



Jewish Day School Wounds and What We Can Do About Them

Miriam Hirsch

ABSTRACT


This article is based upon a qualitative research study that examined 95 school stories written by Jewish female teacher candidates in an undergraduate education course. Many candidates wrote inspirational or humorous stories about growth and development or a special teacher. However, over one third of the narratives described painful Jewish day schooling episodes with insensitive teachers, stinging rebukes, or public shaming. The findings argue for the enhancement of Jewish educator preparation with attention to professionalization of classroom management and interrogation of assumptions from schooling biographies. This study challenges teacher educators in the liminal space of educator preparation as teacher candidates shift from personal lived schooling experience into professional practice.

KEYWORDS

Preservice teacher education; school stories; wounding

Mrs. Hummingbird strolled the school building during rehearsal time to observe and oversee all the theatrical preparations. As usual she entered the lunchroom where we were rehearsing so she could ensure that our practice was progressing. She approached the front of the stage. I remember how loud her voice was as she said, “Goldstein, SHUT UP!”

The music and singing stopped. I froze. My eyes swelled with salty hot tears and I quickly stared at the wooden panels that composed the stage floor. Some girls thought it was funny and giggled, while my friends in the room were silent and blushed with me. Silence ensued. “That’s it?” I wondered. I was waiting for more. I was expecting her to offer an explanation for why she had chosen to humiliate me this way. But she said nothing more. She looked at me for the longest ten seconds in my life and then motioned to the instrumentalist to resume the music. The music began again, but I followed my teacher’s directive and did not sing. I was mortified but I held back my tears because I did not want the others to think I was overly sensitive. Couldn’t she have just pulled me aside and told me to sing quietly? Wouldn’t she have achieved the same result without having shamed me in public? (Teacher candidate school story)

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This article is based upon a qualitative research study that examined 95 school stories from Jewish female preservice teacher candidates collected from 2006–2011 as an assignment in an undergraduate educator preparation course. While each story is unique and personal, generalities and patterns in the schooling experiences offer insight and recommendations for Jewish educator preparation.

Humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives. Thus, the study of narrative is the study of the ways humans experience the world. This general notion translates into the view that education is the construction and reconstruction of personal and social stories; teachers and learners are storytellers and characters in their own and other's stories. (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2)

The goal of this study is to utilize the set of preservice teacher candidate school stories in order to illuminate the lived experience of Jewish day school and to suggest reforms for American Jewish teacher education. This analysis of school stories sheds light on the dark places, policies, and practices of Jewish education for reflection and remediation.

Definitions

Throughout this article, the term *teacher candidates* refers to the preservice teacher candidates enrolled in an accredited undergraduate educator preparation program. *Students* refers to the candidates or their classmates as children in K-12 educational settings. The decision to use the term teacher candidate rather than the colloquial “student teacher” is predicated on the language of the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP), which is the current national accreditation body for teacher education in the United States. The term *teachers* references the professional teacher in his/her classroom position, and *teacher educators* refers to those individuals who prepare teacher candidates within a formal educator preparation program.

The next section presents background on school story research in teacher education to situate the inquiry in context.

Review of the literature: School stories in teacher education

Autobiographical schooling experiences of future educators may yield significant influence on later practices and decisions in the classroom. “The more one reads studies of teacher belief, the more strongly one suspects that this piebald of personal knowledge lies at the very heart of teaching” (Kagan, 1992, p. 85). Preservice teacher candidates enter educator preparation programs armed with a storehouse of memories, assumptions, and beliefs derived in part from their 12-plus years of schooling, often referred to as

the “apprenticeship of observation” (Lortie, 1975, p. 61). Crow (1987), Richardson (1996, 2003), and Levin and He (2008) argue that such beliefs actually filter the professional knowledge teacher candidates acquire, process, and retain. Thus, pursuing inquiry of the stories can be instrumental for both teacher candidates and teacher educators in order to deepen understanding and insight into the formative experiences that may affect educational growth and professional development.

The composition of autobiographical narrative accounts in teacher education refines skills of reflective praxis and critical inquiry. Storytelling of school stories allows looking backwards in order to look forwards. Jersild (1955) and Goethals, Howard, and Sanders (2004) suggest that teacher candidates must have a keen understanding of themselves to empathize and build relationships with their future students. “The teacher’s understanding and acceptance of himself is the most important requirement in any effort he makes to help students know themselves and to gain healthy attitudes of self-acceptance” (Jersild, 1955, p. 3). School story narratives are also a means to challenge knowledge structures and interrogate schooling practices (Ben-Peretz, 1995; Boyd & Noblit, 2015; Greene, 1994; Phillips, 2001; Schön, 1983). Narrative “invites the reader to interpret, question, and wonder about the ‘what might have been’ and ‘what could be’” (Phillips, 2001, p. 263)?

School stories may be especially transformative at the juncture between preservice preparation and new teacher induction. At this intersection when the individual moves along the continuum from student to teacher candidate to teacher, the candidate has the opportunity to safely review her stores of first hand personal knowledge and probe these memories in order to reframe experience from a more knowledgeable and mature vantage point. The timing for the task, immediately prior to the candidate’s launch into the formal classroom environment, offers unique perspective within educator preparation for both the candidate and the teacher educator.

Educational researchers working in the area of preservice teacher education school story research have explored discipline specific narratives such as mathematics school stories (Ellsworth & Buss, 2000; Guillaume & Kirtman, 2010; Latterell & Wilson, 2016; Silva & Roddick, 2001), literacy school stories (Johnson, 2008), and physical education stories (Allison, Pissanos, & Sakola, 1990; Curtner-Smith, 2006; Haynes, Miller, & Varea, 2016; Morgan & Hansen, 2008). Some teacher education scholars examine autobiographical schooling narratives thematically; for example, engaging preservice teacher candidates in the construction of brief written autobiographies to foster the development of culturally responsive pedagogy (Gunn, Bennett, Evans, Peterson, & Welsh, 2013; Morton & Bennett, 2010). This inquiry differs in that the story narratives are not academic subject or pedagogic theme specific. The school stories were all written as part of a general course

requirement in an educator preparation program for Jewish female candidates. The assignment addresses the call of Pomson (1999, 2000), who advocates for the specific importance of teacher narrative in Jewish teacher educational reform. “We want to suggest that a significant factor in impeding such change has been the absence of textured and contextualized accounts” (Pomson, 1999, p. 17). This study mines the school stories of teacher candidates to provide clear examples of specific practices, policies, and communication strategies that pained or troubled the teacher candidates from their own schooling experiences.

Theoretical framework

This study is framed by the theoretical perspectives of Jersild (1955), Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2002), and Greene (2001) who bring insight into the nature of wounding experiences in school settings, and the impact and potential of these experiences in effecting educational reform.

Jersild’s (1955) avers that unless teachers face up to their own hurts, they will be ineffective at understanding and assisting their students. Moreover, he claims that in a class of 40 students, there are 40 students in a physical sense, but psychologically, there are many more. “Each child brings to his present state the child (or children) he once was, the child he now is, and the child, perhaps the impossible child, he is striving to be” (Jersild, 1955, p. 55). Jersild speaks of the “ghosts of old hurts, the souls of agonies of an earlier day,” which live on in lives of children and teachers.

In his landmark study of almost 1,000 school teachers, Jersild (1955) isolates several themes related to teachers’ lived experiences of schooling—including anxiety, loneliness, meaninglessness, and hostility—that may be enacted in their classrooms. For example, intense evaluation, social pressure, and fears surrounding image, intelligence, popularity, and failure can produce strong feelings of anxiety in school settings. Schools contribute to loneliness when they dismiss feelings, asking individuals to hold back tears and swallow rage, fear, and pride. “To do this is like swallowing a sword” (p. 69). Meaninglessness is a form of despondency that presents when people cannot find the personal implication of what they learn and teach. Jersild suggests that this “means an effort to achieve a better integration of thinking and feeling on the part of both children and adults” (p. 81). Hostility may play out when teachers arbitrarily impose harsh deadlines and arbitrary academic requirements, or display sneering and disparaging attitudes to authority. Not facing him/herself in these areas, the teacher may tacitly model these attitudes and dispositions in the classroom with his/her students.

Jersild's work supports the personal examination of emotional life of teachers' experiences of school in order to prevent the misdirection of the emotion onto children.

When a teacher feels angry, hurt, abused, spiteful, vengeful, unfairly treated, full of grievance, and the like, there are two facts that are important. One is that he feels this way, another is that this feeling is directed toward or against something or someone (Jersild, 1955, p. 72).

The author recommends that teachers utilize humility and compassion to address the potentially harmful emotions that threaten to impact their students. "A teacher's understanding of others can be only as deep as the wisdom he possesses when he looks inward upon himself" (Jersild, 1955, p. 83).

Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2002) add to Jersild's focus on the teacher's introspective approach with their description of the transformational properties of school wounds. To understand their perspective, it is important to define their use of the term *wound*:

What exactly is a wound? It's hard to say. Is it an illness, an injury, or an event? Is it a disappointment, a problem, a "disorienting" (Mezirow, 1991) dilemma, a crisis? Is it graffiti declaring "the principal sucks!"? Is it a parent or a teacher confronting a principal at a public event? Is it vague suspicion, or outright public condemnation in the press, on account of questionable performance? Is it the ignominy of one's school being publicly singled out as the lowest performer on standards-based achievement tests? Is it physical and emotional exhaustion from being too many things to too many people? Is it feeling as if one's role, personal beliefs, and actions are simply an empty strategy for getting through an administrative day? Is it when the leader acts as though he is something he is not? (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002, p. 15)

In their investigation of how educational leaders respond to wounds received from conflicts with colleagues, parents, students, and supervisors, Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2002) compare wounding experiences to a double-edged sword: The wounds can enmesh a person in crisis or be the potent catalyst for growth. While conflict and dilemma are constant and natural parts of educational life, the authors suggest "the meaning of the wound can change with time; the sword can be turned" (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002, p. 13). As Bullough (2008) explains, "'Sticks and stones can break my bones, but words can never hurt me,' is of course a terribly hurtful lie, words destroy, but they also create" (p. 2). Ackerman and Malin-Ostrowski argue that through the process of telling and retelling their stories, the wounded are able to reformulate and transform their perception and relationships with the world.

Educational philosopher Maxine Greene (2001) adds to the orientation of Jersild and Ackerman and Malin-Ostrowski as she empowers educational reform through the synthesis of imagination and narrative. She pushes for

teachers and their students to use their imaginations to imagine the world as if it were otherwise, “to become aware of alternatives to the given, the ordinary course of things.”

I want to remind you how important it is to stay in touch with our own narratives, what we feel to be authentic in our addresses to the world around. It is so easy to give way to what is taken for granted as efficient and acceptable. It is so easy to set aside our particular modes of sense-making, our dreams of what ought to be.” (Greene, 2001, p. 125)

Greene (2001) argues that teachers and students must recognize that “meanings must be achieved by those with a sense of agency” (p. 124). She wonders how to move people to questioning, awakening them to respond to the human condition, including the injustices, the violence, and the violations so they can endeavor to repair:

I reflect back on imagination and think how I want to connect our imaginative journeys, our efforts to look at things as if they were otherwise, with the struggle for social justice, for what Paulo Friere called “a lovelier world” (1994/1997).” (Greene, 2001, p. 129)

Greene recognizes that such learning happens with the questions that come in the search for self, meaning, and agency. The three perspectives offered by this set of scholarship suggest the dynamic potential of first hand lived wounding experiences to elicit inquiry, insight, and imagination leading to transformation of Jewish educator preparation.

Mode of inquiry

The study employs qualitative research methods to inductively generate themes from across the school narratives. First, using open and axial coding methods (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), close reading of the school stories resulted in the construction of a thematic codebook with themes and subthemes (Table 1). Next, the stories and codebook were reviewed multiple times to achieve thematic saturation, reduction, and clarity. “Good codebooks are developed and refined as the research goes on” (Ryan & Bernard, 2000, p. 781). Similar themes were clustered for data management. For example, stories of a special principal are included in the category of special teacher to address the message that all adult figures in schools function as teachers in a broader sense. “Coding forces the researcher to make judgments about the meanings of contiguous blocks of text” (Ryan & Bernard, 2000, p. 780). The themes and subthemes are organized in terms of patterns of representation. While frequency distributions per theme and sub-theme were tabulated, they were not subject to further statistical manipulation because of the open-ended and idiosyncratic nature of the narratives.

Table 1. Thematic codebook.

Theme	Explanation	Subtheme	Defining Example
Stories of Growth	Stories in which the student describes personal growth and development (cognitive, social, or emotional) within schooling contexts.	I learned a lesson from that experience.	<i>As I sat doing the homework though, I realized that I was wrong, because I had not done anything to stop Lynn from putting Cheryl's knapsack in the garbage. It was on that day that I realized the importance of standing up for someone when she is being mistreated. To this day, I try my best to do so.</i>
		I learned something about myself.	<i>I did not like how it made me feel. I was not only embarrassed that the teacher had caught me, but I was ashamed with myself and that I had even thought to do it.</i>
Stories of Special Teacher	Stories in which the student identified a teacher or adult within schooling contexts who positively impacted their life.	When I teach I will integrate this learning.	<i>I must balance an understanding of my students' weaknesses, while simultaneously pushing them to achieve. Above all, I must motivate my students to succeed, for it is the teacher who cultivates his students' sense of personal motivation, who has truly succeeded in "teaching."</i>
		S/he changed my life.	<i>I am grateful for the risks she took on my behalf and I wish more teachers and administrators were like her, more focused on the individual. If she had not helped me in the way she did, I am certain that my school story would be profoundly different.</i>
		S/he changed me.	<i>Not only did she teach me history, math, and English, but she taught me to accept responsibility for my actions, to fight peer pressure, and to stand up for what I feel is right.</i>
		S/he is my role model.	<i>When I become a teacher and have students of my own I hope that I am able to affect them as profoundly as Rabbi Kimmelman affected me. As a teacher you have a relatively short amount of time to make a large impact.</i>
		I hope to teach like him/her.	<i>Mrs. Cohen showed me that in being an educator one must be compassionate and open-minded, a listener and a friend, a role model and an advisor. It is because of Mrs. Cohen and that first genuine heart-to-heart that I would like to be an educator myself. She knew how to principal, because she recognized the individual in a large institution. I have so much respect for Mrs. Cohen as a person. I truly hope to emulate her informal teaching skills</i>

(Continued)



Table 1. (Continued).

Theme	Explanation	Subtheme	Defining Example
Stories of Wounding	Stories in which the student expressed shame, hostility, fear, discomfort, or physical pain at an action attributed to another person within schooling contexts.	Special teachers in special school	Students felt comfortable approaching the administration regarding any problem they had with the way the school was run or with any questions of a more personal nature. Not only would they be heard out, their suggestions would be weighed with such seriousness that often they were in fact implemented. Students felt like the school belonged to them and the staff was there for their benefit.
		Why did s/he do that?	Why would a teacher ever say something like that? First of all, teachers are not supposed to do that, it's just not fair to anybody else and it's probably illegal. Second, does she not realize that everybody is now going to hate me?
		I was so embarrassed.	When a student was unable to answer a question or did not do the homework that rabbi would yell at and embarrass us in front of the whole class.
		I felt helpless.	The game was not one any girl wanted to play, but the boys did not take this into consideration. If a girl was outside, and the only way you could stay indoors was if you were sick, then the girl was in the game. If a girl refused to run away and just stood still the boys would grab her arms and pull her into the jail.
		Why didn't s/he stand up for me?	Where was my teacher? My taunting classmates and hysterical mother didn't arrive on the scene until much later. I was alone in every sense of the word. My classmates and my mother were not the ones meant to be responsible for me in this situation. But where were the teachers who were supposed to be supervising the playground?
		This had lingering effect on me.	For 6 years after that I did not sing. I was embarrassed of my voice. I always remembered the sting of Ms. Harding's words, even as I joked with friends and made light of my being "tone deaf." Sometimes when I was alone I would hum to myself, but I would never do so in public.
		This contradicts my values.	Yes, there would have been enough people there without me, but the rally was one of the most memorable experiences of my life! I argued that with him and he mocked me and told me that I should think about things next time around.
		I will never teach like that.	As a future educator, I see the importance of reflecting on this story and taking out its significant messages about childhood relationships with the teacher as well as between the peers. It causes me to realize that I must seriously think before I single a child out in class because of the embarrassing and scarring results it can cause.

Data sources

Ninety-five school stories composed by teacher candidates in an undergraduate certified preservice teacher education course during 2006–2011 comprise the data source for this research. The teacher candidates wrote the school stories as an assignment in the course, “Literature of Pedagogy,” developed and taught by the author. The teacher candidates were all Jewish females ranging in age from 18–22, who attended private Jewish schools mostly throughout the United States, with a few from other countries such as Venezuela and Morocco. The school stories are contextualized by typical features of Jewish school organizations, such as hierarchical division between religious and general studies departments, dual curriculum, and politics of parental influence in private schools. The school stories were drawn from the students’ experiences in K-12 school settings and were written across the course of a semester using a writing process approach (Calkins, 1986). Table 2 identifies the setting of the school story from early childhood through high school ($n = 106$ as some stories spanned multiple settings).

The “Literature of Pedagogy” course is centered on classic and contemporary narratives of teaching and learning as a way to provide teacher candidates with representations of teaching outside of fieldwork and student teaching placements, for discussion, reflection, and inquiry. Readings vary by year and range from Esquith’s *There are No Short Cuts* to Khan’s *The One World Schoolhouse*. Some semesters the class read Kohl’s *36 Children* and once the class read McCourt’s *Teacher Man*. Most semesters the class reads *Teacha* by Gerry Alberelli and *White Teacher* by Vivian Gussin Paley. The entire list of all the literature is included in Appendix A. In addition to the weekly reading, written responses, and student-led discussions, the students were encouraged to find and develop a personally meaningful school story as their own unique contribution to this larger body of “literature of pedagogy.”

Through multiple drafts, revision, and peer editing, the students developed a school story narrative that was submitted at the end of the semester. The shortest story was three pages and the longest was 11 pages. The students were encouraged to develop their story nuggets with greater detail and reflection by looking “inward, outward, backward, forward, and situated within place” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 49). The instructor

Table 2. Story context of student cohorts, 2006–2011.

Story Context	<i>n</i>
Early Childhood	7
Elementary	36
Middle School	21
High School	42
Total	106 ^a

Note. ^aSeveral stories spanned multiple context so $n > 95$.

commented on the narratives, sometimes noting simple grammatical errors or awkward phrases, other times asking questions like, “Did you ever tell your parents that the teacher did that?” or “What else do you think that the teacher could have done in that circumstance?” Peer review occurred both in and out of class as student volunteers read from their drafts out loud or traded drafts for formal critique. Students were invited to give consent for their narrative to be part of the school story archive but were informed that the teacher/researcher would not view the consent forms after the semester’s grades were official. Stories that exclusively discussed experiences in public school, seminary in Israel during the gap year, or student teaching experiences were excluded from the study. In cases where the teacher candidate transitioned across multiple schooling contexts, only K-12 experiences were included. 95 narratives met the criteria for inclusion in this study.

Findings

Three themes center the collection of narratives: stories of personal growth, stories of a special teacher, and stories of wounding (Figure 1). The school story themes of personal growth and special teacher illuminate Jewish schooling in positive, inspirational terms, while the wounding stories describe school as a place of anxiety, fear, anger, and pain. The number of stories in Figure 1 exceeds $n = 95$ because in some cases the story had two equally assertive themes. Next, the three themes and associated subthemes are described with further detail integrating evidence from the school stories.

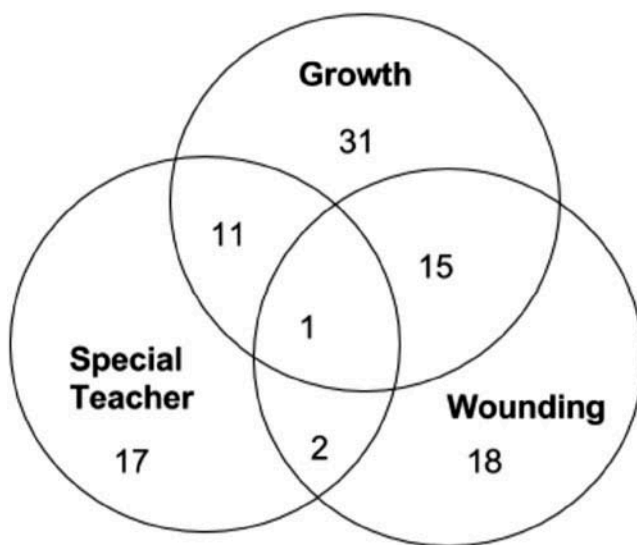


Figure 1. Venn diagram of common themes.

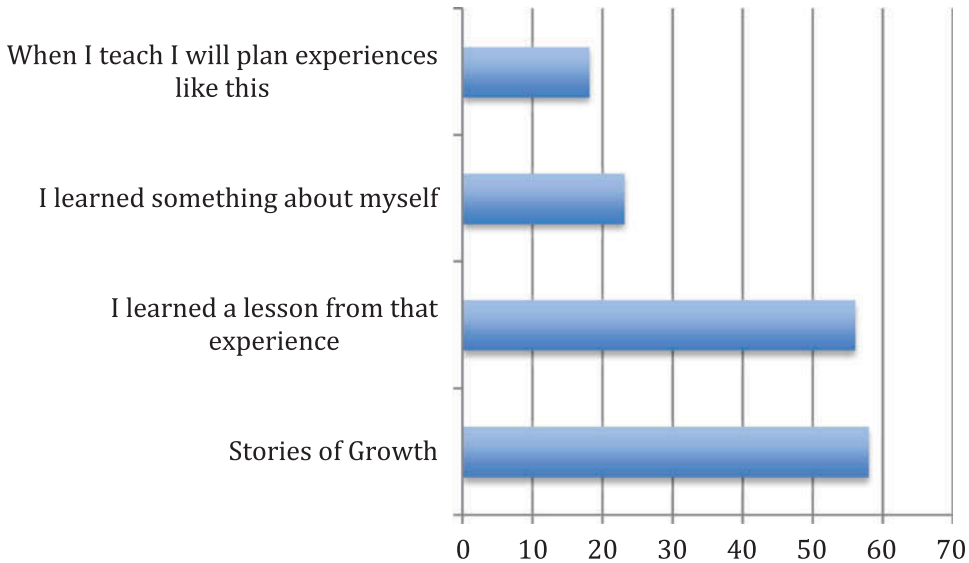


Figure 2. Representation of growth theme and subthemes.

Stories of growth

The stories of growth include narratives where teacher candidates acknowledge learning vital life lessons from their schooling experiences about themselves or life in general (Figure 2). The stories range in scale from the challenges of the shy student mastering public speaking or singing a solo in the school production, to the honest admission of a student's part in humiliating a new teacher. In the latter example, the sixth- and seventh-grade girls in one school mocked and taunted their teacher unceasingly and even made laminated "I hate Morah H-" membership cards.

"I know what you did," said the principal. "What I want to know is why you did it."

I didn't have an answer. I knew why. I wanted to fit in and be part of something special. I started crying. I knew that what I had done was wrong and I didn't know how to make it up to this teacher, who deep down I had so much respect for.

Other candidates similarly described growth that can come in learning from mistakes. One discusses how she stole a snack from a classmate's book bag and the teacher caught her lying about it. "When this happened I was sad by the fact that my parents and teachers who I respected were disappointed in me, more than the fact that I lied."

Stories in this category also included the challenges of accepting learning difficulties, such as the following:

I also feel it's important to understand yourself in working with others. Today, having ADD is not something I flaunt but it is actually something that has forced

me to look at, understand and accept myself. Its part of what makes me who I am and I now embrace and love those aspects.

In addition, the narratives in this category showcase schooling experiences of growth and maturation with reflection that may only be apparent retrospectively. A candidate humorously recalls the work she put into finding the perfect dress, hairstyle, and nail color for graduation but neglected to practice her speech:

I was totally unprepared for the whole graduation. All I could think about was my hair and outfit and I totally overlooked the important stuff. I didn't give one thought as to how it would be when I had to stand in front of a whole *shul* packed with people and speak

But, it was a real learning experience for me and I think I grew a lot in those two hours on the stage. I realized that things scare me and I get nervous, but in the end I can do anything. I can overcome my fears no matter what they are and push myself. And that feeling is priceless.

Some students intend to integrate a learning experience similar to their own into their future classroom. One candidate grew so much from community service activities and volunteering on a regular basis that she feels strongly of the importance of these types of learning experiences in schools. Another candidate described unconventional learning experiences like trust falls, where on the last day of high school the teacher directed each student one at a time to fall backwards into the arms of her classmates, in order to simulate faith and reliance on G-d.

Nevertheless, I know I will NEVER forget my last class of high school and the experience I had. Everyday, before I *daven* (pray) *Shmoneh Esrei*, I think back to that class and the experience I had and realize the importance of sometimes being taught in an unconventional way of learning. Teachers are reluctant to teach in an unconventional way for fear of being different. The traditional way of teaching is for the teacher to stand up in front of the class and lecture them about the subject. However, as I discovered from my experience as a student, sometimes the unconventional way of teaching is more effective.

Stories of a special teacher

Preservice candidates had many fond memories of special teachers who found innovative ways to teach math, Bible, or Talmud, as well as narratives acknowledging teachers or principals who expressed care for students beyond academic performance (Figure 3). There were also stories of school as a special place, a safe haven where students had sleepovers in the building, played pranks on administrators, and felt protected and nurtured.

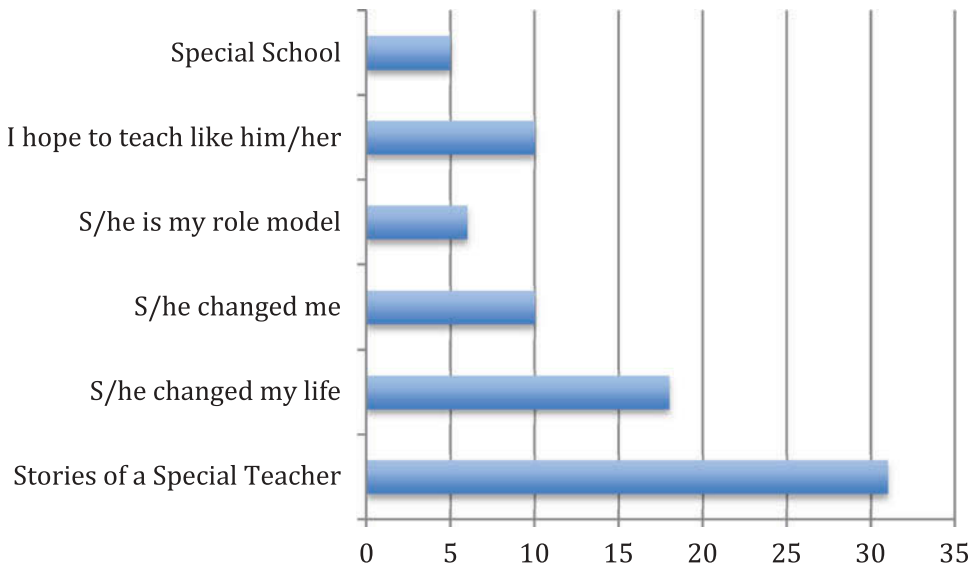


Figure 3. Representation of special teacher theme and subthemes.

One candidate wrote about the special administrator who encouraged her to start a pro-Israel club in a right wing school that didn't support the state of Israel. The candidate endured many embarrassing and frustrating experiences, such as where a classmate told her, "Why don't you go home and sing Hatikvah by yourself?" She was seriously thinking of switching schools until the assistant principal listened to her closely and responded with the magic words, "Let's do something about it." With this administrator's help, the student planned varied programs to educate the faculty and students about the State of Israel. She writes about the culminating celebration with the entire school community that emerged from the support of this special educator. "I stood there and thought about the way a small amount of effort and determination transformed animosity born of ignorance into a beautiful opportunity of learning and respect for new ideas."

Many stories described inspiring teachers whose actions, words, and deeds left a lasting legacy and served as role models. One candidate whose teacher died during the time she was in his low track Bible class writes with passion: "If I can make an impact, half as strong as his, with one student, I will be happy with my career as a teacher." Another describes a high school teacher who was her role model:

Mrs. Kaplan invited us over to her house during the week and on weekends. There was nothing more powerful than seeing Mrs. Kaplan act in a way which reflected the things she taught. She was the coordinator of the school's charity committee, and I vividly remember going over to her house to bake cookies, which we would later distribute to people in the hospital. She extended herself

in whatever way she could, coming to school an hour early every day, acting as a wonderful role model in all settings. Mrs. Kaplan always made sure that we felt connected to our past and encouraged us to learn from it in order to create our own futures.

Several candidates described how their special teacher brought learning to life by making it relevant or fun. For example:

Rabbi Simon would bring the Gemara to life. When we were analyzing the laws of repaying damages, examples would include scenarios such as “If I took a machete and dropped it off a roof and it landed on Brad Pitt. . . .

Also present within this category of narratives was the recognition of schools as special places where notable events happen because of the warm and friendly nature of the school community. In particular, pranks were frequently cited:

We decided to buy a huge blow up pool on EBAY and buy hundreds of goldfish from a fish store and fill up the pool with all of the fish right in the front lobby. Although one might think that doing that is enough of a prank itself, we decided it was not. Someone had an idea to fill up the hallways with a million plastic cups full of water so no one could walk through! The last thing that we did was Saran Wrap all of the doors of the school office together and moved chairs and desks around.

This student was not in school when the administration responded. She did not feel remorse because her friends had a great time missing class to clean up:

It was a lot of fun and it strengthened the friendship of all of the members of my class as we were about to head out for Israel/College. Although I was not there to get in trouble with my friends, I did not really feel bad not being there because they did not mind the punishment that they received and they were able to miss class because of it; in fact my friends told me that cleaning up the fish was a lot of fun.

In school sleepovers and other odd pranks, such as decorating a teacher’s car and hiding his wife inside with a birthday cake, showcase the happiness and warmth that exists in many Jewish educational organizations; powerful and lasting expressions of joy and camaraderie between students and their teachers or administrators.

Stories of wounds

The stories of wounds (Figure 4) sustained through school spoke of school environments with intense testing, humiliating insults, and unpredictable and bizarre teacher behavior, such as the teacher who threw jawbreaker candies *at children*. Students were put “in jail” by boys at recess or were chewed out because of dress code violations. The locus of the wound varied from teacher to principal to classmate. The young student whose experience

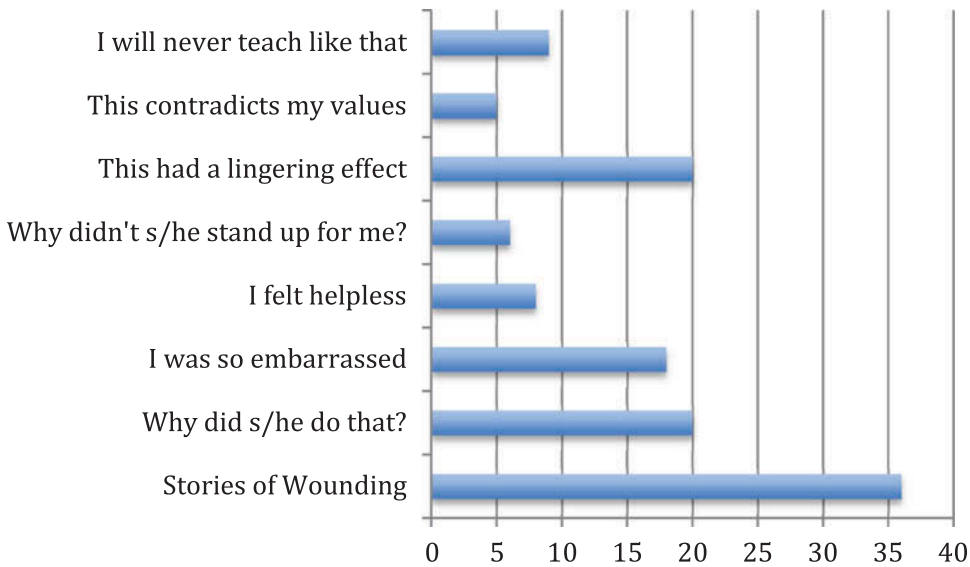


Figure 4. Representation of wounding theme and subthemes.

opens the article was told not to sing because the music teacher thought her voice was awful, and another student lost all respect for her principal when he said, “In school, teachers are G-d. They make the rules and you don’t get to question them.” Saying nothing in reply all she could think was, “He just compared himself to G-D! WHAT IS WRONG WITH HIM!?!?”

Administrators tried to break up friendships “if they didn’t like your gang.” In one school, students received zeros for the day because they attended a rally in Washington in support of the State of Israel and missed class. A candidate describes the time a classmate intentionally pulled a chair out from under her and she injured her coccyx. Another shares the sting of a teacher mimicking her in class and subsequently, how anxious she became about speaking aloud in school. In several stories students spoke of what it is like to be a staff kid and hear classmates speak disparagingly in public about their parents. One student was humiliated through a peer grading session when her lowest score in the class was announced aloud by a classmate. She concludes: “Our job as educators is to educate, not to humiliate. I hope to G-d to never be that kind of teacher because it is something that could scar students for life.”

Many of the wounding stories collected through this research revolve around contradictory teaching practices such as manipulating, favoring, or shaming students. There were unique and singular experiences such as one candidate describes, when her teacher tricked the class by allowing them to grade their own tests. Secretly, the teacher made copies and caught many students who changed answers during the self-grading. The teacher

confronted the students by returning the original paper with the ones the students had graded:

Mrs. Tucker sat before us, expressionless. Once we were all seated, she stood up and frowned. She calmly told us that she was disappointed, that she had expected better of us. We were all confused, but I felt my face grow hot. She walked down the aisles passing back our math tests. But this time she gave us two copies, the ones that we had graded, and a copy that she had previously made and graded herself prior to our involvement. I glanced down at my paper. Staring me in the eyes was my lie.

Likewise, another candidate has an atypical story about favoritism:

One day, about a week into the school year, a boy did not do his homework. He was the first one to commit this crime and if this year was going to be anything like last year, he would be the first of many. We all felt so bad for him. He was definitely going to get it. Sitting in our desks silently, without budging, we waited to see what Mrs. Meier would do. She started giving the whole class a speech about the importance of homework and then, still in front of everyone, yelled that he would have to bring a note from his parents letting her know that they were aware of the situation. He also had to do extra homework for a month. When we all thought she was done and that we could finally breathe again, she decided she had just one more thing she wanted to say; “If anyone in this class ever does not do his or her homework, the consequences will be even worse next time. BUT, if Susan doesn’t do her homework . . . it’s fine!” For a second I thought I was imagining this, but everyone’s stares made me realize that *yes, she really did say that*. It was the strangest thing. Teachers had always liked me, but this was something different. This was favoritism. No, it was even worse than favoritism. She was not just being nice to me as usual; she was changing the rules of the classroom just for me, which is not acceptable and cannot be justified no matter what. Hating attention, especially in class, my mind began to race. *Why would a teacher ever say something like that?! First of all, teachers are not supposed to do that, it’s just not fair to anybody else and it’s probably illegal. Second, does she not realize that everybody is now going to hate me?*

More common wounding stories reveal stinging language that preservice candidates can still hear echoing in through their minds as they recollect their school days and the helpless feeling that children experience in a world controlled by adults who are supposed to know better. One candidate writes about being called a “blabbermouth” in front of the class. Another remembers her religious teacher commenting aloud as he returned her paper, “You did horribly on this test. I don’t understand how one person could lack so much knowledge on something. Did you even study?” Another recalls her fourth grade teacher’s reaction to her missed homework:

She sat down in a chair next to me and rummaged through my bag. To my horror, she pulled out the empty homework sheet and showed it to the class. I was red with embarrassment but what could I do? Mrs. G. then began a five-minute speech claiming Nancy is exactly what you students should not be like and that the

penalty for her actions will be severe. Mrs. G. also called me “bad” and “not a good example to follow.” Her eyes peered into mind with fury, as if there was fire burning from them because she was so furious with me.

Unlike the school stories of growth or a special teacher, the stories of wounding shed light on the dark side of Jewish educational practices. The next section offers implications and recommendations for Jewish teacher education emergent from the findings.

Implications and recommendations

“In order to understand the process of becoming a teacher or an ‘agent of change,’ teacher educators must have a robust and well-rounded understanding of how pre-service teachers already see” (Johnson, 2008, p. 1). With respect to their own schooling experiences, this research finds that many candidates report positive and inspiring recollections of their day school years. However, many future teachers also report school as the source of painful memories that leaves residual discomfort and confusion. Often the candidates felt helpless and powerless. “The school knew what kind of things went on in the classroom while I attended the school but did nothing to rectify the situation.”

The research suggests two concrete implications for Jewish educator preparation. First, Jewish school educators have a moral responsibility to be vigilant of appropriate communication at all times, because they serve as de facto role models. This research shows that the mixed or harmful messages and unprofessional classroom management practices can leave persistent wounds. Jewish teacher educators can stress the importance of classroom management systems and approaches that advance teaching and learning through appropriate and professional communication strategies. Second, teacher educators can intentionally design learning experience for candidates to interrogate connections between autobiographical schooling narratives and professional practice in order to re-pattern habitual ways of thinking and acting in Jewish day schools.

Professionalism in classroom management

Many wounding stories involved the student’s lingering sense of humiliation or embarrassment. This is especially striking within Jewish schooling, because the Talmud tells us that embarrassing someone in public is tantamount to murder. On Baba Metzia page 59a the Gemara writes that it is better to be thrown into a fiery furnace than embarrass someone in public. Tosafos in Sotah on page 10b concludes that one has to give up his/her life than publically humiliate another person. And, Rabbeinu Yona comments on

the Mishna in Avos (3:15) that when the embarrassed person's face turns white in response to the shock of humiliation, this is a physical representation of death. However, these dictates do not provide explicit instruction on what and how to pragmatically respond in the complex environment of contemporary Jewish day school teaching and learning. As Rav Lichtenstein (1997) reminds us, "It is preposterous to pretend to find in our own tradition that which, at a given level and with a certain range, simply is not there" (p. 253). That more than one third of the school stories concern wounding experiences suggests the need for enhanced professionalization of classroom management in our classrooms.

"Was the act of being educated all that was needed to educate others, even or especially young children? The notion persists" (Davis, 2010, p. 80). The notion is especially persistent in the field of Jewish education where the Rebbe (Teacher) student relationship is situated within centuries old historical tradition that one knows how to teach because one knows how to learn. "Implicitly, the call for professionalization represents a reaction against what may be the oldest and most powerful archetype of Jewish teaching" (Pomson, 2002, p. 24). Pomson (2002) explains that the archetype of the Rebbe/Teacher figure as one who possesses encyclopedic knowledge and virtuous character yet is disassociated from professionalized pedagogic training "displays remarkable tenacity within the Jewish day school system" (p. 25). However, he also admits "it is a tradition which seems as likely to leave students scarred as inspired" (Pomson, 2002, p. 25).

The prevalence of the wounding stories suggests that Jewish teacher preparation pay close attention to classroom management practices and the establishment of consistent and ethical routines that build positive expectations through training and reinforcement, thus avoiding reliance on public shaming to obtain compliance. In addition, these narratives show that the language in the classroom used to communicate with students sticks long after the student's formal exit from the class.

This study exposes the intersection between classroom management and ethics in Jewish educational organizations and raises questions about mindfully navigating this terrain. In addition, as mentioned in earlier story excerpts, there are fundamental differences in attitude to concerns such as support for the State of Israel or norms of dress between and among individuals who consider themselves affiliated Jews. Jewish day schools may need to be mindful of the alignment between home and school philosophies and how these gaps are discussed in public and private conversations with students and their families. "The pleasure of teaching and learning must always be directed at raising understanding and aspiration and should never come at another's expense; it must be in service to appreciation, not depreciation" (Banner & Cannon, 1997, p. 123). Teachers are human but they are also de facto role models and their extreme facial

expressions, the biting tone of their words, or their inflexible posturing may leave students and parents questioning the ethics of insensitive comments or actions.

Anyone contemplating teaching as a profession should consider compassion as a measure of suitability. The physical and emotional toll exacted by teaching will be too much for those lacking it: better by far that they leave the care of the ignorant multitudes to those who find their difficulties and their hunger to learn innately compelling. (Banner & Cannon, 1997, p. 89)

Teacher educators can strengthen the focus on the development and maintenance of professional, sensible, and respectful classroom management practices that promote ethical, equitable, and sensitive communication and feedback. This study calls for a renewed focus on classroom management pedagogic knowledge regardless of subject matter expertise.

Intentional interrogation of schooling biographies

Clearly, the potential of schooling to have lasting positive or negative impact is not unique to preservice teacher education candidates. In his classic work, *Experience and Education*, Dewey (1938/1977) argues, “How many students, for example, were rendered callous to ideas, and how many lost the impetus to learn because of the way in which learning was experienced by them?” (p. 26). This study finds that even though over one third of the stories were primarily about wounding, the candidates were undeterred from entering the education profession. In fact, some have chosen teaching to right the wrongs they experienced. Davis (2010) describes a similar finding when she taught writing to Wheelock College students planning a career in teaching. She asked the class,

What teacher had ‘done it’ for them- inspired them to decide to become teachers. Expecting stories of admiration and respect, I was surprised that most of the students wrote of teachers who had abused their power- humiliating or physically harming a child in their class. Those students vowed to grow up to be teachers who would never let what they witnessed happen to a student of theirs. (p. 72)

Given this sentiment, and the seemingly obvious nature of a future teacher’s disposition toward the negative schooling experience, it is peculiar that many of the teacher candidates were unable or unwilling to consider alternative endings or other outcomes. Figure 5 shows that just over a third of the candidates made connections between their experience as students and their professional aspirations. While within every primary theme several candidates reported, “I want to teach the way she did,” or “I will never teach like that,” they were less specific in imagining how that mimicry or opposition would play out in the future.

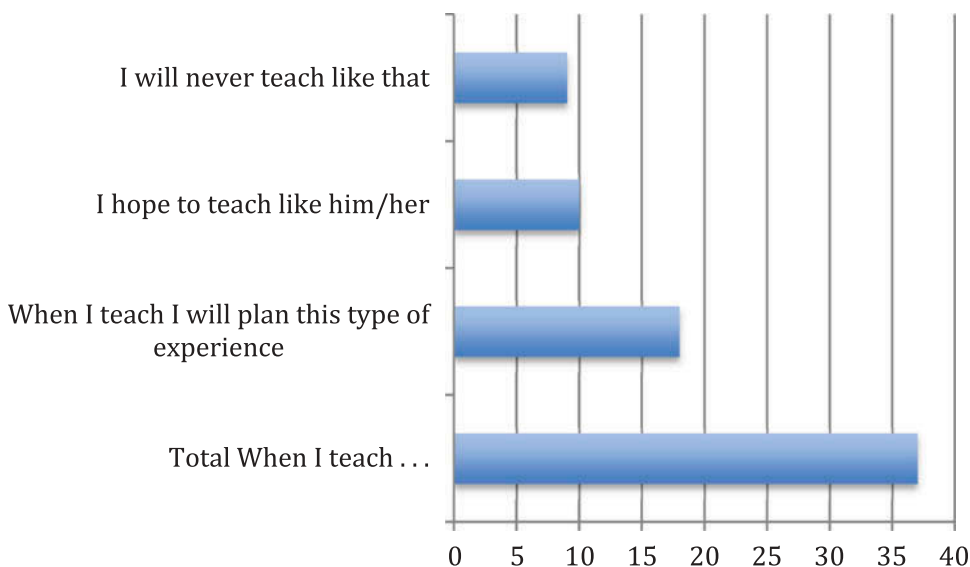


Figure 5. Representation of future teaching practice subthemes.

An example of such generalities: “Rabbi Greenman taught me that the ‘little extra’ makes a large difference. I hope to take that extra step that will give my students an experience that is not just ordinary, but rather extraordinary.” Teacher educators can press candidates: “What specifically will you do that he did?” “What would you do differently when faced with that problem?” “What would that look like/sound like in the classroom where you are currently doing fieldwork or student teaching?”

One particularly vivid example from a teacher candidate shows how this can be accomplished within the context of the school story assignment. In her narrative she reflects upon her choice to remain on the basketball team due to social pressure from parents and friends, even though she rarely got any playing time and was continually embarrassed by her benchwarmer status year after year:

If I could go back in time I would have asked my coach to please give me a little more playing time or tell him how I felt even though I was very shy. I know that as a future teacher I would never want to put my students in the same situation. Rather I would want my students to feel comfortable enough talking to me about how they felt, I would explain to the students my system for how much playing time each student received to the best of my ability. I would notice when a student looked sad or upset, and would encourage each child to be the best player or benchwarmer they could be.

The sentence starter initiated by this teacher candidate, “If I could go back in time” may be effective in encouraging candidates to consider alternatives and recognize that teachers have choices. However, in general, the overall omission of agency was striking. Future development of the school story

assignment recommends including imaginative construction of alternative endings to the schooling narratives as described above.

Moreover, this study also suggests that educator preparers make explicit the relationship of personal perspective to professional practice as part of the transition from student to teacher because it may not happen naturally or consciously for all new teachers. The research supports the assertion of Ben-Peretz (1995) who claims that there is a disparity between student teachers and retired teachers when it comes to learning from experience. "It seems that the process of learning from experience changes through the professional life cycle of teachers" (p. 141). Citing the work of Alexander, Muir, and Chant (1992), Ben-Peretz distinguishes the student teacher candidates' perspective on narrative experiences as highly individualistically oriented while the mature teachers' narrative shows closer connection between experienced events and rules of practice. With focused assignments such as school story construction with alternative endings, Jewish teacher educators can interrogate the connection between personal biography and professional practice to develop reflective capacity and transformational agency.

Further, Britzman (1986) suggests that uncovering educational biographies "can empower student teachers through a greater participation in their own process of becoming a teacher" (p. 452). She describes the role of biography as critical to overcoming cultural myths that reinforce the institutional status quo. "Without a critical perspective, the relationships between school culture and power become 'housed' in prospective teachers' biographies and significantly impede their creative capacity for understanding and altering circumstances" (p. 454). How does one right the wrongs without interrogating the structures, features, and contexts of schooling that influence their perpetuation? This research awakens opportunities for teacher educators to guide candidates in reframing wounds and grievances. This may disrupt perpetuation of pernicious practices in the next generation of teachers, students, and schools.

Jewish education teacher educators can propel this important inquiry and facilitate the expansion of professional knowledge and agency with reading and writing autobiographical school stories. Teacher candidates can be encouraged to think broadly about the experiences that shaped them and their classmates in order to confront biases, assumptions, and taken-for-granted interpretations. Teacher preparation is an opportune time to stretch thinking and provoke dissension in order to lay bare habitual patterns of thought and propose alternative possibilities in school practice, policy, and program. "There can be no significant innovation in education that does not have at its center the attitudes of teachers, and it is an illusion to think otherwise" (Postman & Weingartner, 1969, p. 33).

Conclusion

Johnson (2008) argues for the place of listening to and collecting preservice teachers' stories to better understand the preservice candidates in her classes and adjust course curriculum and instruction to their need. "I believe it is imperative that teacher educators create room for teachers' stories to be told in teacher education settings" (p. 7). This study shows that Jewish day school stories may include wounding experiences and recommends that teacher educators structure inquiry into these episodes to disrupt habitual practices, challenge assumptions, and encourage opportunities for educational reform of Jewish day schools. "Openness, questioning, and wisdom may oftentimes cause pain, but these are growth pains" (Fried, 2007, p. 67). Teacher candidates may need to revisit some painful schooling experiences to reframe possibilities and imagine opportunities in their future teaching practices and policies.

There are several limitations to this research. First, as Kohl (1967) wrote in his classic work, *36 Children*, "How much truth is there in Pamela's memories and how much distortion and romanticization in mine? I honestly don't know" (p. 137). Memory is fickle and fungible. The veracity of the events documented in the school stories may be suspect. Second, did the preservice candidates really choose the story that meant the most to them or the one that was easiest to write? Did they choose the one they thought their teacher wanted to read? Further, all the school stories were authored by female teacher candidates and the impact of gender on Jewish schooling experiences has not explored.

In conclusion, it may also be worth considering that wounding is an unavoidable aspect of the nature of schooling, encompassing both teaching and learning. As Simone Weil (1951) wrote, "pain is the color of certain events" (p. 131). In their study of school leaders, Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2002) report the inevitability of wounding. "Each practitioner we invited to participate in our study had a story of wounding to tell; in fact, some leaders needed time to think about which story to share" (p. 10). The cycles of success and failure are part of life from which no one is immune. Furthermore, preservice candidates' learning to avoid potentially wounding situations with future students may require enhanced capacity to process such events retrospectively, to understand how and why they may have happened. "All crisis stories, not just those with society's preferred happy ending, offer an opening for personal and professional growth and deserve a place in the territory of educational leadership" (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002, p. 121). And, as this research suggests, deserve a place within the landscape of Jewish educator preparation. This research gives preservice candidates license to reframe the past in order to reform the future.

“Of course, it is what we do after we tell stories like this one that matters most, or, more correctly, it is what we do afterwards that makes these stories matter at all” (Cochran-Smith, 2000, p. 165).

In *Elaine’s Circle*, Bob Katz (2005, p. 186) depicts the moving story of a remarkable teacher and her fourth graders, who support a young classmate with terminal cancer. A fellow teacher in the school explains, “We teach to create these kids who can go on and do life better” (p. 186). By extension, we teacher educate, so that the next generation of teachers can go on and teach better. This is my call to action: Let’s work together to improve teacher preparation and professionalization in Jewish education. Teaching is part of our *mesorah*, our legacy that continues the transmission of our heritage and purpose from teacher to student, from Moshe to Yehoshua, from Yehoshua to the elders, from the elders to the prophets, and from the prophets to the Anshei Knesset HaGedolah, and on down through the generations; that is what we do and why we do it, and yes, I believe, we can do it better.

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Appendix A. Literature of Pedagogy Reading List

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