

Network for Research in Jewish Education

Report on an intervention designed to Facilitate Change in the Culture of Prayer and Education for Prayer in a non-Orthodox Day School

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The Research Question

This is a case study of 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. 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.

Design of the Research

This data-driven case study is based on direct observation,, questionnaires filled out by the teachers, artifacts of change, focus groups, an on line survey, interviews of individuals and small groups, including teachers and administrators. The case is the Teachers of the Lower School of the Solomon Schechter Day School of Bergen County, New Jersey. The case study method is well suited to describe and explain events and their impact on people (Yin 2006). It is intended to describe what happened and how or why it happened.

Introduction and Background Statement

The purpose of Jewish studies in many non-Orthodox schools is not always clear to all of the actors. Some parents, teachers, pupils and administrators approach Jewish studies with a degree of ambivalence. Definitions of success are not as clear as they might be in subjects such as science or mathematics. The area of prayer is particularly complicated because it involves *doing* Judaism in addition to learning about it (the same is true of *mitzvot ma-asiyot*).

In non-Orthodox day schools, particularly Conservative and Community schools, developing fluency in the Hebrew language is prized for its connection to Israel and its symbolism as a concrete manifestation of Jewish peoplehood. Attaining a degree of fluency in Hebrew language is a concrete achievement valued by a wide range of people. For all of these reasons, it appeals to a heterogeneous population, including families with a wide range of *mitzvah* observance, religious beliefs and commitment to prayer.

Teachers as a Commonplace of Curriculum

Because mastery of Hebrew is a central component in the curriculum of Conservative and community day schools like the one under study, it is common to engage Israeli teachers who offer fluency in the language and speak it with an “authentic” accent. Some of these teachers are unfamiliar with or alienated from prayer and ritual *mitzvah* observance. Others come from an Orthodox background but

no longer maintain that way of life. These teachers often feel uncomfortable participating in the formal worship which is part of the school day. Some will not attend unless it is part of their job description. Some attend but behave inappropriately during the service (e.g. talking to other teachers, grading papers, drinking coffee). When such a teacher is required to conduct services, the service tends to be an exercise in skills, without any effort to create an in-depth experience (occasionally, the teacher will interrupt the service to correct an error made in Hebrew by the *Sheliah Tzibbur*). If the curriculum calls for some discussion of the ideas in a prayer, this will take the form of *beur tefillah*, in which the teacher explains to the pupils “the meaning” of the text. Since any discussion of the prayer is conducted in the Hebrew language, pupils are limited in their ability to express feelings and ideas. Questions tend to have a set, pre-known answer. The teachers avoid entering into the kind of open-ended discussion that would allow pupils to explore the personal meaning of a prayer. This deprives the pupil of the opportunity to enter into an honest dialogue with Jewish liturgy and the ideas found there.

While this may be known by administrators, in many schools it is ignored either because the administrators share these attitudes or because it is accepted as a necessary “trade-off” for the assets that these teachers have to offer. This lack of authenticity also places barriers in the way of sought-after changes in teacher attitudes or practices. As stated by Hopkins, “The general milieu of the school...interacts powerfully with the personalities of the teachers to create personal orientations which greatly influence how teachers view the world and themselves; in possibilities for personal and professional growth and the kind of options to which they can relate.” (Hopkins 1990).

Pupil Reactions

This combination of prayer experiences that lack depth together with little or no attempt to involve the pupil in a serious attempt to grapple with the ideas in the *Siddur*, can gradually lead the pupil to develop negative attitudes towards prayer. Seeing little or no connection to their lives, these pupils begin to “shut down” and then “act out” during services. This is commonly seen in the large group services conducted in the Middle or High School (In those places where services are optional large numbers of teen agers will choose not to attend them). While this behavior is most common in the older grades of a day school, the seeds have been planted in the younger classes. If prayer is experienced as only being an exercise in skills, there comes a point where the skills no longer reinforce themselves and prayer is seen to lack meaning and relevance.

While this problem is all too common in non-Orthodox day schools, Orthodox schools are not always immune to the problem. It is a fact that many Orthodox schools do not deal with the cognitive side of prayer and among those that do, the dominant mode of operation is *beur tefillah*, not *iyyun Tefillah*. (In this context, *beur tefillah* refers to the explanation of the meaning of a prayer by the teacher, while *iyyun tefillah* refers to an interactive process where both construct meaning from the prayer text.)

“If prayer is in any way a response to need or crisis then the Modern Orthodox educational community has much to pray for – about the very act of prayer in schools. Scratch beneath the surface

of many an educator and they will tell you that morning services are the worst part of the day.¹ Speak to many a student and they will tell you the same thing:” ...’ I can’t stand it when my teachers go out of their way to make me daven. It makes me insane!!! Something about those words in the siddur 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!!!!²”(Goldmintz, 2009, emphasis in the original)).

Assumptions about the Desirability of the Sought Changes

As noted above, a pattern of pupil behavior at prayer services that has been observed in many non-Orthodox day schools is as follows: Young children seem to enjoy prayer services. They enjoy the ritual, the singing and often participate enthusiastically. On the surface, it appears that all is well. What is happening is often an exercise in skills. What is lacking is depth, a sense of *Kedushah*, awe, closeness to God. Because surface behavior is positive, it is assumed that what is being done is totally appropriate. If this pattern does not change, the pupil begins to find less and less meaning in what is done. This often leads to many pupils “shutting down” and then “acting out” during services. Moreover, while the “*madua*” of prayer is clear to the pupils (school mandate), the “*lamah*” of prayer, its purpose, meaning, rationale, is not. (This was apparent in the answers to questionnaires administered to Middle school pupils in several Schechter schools during the period from 1980 to 2002). Many teachers rush through the prayer service without providing for a set-induction or transitional period to help pupils get into the mood for prayer. If in addition to this, there is no study of the ideas in the *siddur*, no cognitive connection to the values and themes of Jewish prayer, the lack of motivation to pray increases. Moreover, if the Hebrew language curriculum does not include the vocabulary of the *siddur*-common words, value-concepts, *tashmishei kedushah and tashmishei mitzvah*, the pupil finds it difficult to derive meaning from the texts. Also, multi-purpose rooms used for prayer can offer a sterile environment, lacking in esthetic support for prayer. It is therefore desirable to seek to incorporate the element of depth into the prayer experience, introduce *iyyun tefillah* into the curriculum, help pupils to develop a rationale for prayer that he/she finds intellectually respectable, increase the pupil’s familiarity with the vocabulary of the *siddur*, pay attention to the esthetics of the prayer space and think about how to help pupils make the transition from *hol* to *kodesh*. Finally, it is assumed that if teachers feel more comfortable about engaging in

¹ See Moshe Drelich’s report that at a *tefillah* workshop he ran for teachers, “Almost all of the twenty participants in the workshop identified *tefillah* as their least favorite part of the school day. One teacher commented that supervising *davening* was as enjoyable as covering lunch duty!” Moshe Drelich, “*Tefillah* Motivation Through Relationship Building and Role Modeling: One Rabbi’s Approach.” In *Jewish Educational Leadership*, 5:2, Winter 2007, pp. 40-43.

² From a website for Jewish teens: <http://www.thelockers.net/forum//archive/index.php/index.php?t-74.html> Accessed August, 2007.

iyyun Tefillah and facilitating prayer services that include moments of depth, in addition to the practice of skills, this will be a step towards positively impacting on pupil attitudes and behavior as well.

The Response of One School

The conditions outlined above led Rabbi Stuart Saposh, the Head of the Solomon Schechter Day School of Bergen County, New Jersey, at the urging of Ricky Stamler Goldberg, Head of Jewish studies in the Lower School (Henceforth designated as *The Administrator*), to invite Dr. Saul P. Wachs of Gratz College, a field consultant for the Solomon Schechter Day School Association, to help change the culture of prayer and prayer education in the Lower School. This intervention began in 2002 and continues to the present moment with the support of Ruth Gafni, new Head of the school. Since 1980, when he began this work, Dr. Wachs had made occasional two day visits to the school as part of a circuit among the approximately seventy schools that make up the Solomon Schechter Day School Association. In the fall of 2002, he began to work with Ms. Stamler Goldberg in a more intensive way. She set the goals and played a major role in establishing priorities, setting time tables for change and offering critical support for both the teachers and Dr. Wachs (henceforth referred to as the Consultant).

The Goals of the Intervention

The Administrator had set out with a series of goals for the teachers to gain from the intervention. Some goals involved student reflection and behavior, while others were directly interested in teacher behaviors. Among these were that teachers feel safe in asking questions and revealing feelings, that they be open to change, that they find the study of prayer stimulating, that they be comfortable with God-talk and other aspects of theology and prayer, that they be able to engage in *iyyun tefillah*, and that they feel comfortable with The Administrator. Further, her goals for the classrooms and the actual lessons included that the rooms support prayer experiences, that the services have depth, that the arts be utilized, that set inductions be used, and that prayer study be made relevant. Obviously each of these goals is also teacher-dependent, particularly in the self contained elementary school classroom. The Administrator had multiple concerns about *tefillah* in the school. She realized that there was not going to be a “quick fix”, and that though teachers came from varied backgrounds and religious orientations, they shared a similar disconnect in their exposure to teaching *tefillah* for meaning, beyond the skills of fluent reading and singing.

Theoretical Underpinnings

The intervention was theory-driven, that is, the consultant worked with a theory of change rooted in twenty one years of consultation to day schools, primarily within the non-Orthodox orbit, and buttressed by the literature of change in educational settings.

People approach an experience of change with memories and experiences that can trigger resistance. In the case of prayer and prayer teaching, this resistance is both personal and professional. People cannot come to terms with something as professionals until they come to terms with it personally. Therefore, the first steps in facilitating change involve helping teachers to take a fresh look at prayer and at the liturgy. A key element in this is helping them see the relevance of the ideas in the prayer book to their own lives. Motivation is in the learner. If subject matter touches deep needs, it will deeply involve the learner.

The Liturgy is the book of values of the Jewish people. All of the teachers have Jewish commitments of one kind or another, if they come to see the connection between the prayers and their own values, one barrier will be removed.

The key element in facilitating change is the creation of a climate of safety so that teachers can engage in this reevaluation without feeling threatened, disrespected or manipulated.

Change efforts are more likely to be successful when:

A. Addressing fundamental issues of curriculum and instruction.

Providing professional development driven by a shared vision.

Establishing an expectation that professional development is a job responsibility for everyone.

Involving administrators in planning and participating in professional development activities.

(In this connection, the active participation of Ricky Stamler Goldberg ,Jewish Studies Head was a signal to the faculty that the seminars and workshops were seen to be a priority in the school.)

Providing ongoing support for teachers as they sought to implement new teaching strategies and make use of new materials.

Provision of staff development experiences all conducted during the course of school hours.

(Pritchard and Marshall, 2003)

B. Professional development is most effective when it deepens Teachers' knowledge of content and how to teach it to students,

Helps teachers understand how students learn specific content,

Provides opportunities for active hands-on learning,

Enables teachers to acquire new knowledge, apply it to practice and reflect on the results with colleagues,

Is intensive and sustained over time

(Hammond and Anderson, 2008)

C. Proceeds on the assumption that before teachers can deal comfortably and effectively with content that is heavily weighted with emotional loadings, they have to come to terms with the material on a personal level. (Wachs 2008)

D “Leaders must model the capacity to change” (Zeldin, 1998).

Since prayer is emotionally loaded, the behavior of the leader is a key to developing a climate of safety among teachers in workshop and seminar gatherings. Ricky Stamler Goldberg was an excellent model, in this regard, as she freely discussed her own issues with prayer and theology. Since the teachers knew her to be a Halakhic Jew, they were thus more able to openly discuss their own feelings, share their memories and voice their difficulties with prayer. Her participation was a sign that these faculty gatherings were viewed as being important, and *her participation as a peer*, contributed to a climate of safety that deepened the interactions in these workshops and seminars. Because the consultant {a Halakhic Jew} also expressed his concerns and questions teachers could openly share the issues that made prayer teaching and prayer experiences difficult for them.

Resistance to Change

Aron and Zeldin have delineated factors that affect resistance to change:

inertia (“we’ve always done it this way,” or “we tried that ten years ago and it didn’t work.”)

resignation (“kids are supposed to hate Hebrew School”) Mutatis Mutandis, “...hate prayer services.”

fear of the unknown

aversion to risk

failure to communicate a compelling vision in concrete and accessible terms.

Aron and Zeldin quote Fullan who writes “If there is one cardinal rule of change in human condition, it is that you cannot *make* people change. You cannot force them to think differently.” (Fullan, 1993).

Aron and Zeldin continue, “People need to have compelling reasons to believe that change will be a good thing. In addition, their unhappiness with the current state of affairs must outweigh their feelings of discomfort and uneasiness in making a transition.” (Aron and Zeldin, 1986).

In sum, the failure of interventions designed to promote change is pervasive and this is well documented in the literature (e.g. Sarason, 1982, Fullan, 2007).

In the particular intervention under study, the Consultant operated under specific constraints. First, he was invited by an administrator, not the teachers. Second, he was an academic, presumed to be occupied with theories, unaware of the specific contexts of a specific school. He didn't live in any of the communities served by the school. He might be presumed to lack any real appreciation of the issues with which the teachers struggled with every day. Ostensibly, he was there to judge their work against some outside (probably unrealistic) standard. On the other hand there were mitigating factors as well. Aside from the fact that the Consultant had made visits in past years to the school, the unique status of the Administrator-the respect and affection with which she was held, eased the way for the Consultant to begin the process of intervention. In their minds, if the Administrator believed that something good might come out of the seminars and workshops, there was reason to give them a chance to succeed.

Strategy for Supporting Change: 1

Seminars

The Administrator and the Consultant agreed on an approach intended to earn the trust of the teachers, through respect, and to make the case for change plausible. This involved a combination of classes, individual and small group meetings, including content seminars, workshops and demonstration lessons. It was agreed that the Consultant would visit six times a year for a full day each time. Starting in 2005, this was reduced to four times a year and that continues to the present time. The initial visits were built around study sessions in which the teachers were invited to forget their professional responsibilities and join in the learning. Using an inquiry approach to the study of the liturgy, the Consultant tried to actively involve them in the study through modeling pedagogy that encouraged the group to develop personal *Midrashim* on the prayers. The teachers found these sessions to be stimulating and were frequently joined by other administrators, guidance personnel and teachers who were not directly connected to the project, who were free at the time when the sessions took place. From the beginning, theological issues emerged. Studiously avoiding rhetoric of conclusions, the Consultant and the Administrator encouraged the participants to react honestly to the texts. The Consultant, who was widowed when his late wife drowned, spoke of the role of water in the liturgy and how sometimes, he has to pray with irony. Other began to share similar stories of faith and doubt. In debriefing the sessions, the Administrator noted a subtle change in the interaction of the teachers. It was clear that they were enjoying the study, but more than that, there seemed to be emerging greater rapport and an absence of posturing among them.

Strategy for Change: 2

Workshops

Starting in the middle of the first year, pedagogic issues were discussed along with textual study and theological discussion. The administrator set the agenda each time, conveying questions and problems raised by the teachers to the Consultant and making them the basis for the deliberations. The Consultant shared lesson plans that he had created for use in day schools and these were

critiqued. When he asked if they would mind if he tried to teach some of them to the pupils, they responded enthusiastically to the suggestion.

Strategy for Change: 3

Demonstration Lessons and Debriefing

As an experienced teacher with many years of doing demonstration lessons in day schools, the Consultant felt reasonably confident that with thoughtful preparation, the prototypical lesson plans which had been feasibility- tested many times in the past, would be well accepted by the pupils. After each lesson, the teachers who had observed the lesson gathered together with the Consultant and the Administrator to discuss the lesson, ask questions and offer opinions. A persistent theme was the expression of surprise, bordering on wonder over the ability of the pupils to think deeply and to be engaged in the study of prayer texts. Each lesson started with a set-induction. Many included some kind of ethical dilemma. Each was intended to help the pupils recognize that words have consequences and that reciting prayers can affect us. The consultant asked the teachers why they thought the pupils were engaged in the learning. He explained that every pupil in a learning situation asks or is entitled to ask "*lamah ani tzarikh (tzerikhah) ba-zeh?* Why do I need to know this? What difference will it make in my life? In the words of Abraham Joshua Heschel, "I would like to suggest as a goal for Jewish education that every Jew become a representative of the Jewish spirit, that every Jew become aware that *Judaism is an answer to the ultimate problems of human existence and not merely a way of handling observances.*" (Heschel, 1953, 1959). In addressing a class in the Jewish Theological Seminary in 1959, Heschel said, "the greatest sin Jewish educators can commit is to *trivialize* Jewish education. If we are not about great values and life transforming ideas, why should any teenager take us seriously?"

Strategy for Change: 4

Asking Different Kinds of Questions

Observation of lessons by the Consultant confirmed the sense expressed by the Administrator that teachers generally felt most comfortable when asking memory questions, leading questions and generally avoiding entry into areas of unknown perimeters. It was decided to make that a focus of attention in the seminars, workshops and demonstration lessons. The group examined various types of questions: Memory, clarifying, convergent-thinking, divergent-thinking and, evaluative. The strengths and weaknesses of each were examined and a plea made for a balance of questions in *iyyun tefillah*. A key point made time and time again by the consultant and the administrator was that "the contract between the school and the home is not that the teacher knows the answer to every question." In interviews and group discussions, teachers frequently mentioned this idea as being "liberating." The Consultant also pointed out that when an issue was not totally resolved, it might well be remembered and even become subject matter for discussions at home, thus extending the learning beyond the classroom.(Bruner, 1966)

Workshops now included exercises where teachers were asked to work in small teams designing set-inductions or question lines that balanced various types of questions.

Strategy for Change: 5

Divrei Tefillah

Towards the end of the first year, the Consultant began to observe *tefillot*, as conducted in the classrooms. He noted the fact that with few exceptions, there were no *pinot kodesh*, esthetically pleasing corners or walls that could enhance the visual environment during prayer. After discussion with the Administrator, it was decided to defer raising this issue till the next year. He did, however, receive permission to present brief *divrei tefillah*, engaging the pupils for a few minutes before, during or after the service in some consideration of a prayer text or the general area of prayer. For example:

Gan-“Does God ever feel tired?” Does God ever feel sad?

First grade-Does God love us? How can we tell? What does God give us that we need and can't get by ourselves? Can we give God anything?

Second grade-What have you heard people say about God?

Supposing there were two gods, what difference would it make?

Strategy for Change: 6

Esthetics and Kedushah

Beginning in 2003-2004, the Consultant began to raise the question of how multi-purpose rooms might be transformed to contribute to an atmosphere more conducive to meaningful prayer. One teacher, in particular had devoted much effort to doing this and after visiting that room, some of the other teachers began to think about the creation of *pinot Kodesh* that would serve as focal points for the prayer experience. In some cases, the teacher did all of the work. In others, the art teacher helped while in many cases, the pupils were enlisted in solving the problem. The results were positive. This is now a standard part of almost every classroom in the Lower school. The cafeteria posed a particular challenge to the concept of a *pinat Kodesh*. Through the ingenuity of the fifth grade teacher, pupils painted mobiles as well as murals that were attached to runners and brought into the room for *tefillot*, and radically transformed the atmosphere.

Strategy for Change: 7

Set-Inductions for Prayer

The idea of preparation for prayer is at least as old as the first century. “*Hassidim ha-rishonim hayu shohin sha-ah ahat umitaplelim, kedei she-yekhavnu et libbam la-Makom.*” “The early pious ones would tarry for one hour and then pray, in order that they might direct their hearts to their Father in Heaven.” (*Mishnah Berakhot 5:1, Talmud Bavli Berakhot, 30b*). Given the fact that preparation is a

staple of much of modernity, especially among professionals, it is curious, that one area in which there typically is little or no preparation is the act of worship. Even teachers who habitually begin a lesson with some kind of set-induction, neglect to do the same thing in transitioning from *hol* to *kodesh*. When the Consultant modeled this, the idea quickly caught on and teachers developed numerous ways of setting the mood for prayer. This included music, silence, meditation, walking meditation, singing a *niggun*, telling a story, sharing a personal experience etc. This too became institutionalized.

Strategy for Change:8

Exploring Possible Rationales for Prayer

While pupils understood all too well the “*madua*” of daily worship (school mandate), the “*lumah*” (rationale) for prayer was not always self-evident. In workshops, teachers, the Administrator and the Consultant shared experiences of powerful prayer and the inability to pray or to pray meaningfully. From this various rationales developed. Some of the most interesting discussions had to do with the effect of prayer on God. As might be expected, there was little agreement. In this connection, the consultant’s contribution was to stress the idea that prayer was intended to affect behavior, ideas, values and ideals of the pray-er. Teachers were encouraged to think of projects that might grow out of the prayer experience or lead to it. Several teachers were struck by the idea that praying can be a prod to self-reflection and personal change. Even among the few Orthodox teachers, this was somewhat novel. (One intriguing question stems from the fact that the Administrator (who played a crucial role in the intervention) is a mid-level administrator. Thus this project was not purely a “top-down” initiative. Her credibility as one who “rose from the ranks” and frequently did some teaching was deemed by the teachers to be a crucial element in creating a climate of safety for them to be able to explore new ideas and practice.

Strategies for Change: 9

God Talk

Given their backgrounds and other personal factors, it is not surprising that many of the teachers were reluctant to enter into discussions of theology. A major theme of the seminars and workshops was the idea of “indeterminacy of belief” as articulated by Max Kadushin in his writings about Jewish dogmas. The Consultant shared a list of 104 names for God compiled by Rabbi Robert Blinder, (Brown, 1980) pointing out that each of these is a metaphor. The teachers found meaning in the idea that there was no need (or right) to demand closure in theological beliefs from children. The Consultant shared selections from rabbinic writings that showed that the rabbis felt free to pass judgment on God’s actions, seeing honesty as an essential element in the Divine-human relationship.

Methodology of Data Collection

The Research Associate joined the Consultant on several field visits beginning in the fall of 2008, and additionally visited the school several times without the Consultant to continue data collection. The primary resources include the following: interviews with Ruth Gafni, Head of School on November 24 and March 24; interviews with Ricky Stamler Goldberg, the lower school head of Jewish studies (the Administrator) on November 24 and December 3, two lower school classroom observations on December 3, observation of a learning session, break out discussions, and a model lesson led by the Consultant on November 24, a focus group with five lower school teachers on April 21, and an on line survey completed by 8 teachers during the month of March, 2009.

The Critical Role of the Administrator

While the Consultant provided periodic reinforcement for the school's efforts to initiate culture-change, it was the Administrator who served in the center of the initiative. Because she had risen from the ranks of the teachers and was both well liked and highly respected by them, her credibility and professionalism contributed significantly to the willingness of the teachers to support the project.

Specifically, she did the following:

For the first two years, she provided a "security blanket" for the teachers as follows:

- 1) Teachers came to her with questions. They felt safe in doing so. Some of these were personal; others, professional.
- 2) Teachers came to her to reflect on lessons they had taught (e.g." I said this, what should I have said?")
- 3) They called on her to model *Iyyun Tefillah* for her. "Can you come in to teach this lesson for me?"
- 4) They asked her for information about the prayers and the 'choreography" of davening (e.g. the place of praise, thanksgiving and petition, the rationale for each, Jewish "body language").
- 5) They asked about the place of creative prayer in the services they conduct.
- 6) They had many conversations about the format of personal prayer. She helped them validate it.
- 7) They shared personal issues with her.
- 8) They discussed the difference between praying for something and wishing for something.
- 9) She led "Break-out" groups in the fifth grade, to provide experiences of *Iyyun tefillah*.
- 10) She made sure that issues that concerned the teachers as a group would be on the agenda of workshops and seminars led by the Consultant.

11)Her credibility as a superb teacher, one who “rose from the ranks” and frequently did some teaching was deemed by the teachers to be a crucial element in creating a climate of safety for them to be able to explore new ideas and practice. This might suggest that, perhaps, a project intended to promote change which originates at a level of management that has strong pedagogic credibility might be easier to implement than one that is directly supervised and imposed from the a more remote level of administration.

The Data

OUTCOMES FOR TEACHERS

A survey conducted by the Consultant in conjunction with the Administrator, in June, 2007, confirmed some earlier assumptions that the project was beginning to succeed in impacting the experience of the teachers and in turn on the experience of the students. “Since working with Dr. Wachs my attitude has grown to a more embracing one. I am not as fearful of doing, and experimenting with *tefillah*. I therefore am able to teach the children the same, and hopefully pass that feeling on to them.” (anonymously completed survey, June, 2007). The Administrator reported at that time that she had seen positive outcomes of the intervention. “Bringing *tefillah* to the forefront for my teachers, having everyone aware of the school’s expectations and allowing the teachers a time and place to express their questions and needs (has been my observation of positive change). You have helped us make *tefillah* a more integral part of our students’ lives and we hope to continue working with you to insure further growth and consistency throughout the school.” (Administrator in survey, June, 2007).

The Consultant was able to initiate change through offering model lessons, which the teachers observed, and then conducting a debriefing after. At other times he observed the teachers modeling, and encouraged teachers to observe each other and share their findings. This collegiality helped most teachers to feel safe in a discipline that had formerly been somewhat scary. This collegiality even has extended over the Jewish studies/ general studies divide, as *berakhot* and value concept terms are used in general studies classrooms.

The Head of School related her frustration that “there was no depth” in the teaching of *tefillah*. She was pleased to find that as a result of the intervention “we have made the most remarkable growth across the board in *tefillah*” (Head of School, 11/24/08). She noted that the classrooms look different. They look like a *mekom tefillah*, and what goes on in them is more spiritual. The teachers have added music, the children sometimes hum a tune before they begin the *tefillah*. They sit in a circle. There is *ijyun tefillah* happening whereas before the teachers were afraid to bring it up. The teachers have learned not to be afraid to ask a question or to say they don’t know something. This leaves room for

growth and reflection. The teachers relate better to the *tefillah*, and are more open in their ability to engage in *iyyun tefillah*. (referring to the Consultant, she said) “His work is inspiring for all of us. When he comes we feel more spiritual later in the day. We discover another added layer of depth to our *tefillot*. I wish there were more written curriculum that can be followed given the kind of work he has done with us. It has been wonderful.” (Head of School, 3/24/09)

Observations of a third and fourth grade classroom confirm some of the evidence for change that has been noted by the Head and Administrator.



As I entered the children were doing a different activity with their teachers, Chana and *Dina*. There were four girls and thirteen boys. After a minute or so Chana put on Israeli music and said something very briefly in Hebrew about starting *tefillah*, and quietly the children put away what they were doing, took their chairs and arranged a circle on the rug in the front of the room. Seemingly with no instruction someone gave out the *siddurim*. They took their seats and began to hum along with the music for 2 or 3 minutes. Chana asked them in Hebrew if they would like to share anything, and a few responded in English. She then said “*Anachnu matchilim im tefillah*”, said in English, “Every day we

have much to be thankful for”, and so they began to *daven*. The *davening* appeared competent, spirited, all of the children, without exception, were engaged and participating. They followed a traditional if somewhat abbreviated *matbeah tefillah*, certainly age-appropriate, and in several instances the form of the experience was innovative though the content remained fixed. For example, they said *Ashrei* around the circle with each pair reciting a verse. The teachers participated as well, and it was done in proper nusah. They also sang *halleluyah*, psalm 150, with a cd. Some of the children started to drum along on their *siddurim*, and then many began to clap. Chana instructed to say *Shema* “*b’kol ram*”, and they read *v’ahavta* without trop, then sang it in trop. After Chana led them in a discussion of *mezuzah* and *tefillin*, asking “*anachnu zochrim ma la’asot?*”- answer “*Mitzvot*”, they then did *vayomer* in trop, discussed *tzitzit*, and sang the next couple verses out loud. Before the *amidah* Chana reminded them, by asking, how to stand, and how to behave in terms of not going in or out during the *amida*. After the regular *matbeah tefillah* was finished, they then stood facing the flag of Israel and recited *tefillah l’shlom hamedinah, hatikvah*, and then faced the American flag and recited the pledge of allegiance.



As they returned to their seats Chana instructed them to take a minute for *tefillah yachid*, while she played some more music. They then shared a couple of personal prayers, including for the health of pets and grandparents.

The third grade class had a very similar *tefillah* experience. The *matbeah* was slightly shorter, given the grade, but the teacher used words like “*kavanah*”, praised attentive *davening* by saying “*yofi*”, and in the end each child kissed his *siddur* before putting it away.



From the observations of the administrator and the research associate it became clear that the classrooms and *tefillah* experiences that the children were now having had been enhanced by the intervention. Innovations, such as *pinot kodesh*, musical set inductions, opportunities for personal reflection, and sharing were being implemented. Teachers had learned pedagogic techniques and had translated this learning into teaching strategies. The question remained of how the consulting had transformed them as *daveners*; whether this transformation helps them in their teaching beyond the strategies that can be observed on the surface.



In February, 2004, I entered a fourth grade classroom at the beginning of the day. The children were sitting in their seats. The teacher began to play a CD of soothing music. The pupils understood this to be the signal to take their *Siddurim* and go to the area of the *pinat Kodesh*. *What followed was a few moments of "hitbodedut", silent meditation. The teacher joined in this.* Following the singing of a *niggun*, the pupils began to pray together. The teacher sat with them and did not interrupt the flow of the service. I saw that the service had "grown" in that prayers were now sung or read that had not been part of the service at the start of the school year. Other prayers were omitted so that the service did not last any longer than it had before. Before the singing of *Adon Olam*, a second period of *Hitbodedut* took place. I noticed that each child utilized the time differently. Some stood, others sat. One child put her head in her arms. The teacher sat quietly, eyes closed. *I felt a sense of depth in the moment.* Afterwards, she began to speak, "My sister is in *Tzahal*. *She is stationed in Gaza.* That is a dangerous place. I asked God to take care of her. I am proud of her but I also worry about her." She then asked if anyone else wanted to share their thoughts. Three children did. One spoke of a sick parent; one spoke of her mother coming home with a new sister. One said his father had a new job. The teacher had succeeded in connecting *tefillah* with the rest of the children's lives and her own, and was also a model of how to create a moment of depth as part of the *tefillah* experience. Before

coming to the United States from Israel, this teacher had no contact whatsoever with the synagogue or organized prayer. I would characterize her as a deeply spiritual individual.

December 2005, I observed a third grade class engaged in *ibyun tefillah*. The teacher was sitting in front of the class. She bent her head and shoulders and said "*Ani Kefufah*" (I am bent over). She straightened up and said, *akhshav, ani zekufah* (Now, I am erect.). After repeating this a few times, she invited the pupils to join in with the statement, "anu kefufim" and "anu zekufim." She then asked them, "have you ever felt kafuf?" (now the word was being treated as "bent out of shape). When no one answered. She proceeded to tell them that as a young girl growing up in Israel, coming to a new school, she was snubbed by a lot of the other girls and felt very "bent out of shape. She would walk with her head down" A boy-who was considered to be a star in her class in Israel came over to her and said, I'd like to be your friend. This led to her being accepted by the others as well. The pupils she was teaching were fascinated by this personal vignette. One said, "but you're so pretty and so nice, how could the kids not like you?" She said, "Thank you. I didn't feel pretty or nice. I just felt *kefufah* bent out of shape and I walked with my head bent. After this boy became my friend, I felt *zekufah*. I walked with my head high. A few pupils shared moments when they felt "*kafuf*." She asked the class. *What do you think the author of this Berakhah had in mind when he said that God is "zokef kefufim?"* The pupils offered different answers. The teacher continued. "these are thoughtful answers. I really like it when we have deep discussions. Let me suggest another possibility. I think that we are being told that we too are supposed to do the things we praise God for doing. It's not just that we praise God. We also are taught to try to imitate the things we praise God for doing. So if God is *zokef kefufim*, we can try to do that too." Then the teacher said to them. "We Jews have a lovely idea called *hakarat hatov*. It means to recognize when someone does something good to you and to express your appreciation. If ever you were feeling *kafuf* and someone said something or did something that made you feel *zakuf*, the way that boy did for me, I want you to find that person and say *todah*. Or, if you know someone who is *kafuf* and you think you can say something or do something that will help that person feel *zakuf*, I want you to try to do that. We can talk about it tomorrow."

In analyzing that lesson (also taught by someone who had had no contact with the synagogue or organized prayer prior to coming to teach in the school), I saw a sensitive individual who had taught a bit of Hebrew, helped the pupils see that there are more than one level of meaning in poetic language, shared a personal story that touched the pupils, worked to inculcate an important Jewish value and offered a rationale for the praise that abounds in the liturgy; all in the space of an eighteen minute lesson on prayer. This was one of many examples where people who did not see themselves as *dati-im* (ritually observant) while growing up, showed the ability to relate to prayer and prayer texts as part of inculcating values that were important to them.

Several themes emerged from the questionnaire responses, interviews, and focus groups. Teachers whose personal prayer education was from secular Israeli, Orthodox, and even American Conservative schooling found a lack of meaning having been taught in prayer. Joan, who was raised in Belgium and went to Orthodox day schools, said, "we learned to pray, it was part of the day. We just prayed; there was no learning, no explanation, no discussion, it was not interactive. We never learned the "why". The boys prayed in the *Beit Midrash*, but the girls only prayed in the classroom." Tali, who grew up in

Israel and went to the *Mamlachti Dati* schools, but later became involved with the Conservative movement in Israel, said, “we knew what to do, we learned the “choreography” of *tefillah*, but not the reasons.” Even Shira, who grew up in the Conservative Movement, went to Hebrew school and junior congregation, couldn’t remember learning the meaning of prayer. Other teachers, who thought of themselves as secular in Israel, acknowledged that they may have had candles and *Kiddush* on Shabbat but never engaged in prayer at all.

These teachers related being scared and intimidated about teaching *tefillah*. They knew how to teach the words and the melodies, but didn’t know that it was possible to go beyond that. They were afraid to take risks.

The secular teachers shared that they didn’t know anything about prayer prior to coming to SSDS. They reported that even prior to the consultation, the Administrator helped them learn the prayers, and feel comfortable at least with the skills expected and the notion of daily prayer in the school. This connection helped to assure the success of the consultant. As reported by one teacher, by Ricky being involved in all the sessions we knew that the messages being taught were the messages that the school stood behind. Others reported that this exposure to Conservative Judaism showed them an aspect of *tefillah* that they had not encountered before. Tzipora, who was raised Orthodox in Israel said, “I have changed because of my exposure to Conservative Judaism in America. I fell in love with the Conservative way.” Esther, who had a secular upbringing, said, “we joined a Conservative synagogue where my son celebrated becoming a bar mitzvah. I like that all my family could be involved.”

Many of the teachers spoke about spirituality and feeling connected to the *tefillah* as a result of studying with the Consultant. Tzipora, “Dr. W. taught us to be more spiritual, to go through a process of discovery. He approaches teaching through many avenues. We can connect nature, life, and event to a child in the world, everything to *tefillah*.” Another way that teachers report is how the children connect to the *tefillah*. Very often their connection revolves around a personal issue, such as the illness or death of a family member. Children will ask for healing for a sick grandparent or friend. Tali related that a girl’s father had died and the *yahrtzeit* was coming. “She asked if there was a prayer for her to say. We looked together through *tehillim* and found one. She had a connection because she had the idea that she could come to me with a need for *tefillah*.”

Many teachers spoke about learning to teach for meaning in *tefillah*. This is a recurring theme. Joan said, “I can look in the *siddur* and read for meaning when I am in *shul*. I try to find connections, look closely at the words. I think about in what circumstance the *tefillah* must have been written. I find a personal meaning then I teach it to the children. For example, if someone is sick I can teach the *bracha* “*refa’enu*”. At *Rosh HaShana* time I teach *s’lach lanu* and *sh’ma kolenu*. I am not afraid to transmit to the children. I tell them they don’t need to understand every single word; if they find key words that they know they can connect to the prayer.” Tali believes that the most important thing to

impart to the students is to understand what you are saying. Cheryl, a teacher with a Conservative Movement background, related that “sessions with Dr. W have made me much more reflective and have added personal meaning to *tefillah*.” In this way, as teachers understand and relate to *tefillah* on a personal level, their teaching is significantly enhanced and thus the students have an experience that is that much richer.

Finally, many of the teachers commented how they appreciated and learned from simply watching the Consultant, either as he led their study sessions or as he taught model lessons to classes of children. In the simple act of watching a master teacher and spiritual *davener* conduct his craft, the teachers gained an appreciation for what a *tefillah* experience can be. Esther said, “Dr. Wachs told us to have them read a prayer once in a while instead of singing it. Even one small change encourages participation. Also we say *shma* very slowly. It changes the atmosphere. The children like the private prayer. It is beautiful when they share. They are more involved and connect to other’s lives. When we play music before we start that also changes the atmosphere.” Shira, who had experience leading prayer at Camp Ramah, was not sure of the school’s expectation, and so brought in her camping background to the teaching of prayer in her class, for example, re-enacting the crossing of the Sea of Reeds when teaching the *Az Yashir* prayer. She knew that such dramatic and experiential learning was effective at Ramah and, even prior to the intervention, believed that such teaching would work in a Jewish day school setting as well. The Consultant re-inforced her thinking and offered her a multitude of other strategies to help *tefillah* to come alive for her students. For example, they now say *Havdalah* on Monday mornings, play music when the children come in to the prayer space, expect the leaders to use correct *nusah*. Tzipora noted that “there are stories that Dr. Wachs brought to us that we can tell. He showed us the connection of why the *tefillah* was written and how they can connect prayer to *tanakh* and to their lives. *Tefillah* can be any place, can serve as a security blanket, you can put emotion to words that you sing. I feel softer when I think of Dr. Wachs.”

Analysis of the Data

An attempt was made to identify common themes that emerged from the reportage of teachers and administrators and to check them against the observations of the consultant and the research associate. Where the same themes (including the use of similar language) was found among several individuals, it was assumed that verbalized changes had occurred or were perceived to have occurred.

Teachers were involved in an ongoing program to change the way prayer is taught and experienced in a Solomon Schechter Lower day school. Initiated and supervised by the Head of Jewish studies, with the support of the school Head, the intervention consisted of a limited number of visits by a consultant and continuing supervision and support by the Administrator.

These teachers enjoyed studying, particularly where the material had both personal and professional relevance. In the presence of a safe environment, teachers were open to reevaluate their attitudes

towards prayer, student readiness to discuss theology and the degree of open inquiry that can be effective in the study of prayer. Teachers were more comfortable in speaking about God than before the intervention. The presence and active participation of the Administrator was absolutely critical to the process of cultural change. Because she ‘rose from the ranks’ was regarded as a superb teacher and offered strong support, together with high expectations and participated actively as a peer in all seminars and workshops, she was (and continues to be) an indispensable factor in what has been accomplished to date. Many of these teachers came from Israel with the expectation that they would return but have remained here. In the process of raising their own children (many of who are students or graduates of the school) have been forced to confront the challenges of transmitting their Jewish and Israel values to these children and teens. This might have been a factor in increasing their motivation to study and teach prayer in new ways. The evidence suggests that teachers who are sensitive individuals, when given the opportunity to study prayer in a safe non-judgmental atmosphere, can reevaluate their attitudes towards prayer and develop comfort with teaching strategies and methods that facilitate a search for meaning that respects the right of each individual to find his or her own path in the life of the spirit.

A Significant Datum

While this report has focused on the teachers and an ongoing study of pupils continues, the following is, perhaps, relevant to the discussion above. On April 4, 2008, the Consultant received a phone call from the coordinator of prayer in the Middle school. She said, “I must tell you about what happened today. I was forced to go to the hospital to deal with a small problem. I facilitate services for the seventh grade along with Ms... She was called into the office to speak with an irate parent. Neither of us knew that the pupils were unsupervised in the Chapel. Twenty minutes after she had left, she found this out. She rushed back to the Chapel to discover that the pupils had organized themselves, appointed *shelihei tzibbur* and were ‘*davening* up a storm’. I just had to share this with you.” Note: These seventh graders were among the first classes to be involved in the intervention in 2002. In reflecting on the phone call, the Consultant vividly recalled observing and later trying to facilitate a seventh grade service in 2002 with disastrous results. At that time, the pupils made it perfectly clear that they regarded mandatory prayer as a burden, to be disrupted as a sign of protest. The enthusiasm of the teacher was heartwarming and the experience stands as an encouraging sign that perhaps the impact of the intervention on the teachers had also affected the pupils.

Ongoing Research

Since the intervention under discussion was largely confined to the Lower school, the question is, to what extent have teachers and administrators in the Middle school been affected.

One indication that change has occurred lies in the request by the faculty and administration of the Middle school for a similar intervention. That began in 2007 and preliminary indications show that changes in curriculum and instruction have been implemented. Since pupils in the Middle school experienced the changes implemented in the Lower school, it will be very interesting to see how their

attitudes towards prayer are different from those of middle school students of earlier years. Here there are some preliminary indications that this might be so, but much additional study is required to determine what if any change is significant. The next stage of research will include focused observations, questionnaires and other forms of data gathering in order to assess the impact of the intervention upon pupil attitudes and behavior related to prayer. The research will also examine *tefillah* and *iyyun tefillah* in the Middle school.

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