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Signature Pedagogy and Constituent Authenticity
A New Model of Authentic Activity in Jewish Day School Classrooms

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Introduction

Since the late 1980s, education researchers have argued that classroom learning practices should be more *authentic*: connected to ordinary real-world practices recognizable to practitioners in a particular field. In the decades since, an abundant literature has addressed how to instantiate this form of "authenticity" in different domains, via approaches such as experiential education, inquiry learning, and problem-based learning.

In this paper, I will suggest that pedagogical practices in American haredi[1] boys' elementary schools may be understood as possessing a different form of authenticity from that which has been conceptualized in the research literature until now. The paper argues that haredi pedagogy functions very similarly to Lee Shuman's concept of signature pedagogy (Shulman, 2005a). Using an in-depth analysis of one sample of first-grade boys'[2] *chumash* (the first five books of the Hebrew Bible) instruction in a haredi school (drawn from a broader group of sixty hours of videotaped observations collected in three schools), I map Shulman's notion of signature pedagogy to a specific feature of American haredi pedagogy that I term "constituent authenticity." Shulman's understanding of signature pedagogy was developed in relation to professional education. In those contexts, he explored how professional schools socialize students into larger communal structures; they may therefore be seen as *authentically*

belonging to those structures. That is, they possess "constituent authenticity" as a constituent part of broader practices that exist and that possess social and cultural importance to stakeholders in the school beyond the school day itself. I argue that as a signature pedagogy, boys' *chumash* represents a distinct first stage of a broader communal practice that spans school, culture, and community and that, as a result, it is a constituent of a socially *authentic* activity.

It is true that boys' participation in first-grade *chumash* does not reproduce real-world engagement in *chumash* in the same way that traditionally authentic activities (such as problem-based learning) reproduce other domains. But analogy to Shulman's signature pedagogies suggests that perhaps they don't have to. First-grade *chumash* is not *like* real-world *chumash*; it *is* real-world *chumash* precisely because it is a constituent part of a broader communal practice.

Authenticity

In a seminal paper, Brown, Collins, and Duguid (1989) argued that classroom practices are authentic to the degree that they would be recognized by practitioners outside the classroom as the same practices in which they themselves engage. The rationale Brown et al. give for using authentic practice in classrooms is that knowledge divorced from its context of use is extremely weak, and that designing practices that are recognized as authentic by outsiders places that knowledge in a broader context of practice, enabling deeper, stronger learning.

In the decades since, this situated approach to school activity has dominated educational research (Putnam & Borko, 2000), particularly in the domain of science, where authenticity is understood as a tool that enculturates students into a community of practice. Different approaches to authenticity have been explored, including students' actual participation in adult practices outside the classroom, and the simulation of those practices in the classroom (Barab & Hay, 2001; Hay & Barab, 2001; Radinsky et al., 1998, 2001). Some have suggested that authenticity is not a feature of any particular pedagogical strategy but is an emergent property of the interactions between the learner, task, and environment (Barab et al., 2000; Rahm et al., 2003). Others have focused on how authentic norms can foster

authentic identities (Cobb et al., 2009; Gresalfi, 2009), and on how students' identification with classroom practices impacts their perception of the nature of those activities (Sfard & Prusak, 2005). The entire pedagogical and curricular technique of problem-based learning is designed to embed learning in authentic contexts of use, so that students will be more likely to engage with and retain the information (Dean & Kuhn, 2007; Kanter, 2010; Strobel & van Barneveld, 2009).

But what does it mean for knowledge to be divorced from its context of use, and what counts as an *authentic* context of use? What makes school memorization or a teacher's lecture inauthentic? The answers to these questions depend on the relationship between the knowledge acquisition practices that take place in school and the *culture* in which that knowledge is used. To unpack the term authenticity we need to first make a number of sociological judgments about culture, identity, and activity: What does it look like when knowledge is used meaningfully (in any context)? How is knowledge embedded in non-school contexts of use? What purpose, or purposes, does school or societal knowledge serve those who learn it?

These questions address authenticity by asking about the culture that would make some knowledge practice authentic to an individual or group. Another way to approach the same set of issues is to ask how authenticity contributes to learning. Is it simply a pragmatic tool for better or broader knowledge recall and use, or is there something inherently valuable in engaging in a learning practice that is connected in some way to an "authentic" culture? The two approaches in fact ultimately converge; whether we open with cultural or pedagogical questions, our analysis will focus on how activity and meaning intersect to promote learning in the classroom.

These questions have an added dimension when we turn to Jewish day school education. Little work has addressed what it would mean to make classroom practices authentic in Judaic studies classes, yet Jewish subject matter's connection to religion, culture, and practice is central to the purpose of Jewish day schools. In past work (Krakowski et al., 2012; Krakowski, 2017), I have examined how Modern Orthodox day schools have used pedagogical models such as problem-based learning to help develop certain forms of Jewish identity. In this chapter, I will examine the relationship between classroom and culture through an exploration of a very different model of authentic practice in the classroom.

Although authenticity can certainly be expressed in the simulation of adult practices (as in problem-based learning), it may also be expressed through practices that explicitly enculturate students into society, even when these practices do not resemble a mature version of the same activity. This model of authenticity has been well articulated in the context of professional education (though without explicit reference to the concept of "authenticity").

In the course of a decade-long study for the Carnegie Foundation, Lee Shulman (Shulman, 2005a) developed a construct called "signature pedagogy" to describe a cluster of key similarities in professional instruction across several different fields. For Shulman, the key features of professional schools are that they use pedagogies that are pervasive and uniform in their fields; involve fixed routines and rituals; are visible and interactive; and inculcate particular "habits" in students (Shulman, 2008). Shulman argues that professional schools employ signature pedagogies precisely because such schools require more than just student understanding; they demand education for practice and serve to socialize students into a profession's culture and epistemology (Shulman, 2005b). Precisely because *all* students in a particular professional school will be joining the same profession with the same expectations, their initial learning practices can be considered *a part of* that profession.

Religious Education in Orthodox Jewish Classrooms

Religious schools, connected as they are to religious communities of practice, provide fertile ground for exploring questions about culture, socialization, and authenticity. Indeed, socialization has been widely noted as a goal of religious schooling: as Rapoport, Garb, and Penso note, "religious educational frameworks act simultaneously as educational institutions and as religious socializing agencies" (Rapoport et al., 1995, p. 48). In Orthodox Jewish communities, schooling functions explicitly to enculturate and socialize; content knowledge is important, but becoming a productive member of Orthodox Jewish society is primary (Krakowski, 2008a, p. 322; 2013).

Since the last quarter of the twentieth century, American Orthodox Jewish religious education may be broadly divided into two distinct

approaches, enacted by the two major American Orthodox denominations (themselves umbrella categories that may be subdivided into many other finer-grained denominational groups): Modern Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox. Broadly speaking, Modern Orthodoxy values secular Western culture and knowledge and Modern Orthodox institutions generally seek to synthesize Jewish religious knowledge, thought, and practice with full participation in Western culture and society. Ultra-Orthodoxy, on the other hand, views such synthesis as problematic and generally leans toward some measure of isolation. Ultra-Orthodox schools therefore typically provide a minimal secular education intended to permit students to eventually maintain gainful employment, but assign no intrinsic value to secular culture and knowledge.

Both yeshivish and Chasidic schools share this perspective on secular education, but they express it in different ways: in general, Chasidic schools offer less secular education than do yeshivish schools. This isn't because they disagree about the purpose of secular education, but because they have different cultural expectations of the types of occupations community members will hold.

In nearly all ultra-Orthodox schools in the United States (and in many Modern Orthodox schools as well), boys begin studying *chumash* in or before first grade, learning to read and translate biblical Hebrew and learning the basic content of biblical stories and laws. By third or fourth grade, boys at most schools start to add the study of Mishnah, a late ancient code of Jewish law that forms the backbone of the Talmud, and in fifth or sixth grade they begin to study Gemara, the complex text full of arguments, analysis, and discussion, that together with the Mishnah makes up the Talmud. Although ultra-Orthodox men are expected to continue to study other subjects (such as practical Jewish law, ethical instruction, the Prophets and other writings of the Bible, and the weekly *chumash* portion) throughout their lives, Talmud remains the dominant subject of study.

Given their commitment to full participation in Western society, Modern Orthodox Jewish high schools have struggled to make the religious curriculum meaningful to students in a context where secular academics and college prep are more dominant realities for the students (Bieler, 1986; H. Goldberg, 1981; Heilman, 1992; and see, e.g., Pomson, 2011, in the related

context of liberal Jewish day schools). Student engagement in religious subjects such as Talmud and Jewish law (halakha) is particularly low, as the vast network of Jewish laws and regulations often seems arbitrary and confusing to students, something externally imposed over their regular lives (Weiser & Bar-Lev, 1989). In this context, authentic practices may offer a mechanism to engage students in halakha in a way that builds connections between the text-based legal codes and practices that are personally important and relevant to them (see, e.g., Krakowski, 2017).

Ultra-Orthodox schools, in contrast, do not typically suffer from this kind of pervasive lack of student engagement in religious material (even if some individual students are indeed disengaged).[3] Moreover, these schools view their mandate more as an "inculcation of ultra-Orthodox worldview and culture" (Krakowski, 2008b, p. 17) than specific content knowledge acquisition. Ultra-Orthodox schools serve the most traditional and stringent elements of Orthodox Jewry in America. Beginning in elementary school and increasingly in high school, most of the long school day is spent on religious study, while a small portion of the day is reserved for basic secular education. Boys in these communities are expected to continue to engage in religious study throughout the rest of their lives in very prescribed ways. The material that they study in school, therefore, has a clearly articulated context of use, one that is central to the entire endeavor of boys' ultra-Orthodox education. In this sense, the entire program of education is deeply tied to a clear model of authentic knowledge use outside the classroom.

Given the centrality of religious study for men in this community, the acquisition of religious study skills is fraught with importance and pressure. Religious study is so central, in fact, that students who fail to learn how to read biblical and mishnaic Hebrew or who fail to acquire complex Talmud study skills (reading Aramaic, following complex legal arguments, researching the competing textual interpretations of medieval commentators) are at risk of dropping out of the community entirely, a phenomenon known to members of the American ultra-Orthodox community as "going off the *derech*" (going off the path). (See Goldberg, 2004, in particular, on the impact of failing to acquire Hebrew reading fluency on behavioral problems in Orthodox contexts.) This illustrates the deep connection between the content studied in school and the culture of the community; failure to

acquire religious studies content holds tangible social and cultural meaning in students' lives.

Signature Pedagogy and Constituent Authenticity

Much like religious study in ultra-Orthodox communities, when students enter a professional school, they choose to join a professional community. Students in such schools follow a trajectory from the periphery to the interior while being enculturated in the community's norms and dispositions. In both cases, because the learning trajectory students follow is already defined as normative by the surrounding community, and because students' expectations for future use of knowledge are clear, the authenticity of classroom practices does not necessarily reside in these practices' similarity to an external, "real-world," set of practices, but rather in constituting a *component* of such external practices. In contrast to models of authenticity that require classroom activities to simulate or replicate authentic practices, I term this very different type of authenticity constituent authenticity.

Signature Pedagogy: a model of authentic activity in professional education

In a ten-year study of professional education for the Carnegie Foundation, Lee Shulman has extensively addressed problems related to *authentic* classroom activity without ever using the term. Professional education is explicitly designed to prepare students to engage in a community of practice. Professional education is often overlooked in the research on the authenticity of school practices, but it represents an archetype of educational practice situated within a larger cultural superstructure. Professional education is genuinely embedded in an authentic context of use and it explicitly socializes students into the norms and practices of a given field—one that school practitioners assume all students will enter once they complete their schooling. Students attending professional schools are learning material as part of a clear community of practice—they are participating in the culture, without ever leaving school.

Shulman has used the term signature pedagogy to describe key similarities in professional instruction across a wide range of fields (Shulman,

2005b). In the Carnegie study, his team observed that certain instructional formats, such as the Socratic case-study dialogue of the first-year law school classroom or the medical rounds of doctors-in-training, are clearly and unambiguously identified with particular fields. Though this distinctiveness is what makes them "signature," these pedagogic approaches also share certain characteristic features (Shulman, 2008):

- They are pervasive and uniform in their fields.
- They involve fixed routines and rituals.
- They are visible and interactive.
- They each inculcate particular "habits" in students.

Such habits differ between professions. For example, legal training develops habits of mind (thinking like a lawyer), while medical training develops habits of practice (acting like a doctor), while clergy training creates habits of the heart.

Shulman argues that signature pedagogies are found in professional schools precisely because professional schools require more than just understanding; they demand education for practice (Shulman, 2005a). That is to say, professional schools exist not only to teach foundational content in a discipline but also to help students adopt the identities of their chosen fields. Because the students will all enter the same profession after graduation, identity formation can be developed in a uniform and consistent manner. In such contexts, pedagogy must include mechanisms for socialization into a profession's culture and epistemology. As Shulman writes, "[Signature pedagogies] implicitly define what counts as knowledge in the field and how things become known. They define how knowledge is analyzed, criticized, accepted, or discarded. They define the functions of expertise in a field, the locus of authority, and the privileges of rank and standing" (Shulman, 2005b, p. 54).

There is, therefore, something inherent to the features of signature pedagogy that helps situate the learning activity within a broader culture that gives meaning to the activity. Without explicitly using the terminology of norms and dispositions, it is clear that this is indeed what Shulman is referring to. Habits of mind, practice, and heart *are* norms and dispositions (which indeed are sometimes termed habits of mind, e.g., Gresalfi, 2009, p.

364). Thus, what is significant for my purposes about Shulman's research is that it identifies those features of learning environments that situate learning activities within the broader culture that students are joining—that is, it identifies how to make activities a constituent part of a broader authentic set of cultural practices.

How do these specific features embed learning activities in an authentic professional culture? The norms and dispositions inculcated by professional education differ by profession, but in each the pedagogical structure is pervasive and uniform (as suggested by Shulman's term signature). This uniformity is an essential element of enculturation—regardless of which law school an individual attends, she will have had roughly the same formative experiences and will have adopted characteristic "habits of mind" (Falk, 2006) that will smooth her transition into the community of lawyers. These fixed routines and rituals structure learning *explicitly and visibly* along specific preset norms of behavior and attitude. Ritualizing learning practices in a public manner provides a platform for explicit affiliation with a community of practice.

These features do not need to simulate adult practices. Though context of use is essential to the learning process, most professional training bears little resemblance to real-world activities within the profession itself. Law schools, for example, do an excellent job of teaching students to *think* like lawyers, but law school activities don't actually resemble those found in everyday professional legal practice. Indeed, the Socratic methodology found in these classrooms has been criticized for this reason (e.g., Hyland & Kilcommins, 2009).

Despite the criticism, these signature features socialize students and provide them with the essential skills to progress to more advanced stages of learning, and ultimately to mature participation in the authentic activities of the domain. Precisely because attending a professional school signifies students' intention to have a clear end point of full participation in a particular community of practice, the skill-building aspects of student activities do not need to resemble actual mature practice—there will be plenty of time for that later. The fact that students now act *within* the larger cultural superstructure of lawyers and doctors allows them to work on essential skills in a context that renders that work meaningful. It is critical that lawyers develop certain habits of mind and modes of reasoning (e.g.,

Harner, 2011), but these foundational skills might not be easily acquired if the classroom actually resembled the real world. (Indeed, this is a common challenge for teachers in traditionally authentic classrooms; see Krakowski, 2017.)

To be clear: I am not arguing that any practice, no matter how retrograde, can be magically made meaningful and useful for learning if students all expect to participate eventually in a common culture. Rather, each profession has certain skills that are central to its practice but that cannot be acquired by simulation. These signature features embed skill-building practices in a cultural setting. Shulman's heuristic of signature pedagogy offers a particularly clear example of constituent authenticity that provides a road map to the types of features essential to making a classroom skill-building activity an explicit component of a broader cultural context. The public and signature nature of these educational structures serves to unify and reify abstract notions of what it means to be a member of a professional community of practice, while students engage in practices that might be useful for learning but may also otherwise be boring or nonmeaningful.

This is the case for *chumash* as well; without a larger cultural superstructure in which there is a clear end point of full participation in a particular community of practice, *chumash* learning might just be drilled practice and interleaved repetition—tasks that are notoriously difficult and discouraging for many students. However, as I will argue in the following section, boys' *chumash* learning in first grade is the authentic first (formal)[4] stage of a larger cultural activity—one that extends from childhood through adulthood. Boys in *chumash* class begin the process of enculturation into the practices of the Orthodox Jewish world, while acquiring the basic skills necessary to advance within that context.

This cultural framework relieves much of the tension between meaningfulness and learning. In constituently authentic classrooms, activities are not made meaningful by emulating meaningful activities; they are intrinsically meaningful because they define and shape what it means to be a member of this community. Because students live within this culture, meaning does not need to be artificially provided, and as such, types of learning structures that might in other contexts be repetitive, rote, and meaningless can be introduced without automatically stifling student engagement and interest.

Chumash in Ultra-Orthodox Schools

The description of *chumash* learning provided in this section comes from a broad ethnography of three boys' ultra-Orthodox elementary schools, two Chasidic and one yeshivish, in which sixty hours of videotaped observation were collected from eleven classes spanning first through eighth grades.[5] Classroom activities were broken into units for analysis in ways that emphasize the cultural features of classroom practices, closely examining the socializing and worldview-orienting features of classroom scripts, routines, and activities.

Elementary chumash *study*

There are two parts of the ultra-Orthodox school day, religious and secular, and they are not given equal weight; religious study takes up the morning and early afternoon while secular study (e.g., math and language arts) takes up only the late afternoon. In the religious part of the day, examined here, the central units analyzed were related to the study of *chumash* and the study of Gemara, which make up the bulk of classroom activity for younger and older students, respectively. Aside from these two subjects, classes also focus on prayer, Jewish law, the weekly Bible portion, and the Prophets. One particularly significant unit of activity, ubiquitous throughout the day and frequently intertwined with many other activities, consists of brief explicit lessons in morals, ethics, and spirituality. I have argued elsewhere (Krakowski, 2008a; 2013) that these religious classroom activities are generally more complex and contextually connected than their counterparts in the secular part of the day and that these schools deliberately strip secular learning activities of larger worldview significance.

Here, I'd like to focus on just *chumash*, the central learning activity in first grade. In *chumash*, students learn to read the Hebrew text, translate it, recognize the grammar, and understand the story of the text. The process involves aspects of lecture, singsong reading, call and response, translation of text, partnered reading, and drilling of Hebrew vocabulary and grammar concepts. These components are intermingled with one another, and the rebbe (religious instructor—always male) will often cycle through them numerous times.

To demonstrate how *chumash* socializes students while providing a structure for important foundational skill acquisition, I provide a close reading of an excerpt of a videotape on a first-grade yeshivish classroom.[6] In this excerpt, students review verses from the *chumash* story of Noah and the flood, which deal with how the wickedness of man prompted God's decision to destroy the world. The excerpt, six and a half minutes long, focuses on their treatment of one verse (out of four that they reviewed that day) that describes the wickedness of the "sons of the Elohim," who were kidnapping women to be their wives: "And the sons of the Elohim saw the daughters of men, that they were good, and they took wives for themselves from among all that they chose" (Genesis 6:2).

Throughout the class, the rebbe circulated throughout the room, holding flash cards with two or three Hebrew words from the text, color-coded to indicate the different parts of the Hebrew word that translate into separate English words, or to indicate the word's root, tense, or gender.

For this verse, the rebbe begins by asking an individual student to identify the root of the Hebrew word "and they saw" (*va-yir'u*, from the three Hebrew letters *reish*, *aleph*, and *hei*) by pointing to a previous verse that contains a word with the same root. He points out the function of three additional Hebrew letters contained in the word *va-yir'u*: the prefix *vov*, which means "and," and the *yud*-prefix/*vov*-suffix combination that renders the verb third-person plural ("they"):

> Rebbe: Alright—I need a smart person; look in the next *pasuk* [verse], I need the *shoresh* [root] letters of the next *pasuk*'s first word. I don't want you to read the first word yet, I want three *shoresh* letters of the next word; don't get tricked by the beginning or the ends of the word. Don't be tricked, I want three letters of the first word in *pasuk beis* [verse 2]. Look in *pasuk beis*, I want the three *shoresh* letters. Take a moment to look; don't be tricked by the beginning letters or last latter, the prefix or suffix letters. I need three letters for the *shoresh*. Reuven Benyamin,[7] you want to try it?
>
> Student: *Reish, aleph, hei*.
>
> Rebbe: Beautiful! That's the right answer! *Reish aleph hei*. How many boys knew *reish aleph hei*? Raise your hand—beautiful! *Reish aleph hei*

are the three *shoresh* letters. Alright, Reuven Benyamin, now comes the hard question: What does it mean, *reish aleph hei*? What's the word?

Student: "Saw."

Rebbe: Beautiful, excellent, SAW. Reuven, very nice. Let's say *pasuk beis* together—everyone—and the *vov* at the end makes it THEY, the *yud* with the *vov* at the end has nothing to do with AND. I want Levi to say the *pasuk* AND Shimshon. But does that *vov* at the end make it AND? No, it makes it THEY.

At the rebbe's instruction, the class chants/sings the verse together in Hebrew, interspersed every few words with the English translation they have previously learned. The capitalization is meant to indicate the cadence of the chant in which the verses are read:

Rebbe: Okay, alright, let's say *pasuk beis* together:

Students all together, slowly with the rebbe: *Va-yir'u bnei haeloKIM*—and the sons of the rulers SAW, *es benos haADOM*—the daughters of the MAN, *ki TO-vos heina*—that they were good. *Vayikchu lahem nashim*—and they took for themselves wives, *miKOL asher BA-CHARU*—from whoever they CHOSE.

The rebbe then points out that another Hebrew word from the verse, "they chose" (*bacharu*), also has a *vov*-suffix denoting the third person plural:

Rebbe: And here's the word *bacharu*. *Bacharu* means "chose," the *vov*—THEY chose, the *vov* at the end makes it "they." The *vov* at the end makes it "they." Okay, the *vov* at the end makes it "they," except, Yosef Chaim, can you tell me again where does it say the word THEY? Where does it say—which part of the word makes it THEY?

Student: The *vov*.

The rebbe asks first one and then the other half of the class (previously grouped as the "cholent pots" and "lukshen kugels") to chant the verse together again:

Rebbe: Alright, I want only my cholent pots—just the cholent pots—to say *pasuk beis*, not the lukshen kugels, just the cholent pots; let's say *pasuk beis*. Go ahead, all of my cholent pots.

Half the class together, with only a little help from the rebbe: *Va-yir'u bnei haeloKIM*—and the sons of the rulers SAW, *es benos haADOM*—the daughters of the MAN, *ki TO-vos heina*—that they were good. *Vayikchu lahem nashim*—and they took for themselves wives, *miKOL asher BACHARU*—from whoever they CHOSE.

Rebbe: Okay, alright, cholent pots, that was very good, but I think that the lukshen kugels sound a little more heated up, I think they're gonna do a fine job too. Alright, I want my cholent pots, okay, this side of the room, lukshen kugels, I mean.

Half the class together, with only a little help from the rebbe: *Va-yir'u bnei haeloKIM*.

Rebbe: Way to go, lukshen kugels! And the sons of the rulers SAW, *es benos haADOM*—the daughters of the MAN, *ki TO-vos heina*—that they were good. *Vayikchu lahem nashim*—and they took for themselves wives, *miKOL asher BACHARU*—from whoever they CHOSE.

The rebbe now turns to the content of the verse, placing it in context of the following biblical verse ("And the Lord said, 'My spirit will not abide in man forever, for he too is flesh, and his days will be one hundred and twenty years'") and of a rabbinic story associated with the biblical character Enosh (Genesis 5:6–11):

Rebbe: Alright, this did not make *Hashem* [God] very happy—both sides, the lukshen kugels did very nicely, yes—*Hashem* was not very happy with what he saw, when people were kidnapping, and not only that they were kidnapping other people's wives, no problem they were [unintelligible], they were *chas ve-shalom* [God forbid] killing the husbands to steal their wives. That's terrible! People were doing *avodah zorah* [idol worship], and they were stealing each other's wives, and they were killing. What happened to the beautiful world that *Hashem* created?

Hashem was not very happy with the people. *Hashem* was a little bit upset. And so *pasuk gimmel* [verse 3], let's take a look what *Hashem*

said. *Hashem* said, "I'm gonna give the world one hundred and twenty years to do *teshuva* [to repent] and I hope by then they will change their bad ways and become good again. I'm hoping that after one hundred and twenty years that the people will do *teshuva*," right? They're not gonna live forever otherwise. What is *Hashem*, Shloimeh Zalman, gonna send if they don't become good again? What's *Hashem* gonna send to the world?

Student: A *mabul* [flood].

Rebbe: A *mabul*. *Hashem* is gonna send a flood, right. As a matter of fact, what happened in the time of Enosh? Already when the *avodah zara* started, what did *Hashem* do? Dov?

Student: He destroyed one-third of the world.

Rebbe: He destroyed one-THIRD of the world. He was hoping—if I destroy just part of the world, [what] the other parts will do?

Students together: *Teshuva*.

Rebbe: *Teshuva*. And did they do *teshuva*?

Students together: No.

Rebbe: Shloimeh Zalman, and did they do *teshuva*?

Student: No.

Rebbe: No. They did not. Okay, let's take a look at *pasuk gimmel*.

In reviewing this verse, the rebbe focused on the grammar and meaning of two particular words, asked the class to chant the verse and its translation several times, and briefly discussed its meaning in the context of the larger biblical story. In other classes where students learned new verses, rather than continuing the process of gaining proficiency in previously seen verses, the singsong would have been conducted in a call-and-response format, with the rebbe singing and translating each clause, and the students repeating it after him, and they would have repeated it many more times. Though not demonstrated in this excerpt, *rabbeim* also frequently ask specific individual students to read all or part of a verse, and they focus on other aspects of grammar, such as tense and word gender. Finally, students are regularly grouped in pairs (the traditional *hevruta* structure) to read and translate a set of verses to each other in the same singsong format.

What Is Learned in *Chumash* Study?

This excerpt illustrates many of the distinctive features inherent in first-grade *chumash* learning: a choral reading structure, frequent repetition, a public and interactive pedagogical structure, and pervasive enculturating content. These features address a number of different implicit and explicit learning goals. One way of dividing these goals is in terms of those that deal with reading fluency, grammar, and vocabulary, and those that deal with the relationship between classroom and culture.

Chumash reading fluency

First, how effective is this approach in giving students actual competency in reading *chumash*? Because the goal of *chumash* instruction includes comprehension and language learning, and students ultimately use the *chumash* text in sophisticated analytical ways, reading automaticity is essential to free up cognitive space for interpretation and analysis.

There are no current statistics available for success and failure rates of *chumash* competency in ultra-Orthodox schools; this is a small community, and they are studying a subject of interest only to community members. Moreover, success or failure in this domain is readily apparent within the community, and community members generally do not feel the need for outside analysis. Anecdotal evidence makes clear that some individual students do fail to grasp the essential skill of reading and translating *chumash*.[8] Nonetheless, many aspects of *chumash* activity structures mirror methods that have demonstrated efficacy in other literacy contexts, giving us good reason to believe that these methods may be generally effective here as well.[9]

a. *Practice*: The choral reading structure, with its emphasis on frequent repetition of the words and translations, broken up by clauses and phrases, accomplishes one thing that is unanimously agreed to be essential for fluent reading: practice. Over the course of one class that introduces a new verse, students may repeat, either together or individually, the verse ten to fifteen times, providing the practice

and repetition that is essential for the development of reading automaticity (Samuels, 1988, p. 759).

b. *Fluency*: *Chumash* study combines aspects of the unassisted repeated reading method (Samuels, 1979) with modeling and reading-while-listening (Heckelman, 1969), a relatively common combination (e.g., Allington, 1983; Dowhower, 1987). In particular, the emphasis on the repetition of specific demarcated phrases with appropriate intonation (given by the singsong) may have benefits for fluency as well as comprehension (see Kuhn & Stahl, 2000). Finally, in *chumash* learning, the teacher provides a content explanation prior to modeling and repeated reading to foreground comprehension, something that has also been found to be effective in promoting reading fluency (Hoffman, 1987).

c. *Retention*: Practice in learning *chumash* is also structured to aid in retention, in that the practice is typically spaced and repeated over numerous days, taking advantage of the spacing effect (Cepeda et al., 2006). For example, in the previous excerpt, students were cycling back to verses they had explored throughout the previous week. Similarly, by varying the skill to be practiced frequently throughout the session (for example, switching from vocabulary translation to reading practice to content description to grammar), the practice is substantially interleaved, another feature that is generally understood to improve retention (Taylor & Rohrer, 2010).

d. *Flexibility*: Finally, the structure of *chumash* learning is very flexible and provides substantial opportunities for differentiation. Students of differing abilities may be asked to read individually with greater or lesser frequency; when *hevruta* occurs, pairs may be grouped to facilitate individual attention. Further, students can be asked to practice in a variety of ways, including writing on the board or drawing, singing together, and reading out loud.

Why are these features important? Many of them, while efficacious, are also—for lack of a better term—boring. Spacing or interleaving material may be demonstrably better than other methods of retention in the lab, but they aren't particularly motivating or intrinsically meaningful; the process

is not tied to specific content in meaningful ways. And yet, to build skill automaticity, there are few better methods than practice and structured repetition. I argue, however, that this dilemma is resolved by the larger superstructure of enculturation within which these activities are situated.

Enculturation

Students in *chumash* class learn a wide range of content, much of which directly relates to fundamental conceptions about the world, their religion, and the nature of the *chumash* text they are studying. Much as the pedagogical structure of math instruction can have an impact on student dispositions regarding math and conceptions of what it means to do math, the way in which students study *chumash* significantly impacts student conceptions and dispositions regarding *chumash*. Specifically, *chumash* learning inculcates two types of dispositions in students: dispositions regarding the nature of the *chumash* text and dispositions regarding students' own relationship to the *chumash* text.

» Dispositions regarding the nature of the *chumash* text

Conceptions regarding the nature of the *chumash* text are primarily epistemological; they relate to students' understandings of the nature of the knowledge they are acquiring in *chumash* class. Naturally, this epistemology reflects ultra-Orthodox beliefs regarding the Bible. Just as a Christian scholar or an academic Bible scholar would study *chumash* content in ways that reflect their underlying assumptions about the text, the way in which these students are asked to engage with the text reflects ultra-Orthodox assumptions.

a. *The meaning of the text is fixed and mediated by tradition rather than open to individual interpretation*: As in the previous excerpt, *rabbeim* in ultra-Orthodox classrooms present the meaning of the biblical text according to traditional readings expressed in rabbinic commentaries, rather than, for example, a careful individual reading of the text.

For example, the rebbe translates the evil *b'nei haelohim* as "the children

of the rulers," and while the word Elohim does mean "ruler," it more frequently means "God" or "Gods," an obviously problematic interpretation from an Orthodox Jewish perspective, but one that makes more sense textually given the contrast to the daughters of man. The rebbe, it turns out, is following the first of two interpretations given by the medieval commentator Rashi. Similarly, the rebbe explains their wickedness in terms of killing husbands, kidnapping their wives, and engaging in idol worship. Of those, only "kidnapping wives" has any possible source in the text itself ("and they took for themselves wives, from whoever they chose"). Again, this is a reference to a midrashic[10] gloss on the story. Finally, his description of God destroying a third of the world in previous times, in order to get the rest of the world to repent, also derives from a midrashic source, rather than the text itself. In ultra-Orthodox *chumash* study, these traditional interpretations of the text are presented as truth, and the contrast between what is actually written in the text and the story the students are taught creates an implicit understanding that the text must only be understood through traditional sources—not on its own.[11]

b. *The text is assumed to be a literal description of events*: A pervasive underlying assumption in elementary ultra-Orthodox *chumash* study is that all of the events truly happened the way they are described (unless tradition specifically dictates that the text is allegorical). In the previous excerpt (along with the broader story), the rebbe's presentation assumes that the narrative actually happened as described—that the flood really covered the entire world, killing everything but Noah and the animals (who all miraculously fit on the ark). In lessons on the following verse, students learned of giants on Earth who mate with normal humans, and in other verses in this section they are taught of God's direct communication with Noah. All of these remarkable occurrences were taught as actual historical events, shaping students' understanding of the text.[12]

» Dispositions regarding students' own relationship to the *chumash* text

The second type of disposition inculcated in first-grade *chumash* learning relates to students' own personal interaction with *chumash*.

c. *It is the practice that is of value, not its component skills*: By integrating vocabulary, grammar, and reading practice with the study of the text itself, ultra-Orthodox schools send an important message regarding the purpose of *chumash* study. One might imagine that students would not begin in-depth study of the *chumash* text until they have mastered biblical grammar and have acquired basic vocabulary. This is, in fact, the way that some Modern Orthodox and Conservative schools teach *chumash*. Alternatively, one might focus on the stories contained in the *chumash* and not bother with Hebrew at all—there are schools that do this as well.

Blending the activity in this way retains an element of authenticity; despite the fact that singsong choral reading is not found outside of this context, engagement with the authentic text itself in order to learn grammar and vocabulary publicly points to the ultimate mature expression of *chumash* learning. Students' *chumash* skills will not be needed for some other content, or for wider knowledge of grammar systems; rather, they are expected to continue to study this exact text throughout their lives.

d. *The text has active moral and religious implications:* Finally, *chumash* content contains many basic principles, norms, and beliefs that structure how ultra-Orthodox community members understand the way that the world works; these are expressed as relevant in the children's present lives as well as being historical truths. For example, in the story of Noah, the students are taught that God gets angry or happy with people based on their good and bad actions, repentance can change God's mind to forestall punishment, people can die because of their sins, that if you act badly bad things will happen to you, and that taking revenge is a sin. They are also taught theology through this textual study. In one of the subsequent verses, "God was sad unto His heart," the rebbe makes a special point of stressing, and having the students repeat, that God doesn't really have a heart—this is just an expression. These and many other lessons organically contained within the *chumash* learning structure shape student understandings of their own lives in relation to the lesson of the *chumash* text.[13]

To sum up: the structure and content of this activity adds a tremendous amount of complexity to the otherwise straightforward task of learning how to read and translate biblical Hebrew in order to be able to study *chumash*. Students do repeatedly practice vocabulary and grammar, but they practice in a singsong pattern, from the text itself, while learning moral and theological lessons, developing a narrative and communal identity around the text based on both its content and the epistemology of its study.

Authenticity Reconsidered

Is the practice of *chumash* in ultra-Orthodox school an authentic practice? Not if we require authenticity to faithfully replicate, or simulate, the ordinary practices of adult *chumash* study. In adult practices there is no singsong chanting of the verses, the grammar and translation are already known, and the basics of reading need no practice. Yet *chumash* study is clearly authentic in an entirely different sense: as a pedagogical practice deeply embedded in a very specific context of use, which it works to reinforce in myriad ways, epistemologically, theologically, and structurally.

Chumash Learning as a Signature Pedagogy: Signature Pedagogy as Constituent Authenticity

Although it appears in an early elementary rather than a professional educational context, *chumash* learning accords closely with Shulman's description of signature pedagogical structures. A boys' first-grade classroom in almost any ultra-Orthodox school will include some variant of this activity, practiced in essentially the same way. The pedagogy is therefore pervasive and immediately recognizable: upon entering the classroom a visitor familiar with ultra-Orthodox schools will have no doubt what is being studied, without looking at the *chumashim* on the desks for confirmation. Aside from uniformity of practice across different schools and classrooms, *chumash* learning is relatively uniform in its execution, maintaining the fixed routines and rituals that Shulman describes as essential to signature pedagogies.

The activity is also public and interactive, requiring a high degree of performance and engagement. (Which is not to say that it is necessarily

always effective at this task. As with all pedagogical structures, students are capable of nonparticipation and weak engagement.) Finally, as demonstrated previously, *chumash* learning inculcates distinctive habits of heart, practice, and mind (or, *dispositions*).

Like professional education, *chumash* study also possesses constituent authenticity. Because the students are part of a broader Orthodox culture that has clearly articulated normative expectations for students' lives (and within which *chumash* study is an essential practice), their participation in *chumash* class in first grade is given meaning by that broader culture. As noted at the outset, because the larger meaning of the activity is provided by a broader superstructure, the activity becomes *part* of real-world *chumash*, rather than an emulation of it.

Because it adheres to a clear set of cultural expectations, the study of *chumash* significantly impacts the narrative that students develop about what it is they are doing when they study *chumash*. As described previously, this narrative is explicitly and implicitly communicated in classroom practices. Students acquire norms relating to the methodology of *chumash* study, the relevance of its content, and the relevance of its practice to their lives. Just as in professional schools, the end goal of instruction is clear—knowledge use in the context of the professional community students will eventually join—the end goal of *chumash* learning in ultra-Orthodox schools is clear as well: participation in the full spectrum of adult ultra-Orthodox religious life. This provides significant authenticity to classroom pedagogy and activity, not because it resembles mature *chumash* learning, but because it is embedded in a larger cultural context in which the practice of *chumash* learning will be utilized.

Beyond chumash

The role of signature pedagogy in creating constituent authenticity has implications for the acquisition of foundational skills in a variety of domains in Jewish education. Adults in haredi communities study *chumash* (and other texts that draw on *chumash*) for a variety of reasons and in a variety of ways: in order to acquire a deeper understanding of their religion, to support in-depth Talmud study, to deduce religious and ethical principles, and to fulfill the religious requirement of Torah study. Boys

in first grade are expected to engage in all of these practices eventually, but they first need to acquire a basic fluency with the text. Because the most effective way to acquire fluency is through this type of repetition and choral reading, and those practices don't resemble adult practices, a different approach is needed to make the practices religiously meaningful. Constituent authenticity is a particularly good fit in this regard precisely because the activity structures need not closely resemble authentic practices. Because foundational skills must be automatic in order to replicate authentic activities (one cannot model the practices of a historian, a poet, or a literature expert without first knowing how to read, for example), it is not possible to simulate authentic adult activities while first developing these skills.

This is where Shulman's account of signature pedagogy serves as a productive point of departure. To develop foundational skills in any Jewish studies domain, activities must include the type of structured repetition that promotes fluency. But to make those practices meaningful they need to include some element of public performance, be uniform across contexts, and should involve fixed routines and rituals. These elements help create a group culture around the learning practice that can explicitly point to an assumed future engagement in the practice. To those features I would add a clear account of the epistemology of the learning practice (e.g., What is the nature of this knowledge?) and a clear articulation within classroom discourse of the expected contexts of use, both of which are found in *chumash* study.

Chumash learning in ultra-Orthodox Jewish schools serves as an exemplar of what this might look like at the elementary level, while professional education is an exemplar of more advanced constituent authenticity. In both, foundational skills can be acquired in ways that do not replicate or simulate real-world practice, yet are meaningful due to the broader cultural context within which the learning practices are embedded.

This is something that can be profitably employed in a wide range of Jewish educational contexts, provided that schools and communities can identify common expectations for their students. If schools that struggle to make religious studies meaningful can identify common experiences and expectations *beyond* school, they can also start to create pedagogical models that explicitly point to that broader context of use. If important

foundational skills can be embedded in signature pedagogies that are meaningfully associated with mature practices, then students may experience religious subjects as intrinsically meaningful, rather than as an external imposition.

NOTES

1. Haredi here refers to both Chasidic and yeshivish schools. Two of the schools in this study were Chasidic and one yeshivish. The example provided in this paper comes from the yeshivish school, but it is consistent with the findings from the two other schools, as well as the many other yeshivish and Chasidic schools in which I have conducted research.

2. The cultural and religious expectations for boys and girls in haredi society are quite different, and consequently, so is their education. Because of this, analyses of pedagogy for boys and girls in haredi schools must be conducted separately.

3. Engagement problems in haredi schools tend to occur in secular classes, where it is difficult to make the material meaningful while the structure of the school and the community worldview all signal that the secular material is not meaningful. See Krakowski (2013) for more on this.

4. The enculturation certainly takes place in numerous informal contexts before schooling begins as well.

5. The universality of these practices is apparent in that nearly every American haredi school that I have observed, including both Chasidic and yeshivish schools, has utilized some version of these practices, with minor adaptations.

6. There are subtle, but significant, differences between schools in the two streams of ultra-Orthodoxy, yeshivish and Chasidish, but in regard to this excerpt, other than the English—rather than Yiddish—language of instruction, I have observed no significant differences. Because this excerpt is in English it is simply easier to discuss in the paper.

7. All names used are pseudonyms.

8. Note my earlier observation that those who do fail to acquire this skill are at risk of dropping out of the community entirely. Although even then, they may still acquire many of the ancillary content—the moral, theological, epistemological, and identity-building aspects, which may be retained without further participation in the community.

9. In addition, it is assumed by school leaders that *rabbeim* will teach in this way, and if they need help, they are given training and mentoring to successfully teach this way. This reflects the belief by those with the most at stake that these methods actually work.

This doesn't guarantee that they are correct, but it does offer some indication, especially given the literature in these methods in other contexts.

10. Homiletic and exegetical discourses on the biblical text dating back to the third century.

11. This feature of *chumash* practice paves the way for later components of *chumash* learning that students will encounter as they age. As part of the graduated approach toward skill development in *chumash*, students will later learn Rashi script and start to read these very same Rashis on their own (most schools begin this process around the third grade). In most schools, students in the upper years of elementary school are exposed to a greater range of medieval commentaries, but because their focus at that point is Talmud, this is one area where girls (who do not study Talmud) receive a more robust religious education than boys.

12. In theory, *rabbeim* have a good deal of agency in determining which midrashic tales are incorporated into the text, but in practice, over dozens of haredi schools in all sorts of haredi communities, I have seen the same midrashim utilized, with minimal variation—perhaps a function of *rabbeim* making use of the same curricular materials.

13. Although many students will ultimately develop much more nuanced understandings of midrash, this typically does not come through formal instruction in school, but through exposure to more sophisticated commentaries when studying *chumash* as adults.

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