mean responses for most of these questions were extremely high upon entry. Seventeen of the nineteen means were 4 or above and the lowest mean upon entry was 3.8. This may be a reflection of the fact that many students choose to attend DeLeT because it matches their interest in progressive education and supports their commitment to Jewish education (Tamir at al., 2010).
Another notable pattern that emerges from these data is the generally stable nature of the responses. Fourteen out of nineteen of the response means did not change in a statistically significant way from entry to graduation. In some ways, this is unsurprising as many of the prompts are statements of desirable outcomes and were rated highly upon entry. For example, students entered DeLeT believing that helping students succeed academically is very or extremely important and they graduated with that belief unchanged. DeLeT students also continue to believe that items such as integrating general and Jewish content and serving as a Jewish role model are very or extremely important.

As described above, DeLeT students graduate with newly developed or strengthened beliefs about the importance of teachers working together to develop their practice. This finding from the open-ended responses is reinforced by the fact that both survey items that included collaboration demonstrated statistically significant positive change. Collaboration as an important teaching practice may have been slightly counter-intuitive to the incoming students, as the dominant cultural image of a teacher is the solo practitioner working with students behind closed doors (e.g., Little, 1990; Lortie, 1975). DeLeT, on the other hand, provides multiple opportunities for interns to engage in collaborative learning experiences. Interns leave with new understandings about the complexity of teaching and the accompanying necessity of collaborative, ongoing learning.

Two of the practices that are important in a learner-centered classroom demonstrated statistically significant positive change: asking open-ended questions and encouraging risk-taking. At graduation, students were more likely to believe an observer would very often see them asking open-ended questions and encouraging risk-taking. Open-ended questions have no “right” answer; they invite students to listen to each other and think deeply and creatively. In order to support all students in responding to these questions, teachers must create a culture where students are encouraged to take intellectual risks. Feeling safe enough to take intellectual risks makes deep discussion of open-ended questions possible. These two practices combined enable teachers to deepen and assess student understanding of subject matter. DeLeT explicitly teaches students how to engage in these practices and models them through the pedagogy of course instructors.

Interns study Jewish texts as part of their coursework and teach children about Jewish texts over the course of the year (Tamir & Hammerness, 2014). In fact, all of their placements include opportunities to teach Torah or Humash. Given the emphasis in DeLeT on teaching Jewish texts and the varied opportunities DeLeT students have to study Jewish texts, we were surprised that the one statistically significant negative change involved graduating interns’ anticipated engagement of future students in the study of Jewish texts. In other words, on average, a graduating DeLeT student believed that she or he was slightly less likely (compared to a beginning DeLeT student) to be observed teaching Jewish texts. One possible explanation for this change is that when filling out the surveys, many graduates know they will enter day schools as general studies teachers, where they will not be responsible for teaching Judaic studies. Perhaps some interns’ anticipated frequency of teaching Jewish texts decreased because they became aware that they would not be teaching Torah or Humash in their future positions. These teachers may continue to have the same commitment to incorporating Jewish texts into their teaching, but what has changed is their improved understanding of the opportunities available to them.
Discussion

Learning About DeLeT

This close examination of survey data supports the idea that DeLeT interns develop beliefs about teaching which match the program’s articulated vision. Ideas that put learners at the center, highlight teaching for understanding, and acknowledge the importance of ongoing, collaborative learning were widespread in the graduation surveys and aligned with the responses on the survey prompts. Both program sites support the development of these ideas through explicit teaching and by engaging the interns in multiple experiences such as child study and collaborative teamwork. These results make clear that it is important for programs to have an explicit vision and consider how it is communicated to prospective teachers throughout the program.

In addition to communicating a strong and clear vision of good teaching, programs must be clear about the kinds of practices that enable teachers to enact that vision in their teaching. One task of teacher education is to teach instructional practices which align with the vision, so that developing teachers do not simply fall back on patterns of teaching they may have experienced as pupils. DeLeT students may enter the program with a desire to create classrooms that support the academic success of all students and an interest in learner-centered pedagogies, yet as new teachers they typically do not yet have a repertoire of teaching practices that will turn that vision into reality. Studying the ways their mentor teachers create emotionally safe classroom cultures that support intellectual risk-taking, and then working to facilitate learning experiences that maintain that culture, helps DeLeT students understand the complexity and importance of these practices and their underlying vision. Learning about types of open-ended questions, studying examples of productive questions across content areas, and then having multiple opportunities to conduct classroom discussions provoked by open ended questions, enable DeLeT students to develop their capacity to incorporate these practices into their teaching.

While the survey data provide evidence of change in DeLeT students’ ideas about good teaching and their anticipated use of some teaching practices, it does not provide information about the way their actual teaching practice may have changed over the course of the program. Students’ ideas and beliefs about teaching may have been radically changed or simply reinforced, but the expectation of the program is that the DeLeT students’ ability to enact those practices should be strengthened. Both DeLeT sites assess their students’ learning in multiple ways, including traditional assessments, as well as public opportunities to share and analyze video clips of their actual teaching. Still, the development of common in-depth performance assessments across the two program sites could provide additional evidence of changes in graduates’ teaching practices. Common assessments would help all teacher educators understand how teacher candidates learn new practices and how those practices can be taught by teacher educators at the university and in the field.
The Post-DeLeT Period

While the survey data presented in this report focus on the immediate impact of the DeLeT program, the analysis raises important questions about what happens to DeLeT graduates as they enter the world of Jewish day school teaching. DeLeT students exit the program with particular ideas about the nature of good classroom teaching and strong interest in continuing to develop their practice through ongoing, collaborative learning opportunities. They also have a commitment to Jewish education. What happens to those ideas, commitments and interests as DeLeT graduates embark on their teaching careers?

As part of a different study, researchers visited the classrooms of a handful of DeLeT graduates four to six years after graduation along with graduates of two other mission-driven teacher education programs (Tamir & Hammerness, 2014). They found these graduates practicing the kind of teaching espoused by the program. Regarding their observations, researchers wrote:

The observations of these five new teachers suggest that long after graduation, their teaching practices clearly reflected many of the ideological commitments, religious and social values, and distinctive pedagogies advocated by their programs… DeLeT teachers were committed to building a strong classroom community infused with Jewish values, asked many open ended questions, and tried to stimulate learning through discussions. (p. 145)

These classroom observations, conducted years after the teachers had graduated from DeLeT, demonstrate that at least some DeLeT alumni continue to engage in the learnercentered teaching practices they learned in the program and to infuse their classroom with Jewish values.

Another question, that this research raises is how might day schools build on and deepen the ideas and practices that DeLeT teachers bring to their classes?

As this report indicates, graduates of a professional teacher education programs like DeLeT come to Jewish day schools ready to practice ambitious teaching and to continue developing their teaching through ongoing collaboration with colleagues. Jewish day school leaders who hire DeLeT graduates have a special opportunity and responsibility to support new teacher development. While day schools often use the rhetoric of collaboration, providing regular opportunities for teacher to work with their colleagues on matters of instruction disrupts the traditional culture of autonomy and privacy which often characterizes the work of teachers (e.g., Johnson et al, 2007). This study calls on Jewish day school leaders to think about the kind of school culture into which they induct new teachers, the opportunities they provide to learn with and from colleagues, and the vision of good teaching they promote.

Value and Limits of Survey Data

The DeLeT survey is an efficient strategy for learning about how DeLeT graduates think about a range of issues and for tracking changes in their thinking over time. The anonymity
of the DeLeT survey provides a safe venue for DeLeT students and alumni to express their ideas and beliefs.

At the same time, the survey data have limitations. One challenge we faced stemmed from the brevity of the responses to the open-ended questions. It was not always easy to infer how students’ ideas had changed when they provided only a brief list of individual words. We wondered whether giving fuller directions, including encouraging students to use full sentences, might have provided more in-depth information about their thinking. In addition, since we wanted to know whether students had developed ideas about effective teaching in Jewish day schools, we should have asked specifically about that context. Taking these two ideas into consideration, the revised question would read: “What are the most important aspects of being an effective Jewish day school teacher? Please respond using full sentences.”

A future survey may benefit from adding a wider range of possibilities that are neutral in terms of social acceptance, including teaching practices not emphasized in DeLeT. For example, the list of practices could have included items such as “testing students,” “taking children on field trips” or “inviting parents into the classroom.”

Finally, future studies should also consider complementing the survey analyses with teacher interviews and classroom observations to help untangle teachers’ beliefs and their enactment in practice.

**Conclusion**

We hope that this analysis provides useful information to the DeLeT programs as well as to the field of day school education. All those involved in Jewish teacher preparation, including DeLeT faculty and mentor teachers, might consider what kind of vision they inspire in their teacher candidates, how closely teacher candidates’ ideas and teaching practices align with that vision, and how teacher candidates’ learning over the course of their preparation can be documented.

We encourage Jewish day school leaders to capitalize on the aspirations for ambitious teaching and desire for ongoing development that graduates of DeLeT, as well as other new teachers, bring to their schools. We hope they will explore how day schools can provide ongoing opportunities for new and experienced teachers to learn with and from one another in ways that strengthen their teaching and their students’ learning.

Lastly, we call on researchers and those who fund research and program evaluation to frame their studies in ways that can deepen our collective understanding about how day school teachers’ beliefs and practices evolve as they enter the field. Using common instruments and developing a shared research agenda would enable researchers to build usable knowledge for the field as a whole.
References


