

Ways to improve teaching and increase intrinsic motivation for learning Talmud in the religious public school system : ICT integration in teaching Talmud /

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Abstract

This research studies the effects of innovative Talmud teaching methods on student's motivation to study. In recent years a number of articles have been published regarding the contribution of technology and innovative teaching methods in general. Research shows the growing need for creative educational tools and their effects upon motivation, towards learning in general and "meaningful learning" in particular.

The Talmud, since its completion circa 500 c.e., has been the central focus of traditional Jewish study. Despite this, Talmud study poses numerous challenges, especially for younger students.

The following research analyzes technology incorporated by Talmud educators to improve the quality of instruction, engage larger groups of students and increase motivation.

In order to investigate the difficulties and technological solutions in the field of Talmud study, approximately 20 Talmud teachers were chosen. All those chosen taught students in the religious public school system, ranging from beginners in 5th grade to 12th graders completing Talmud matriculation exams. Because this is an initial research intended to describe the field, qualitative research methods were used, enabling deeper understanding of the difficulties in context. The main research strategy was the application of grounded theory in order to define central categories. Six initial probing interviews were followed by data collected through in-depth non-structured interviews with 19 teachers.

As a prerequisite to understanding the technological tools chosen, it was necessary to clarify the educator's goals and pedagogical challenges. The research shows that educators intend to go beyond the immediate goals of the student's textual understanding and developing capabilities for future self-study. Overarching goals include transmitting Jewish tradition, development of the students' Jewish thought patterns and creating positive learning experiences and emotional commitment to Talmud study. These lead to internalization and identification with the Jewish ethos and continuation of Talmud study after graduation.

The research conducted also shows that beyond difficulties that have always accompanied Talmud study, teachers currently have to deal with a growing number of disengaged students as well as difficulties of students to study from the classic print edition. Analysis of the data shows that the disengagement is caused by the inability of students to overcome the difficulties in Talmud study and by a feeling of the irrelevance of the Talmud, both in content and intellectual style. Furthermore, in general Talmud study is considered less central than in the past, no longer engendering the feeling of "belonging" which served as a major motivational element.

Key findings include that many educators do use technology in their classrooms, although limited to simple technological tools, such as presentation software and projectors. Teachers described the use of technology as a tool for increasing engagement and assisting in overcoming the multifaceted challenges posed by the study of Talmud. Integration of technology enhances motivation by placing Talmud study within the more modern and standard frameworks of study students are used to. Furthermore, by allowing students to achieve success in Talmud study the technological aids increased the students' feelings of self-efficacy.

Despite the growing use of innovative methods, some educators are reticent to use technology as an aid, fearing that its use will negatively affect the teachers' position in the class. They prefer a teacher-centric method, to enable deeper understanding of the religious works, both from intellectual and emotional standpoints. Those who do choose

to use innovative methods also showed signs of internal deliberation about the type and amounts of technology to be used so as not to weaken the student's capabilities for classic Talmud study. This duality can also be seen in the educators' choice to limit (with few exceptions) innovation to basic technologies, while describing the positive contribution on overcoming challenges and achieving the study goals.

This research can serve as a base for educational and social research, analyzing educators' rationale in integrating technology in unique fields of study, and can assist in planning future Talmud educational technologies.

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