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Contributed by Administrator

What do we mean by Jewish Education?

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Abstract

Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â The present study was initially planned as a smallÂ exploratory research aiming to enhance our understanding of the participants' perceptions and interpretations of Jewish Education.Â Fourteen persons including teaching students, preschool teachers who are field mentors, college mentors , Judaism lecturers and the Head of the School and Education and the Head of Bible studies at the Levinsky College of Teachers Education,Â answered a half structuredÂ questionnaire. The rich and meaningful narratives provided by the participants in response to the questionnaire, combined with their surprisingly high motivation to espouse their views, to stop and think and revise issues that seemed to be self evident to many of them, motivated me to transform this study into a first step of an action research focused on the question: How to use the wealth of personal experiences Â "owned" by the participants in the teacher preparation enterprise ,as resources in the construction of a real socio-cognitive pedagogy of Jewish Education in the Early Childhood Education Department at Levinsky ?

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What do we mean by Jewish Education?

Understanding across cultural groups requires adopting a mode of encounter that I call learning for self transformation: that is, to place oneself and the other in a privileged place of learning, where the desire (is) not just to acquire "information" or to "represent", but to recognize and welcome transformation in the inner self through the encounter. ..I also think that authentic understanding must be grounded in the sense of genuine humility that being a learner requires: the senseÂ that what's going on with the other has, perhaps, some lessons for me (Hoffman, 1997, p. 17 Â in Rogoff, 2003, p.29).

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We do not know, how different stakeholders related in one way or another to teaching Judaism at the Levinsky College of Teachers' Education, the Early Childhood Education Department, Â define Jewish Education and therefore we do not know how these perceptions and interpretations impact the teaching-learning of both students and young children in Â preschools. Â To that end, I adopted in the present study an "ethogenic" methodology (HarrÃ© and Secord, 1972), meaning that the interpretations of Jewish education were extracted from the participants' direct accounts - their own statements about Â what they consider Jewish education and what are their implications to teaching students and young children in Israel.

The usual concern related to curriculum, is related traditionally to What to teach. When we talk about Jewish Education in general, and Preschool JewishÂ Education, in particular, Â traditionally we ought to thus ask the question what "chapters" or texts or contents we should teach? Furthermore,

when talking about DAP (Developmentally Appropriate Practice) – in general and Reggio Emilia in particular, we also address the question related to alignment of the curriculum to developmental and cultural characteristics of the children and their families. However, these important concerns leave out the issue of the teachers' and parents' beliefs, feelings and knowledge. In the social-constructivist approach emphasis is put on promoting knowledge, values and skills on the basis of the learners' existent knowledge, beliefs and skills. In this paper we also address the question of the teacher trainers' beliefs related to Jewish Education and how they are related to how they perceive themselves as Jews. Thus, the perception put forward here is that teachers need to enact in an integrative, coherent manner their knowledge, beliefs and feelings towards contents taught, as well as towards children and themselves (Feiman-Nemser, 2008). In Feiman-Nemser's (2008) opinion:

“teaching and learning to teach are deeply personal work rooted in teachers' emotions, values and identity by combining parts of their past, including their own experiences in school and in teacher preparation, with pieces of the present in their current school context, with images of the kind of teacher and colleague they want to become and the kind of classroom they want to create. Ultimately, teachers must integrate ways of thinking, knowing, feeling and acting into principles and responsive practice” (p.215).

That's why in this study we wanted to learn about the interpretations of various stakeholders in the field of teacher preparation and early childhood education and about their perceptions related to what and how Jewish education should be taught, in general, and to young children in Israel of today, in particular.

Identity and identification

All of the participants in the present study, including the writer of the paper are born Jews. As such, we did not choose to be Jews as we did not choose to be born women or men, or to have dark hair and skin or blond hair and light skin. As opposed to the state of being Jewish, that was imposed on us, we can and do choose to some extent how and with what contents, rituals and values to fill in our Jewishness. Family and school education can have a significant impact on what is offered to us to choose from in the process of defining ourselves as Jews.

Jewish education is thus closely related to the process of initiation of people (children, students and others) in the Jewish collective and as such in the process of their becoming self aware members of this collective.

Himmelfarb (1982) and Herman (1989) advise that we distinguish between Jewish identity and Jewish identification. "Jewish identification is the process of thinking and acting in a manner that indicates involvement with and attachment to Jewish life" (Himmelfarb (p.57). Jewish identification is the process by which the individual comes to see himself as part of the Jewish group and identity is what being Jewish means in the life of the individual, the content of his Jewishness. On the other hand, Jewish identity is one's sense of self with regard to being Jewish. Every person has various identities which vary in importance in different social contexts Herman (1989).

Operationally, identification studies seek to discover the extent to which the behavior and attitudes of Jews are oriented Jewishly. Identification studies ask questions about ritual observance, Jewish organizational involvement, attitudes toward Israel, intermarriage, and other matters related to Jewish life. Identity studies are concerned with what being Jewish means to individuals and the extent to which it is an important part of the way they view themselves in relation to others. It is important to be aware of this distinction because it explains the possibility of people who are ignorant about their cultural heritage and yet identify themselves as Jews. Therefore it is important that people develop a cultural distinctiveness of Jewish identity which sets them apart as different in a culturally pluralist society(around the Globe and in Israel itself).

Education of the young plays an important role in the children's development of Jewish identities. It is also important to recognize that the study of Jewish identity has to take into account the peculiar interweaving in such identity of national and religious elements(Herman, 1987; Dashevsky, 2003). Judaism is not just a religion. "It is the religious civilization of one particular nation, it resides in the Jewish people and reflects in history. And the Jewish people is what it is because of this religious civilization"... the Jewishness of even nonreligious Jews cannot be completely divorced from its religious associations (Herman, 1987, p.36). Although there have been Jews who choose to present themselves on the basis of their national belongingness, according to Herman the religious and national elements are closely related to each other and even inseparable.

Cohen (2008) views the issue of Jewish identity in a more flexible way. He asserts that that the last two decades have given birth to the Sovereign Jewish Self in which [American] Jews feel perfectly comfortable deciding for themselves whether, where, when, why and how they will be Jewish. This process reflects according to Cohen a transformation from being sensitive to communal and public obligations to more commitment to personal and private interests and needs. According to Horwitz, 2000 in Cohen, 2008, p. 78), Jews now "embark upon personal Jewish journeys in which they not only experience rises and falls in the salience of their Jewish identities but also continually refashion the meaning of their Judaism". An expression of this transformation is related according to Cohen(2008) to a new emphasis on autonomy which values serious reflection and informed choice, as opposed to a more traditional notion of compliance with religious law or conventional custom",p.78). He continues:" that following this new emphasis on voluntarism and autonomy, Jewish education moves increasingly toward a stance of helping students make the Jewish choices that are right for them, as opposed to advocating fixed norms.

Defining cultural belonging and processes that support it

A useful definition of a culture is a community of persons who share the same symbolic meanings for its myths, religion, art history and the actions and beliefs classified as right or wrong". (Kagan,2009,p. 107). Coherence within a culture is related to the degree of agreement on the meanings of a large number of symbols, especially those related to values.(p. 109). An ethnic identity implies on the one hand alignment, a shared belonging with members of a specific group, and on

the other hand a differentiation, a marking off, of members of certain other group (Herman, 1987, p. 40). This is true both when affiliation with Jewishness is taken in consideration and in cases in which affiliation to subgroups (religious, traditionalist or secular) is referred to. When Israelis think of themselves as marked off as Jews it is not as much in relation to any minority in Israel but as part of the Jewish people in the non-Jewish world; they place themselves in a global context (Herman, 1987).

The question is how are the common meanings of symbols, history constructed in the minds of the individuals in general and young children in particular who are identified with that culture? Rogoff (2003) perceives the process of culture formation as one that considers the new generations as active participants in the culture construction rather than disciplined recipients of what already exists.

Cultural tools are both inherited and transformed by successive generations. Culture is not static; it is formed from the efforts of people working together, using and adapting material and symbolic tools provided by predecessors and in the process of creating new ones. Individual and cultural processes are mutually constituting rather than defined separately from each other (Rogoff, 2003, p. 51).

Complementarily, for Rogoff, development is portrayed as a process of changing participation in socio-cultural activities:

...human development is a process of people's changing participation in socio-cultural activities of their communities. People contribute to the processes involved in socio-cultural activities at the same time that they inherit practices invented by others..... People of each generation, as they engage in social cultural endeavors with other people, make use of and extend cultural tools and practices inherited from previous generations. As people develop through their shared use of cultural tools and practices, they simultaneously contribute to the transformation of cultural tools, practices, and institutions (Rogoff, 2003, p,51).

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Similarly, Wells(2008) based on Vygotsky Cultural Historical Activity Theory(CHAT) envisages development as ongoing transformation and also at the same time treats it as involving a mutually constitutive relationship between the individual and the society in which he or she is growing up.

In Israel, as a Jewish state the question of shared Jewish contents and values in the religious community is made from the perspective of Jews as a majority as opposed to the position of Jews as a very small minority as in the United States and even more so world wide (Dashevitz,2003).

Ben-Avie(2008) identifies, based on extended research including 1010 adolescents in six Jewish day-schools

in the United States, that the most important predictors in whether these young people were forming a strong relationship to the Jewish people, past and present, were (1) the students' engaging in learning and their motivation to achieve; (2) their tendency to seek adult guidance, which is one manifestation of high-quality relationships between educators and young people, and (3) their parents being their partners in education. He mentions that all three factors are related to relationships as a basis of good education. Thus the quality of relationships with children is perceived as a central issue in their Jewish identification formation. Quality of relationships is considered for some time one of the main "indicators" of a high quality education (Pianta, 1999, Sidorkin, 2002; Evertson & Weinstein and, 2006- to mention only a few). Quality of relationships with young children has been indeed considered to be a main characteristic of high quality education (Bowman & Donovan, 2001). So in considering high quality Jewish Education for preschool children in Israel (and in any place around the Globe for that matter) one must consider good relationships with and among the children as a central factor. What we can additionally learn from Ben Avie's summary is that educators should form relationships that encourage children to get interested and engaged in knowledge related to Judaism and regard them as full partners in the journey of the perpetual development of the corpus of knowledge that constitutes Judaism.

Methodology

The present study attempted to extract understandings related to personal definitions of Jewish Education provided by representatives of most stakeholders related in one way or another -directly and indirectly- to Jewish Early Childhood Education preparation of teaching students at the Levinsky College of Education in Tel Aviv. To that end, I adopted in the present study a qualitative interpretative "ethogenic" methodology (Harré and Secord, 1972), meaning that the perceptions of Jewish education were extracted from the participants' direct accounts - their own statements about what they consider Jewish education and what are their implications to teaching students and young children in Israel. This methodology was spelled out by Harré and Secord (1972) and differs from the widespread methodology used in social studies in which participants are asked to rate or evaluate words or statements provided by investigators.

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Participants

14 people participated in the present study. Participants were 5 teaching students, 3 kindergarten teachers, 3 lecturers of Judaism one of whom is the Head of Bible studies at Levinsky, the Head of the School of Education, two teaching mentors. All, but one participant were female. As it turned out, the contents chosen by the participants to present their biographic details are a finding in themselves. Therefore, I will present some of the demographics in this section and some in the Findings section.

The teaching students: Four of the 5 teaching students participating in this study are enrolled in their second year of a four year

academic track early education teaching preparation program and another one is enrolled in a third year. All of them are well standing students whom I taught. All students were born in Israel. All of the second year students have been taking a mandatory yearly 'Hag Umoed'(Jewish holydays) course. One of the assignments related to this course constitutes of the planning and implementation at the preschool that serves as their field placement, of a short teaching plan for preschool children whose aim it to teach in a developmentally appropriate way one of the Jewish holidays to the small group of children(up to 6) they are assigned to in the respective semester. The teaching plan was to include at least 4 learning encounters with the small group, the first of which included getting an idea about the previous knowledge, attitudes of the participant children in the group. The responsibility for the students' guidance was divided between the Judaism lecturer(responsible primarily for the disciplinary knowledge) and the teaching mentor helping with the pedagogy(planning and implementation of the program and coordinating the planning and the implementation with the field mentor). Judaism lectures and teaching mentors collaborated in the common planning of the assignment(3 face to face meetings during the first semester and email correspondence). This year the students built a short plan related to Passover. All students had to teach Passover but were instructed to pick up whatever focused theme suitable to them and the children related to Passover(We encourage at Levinsky teaching on focused topics and at depth rather than covering many contents). The third year student was added to the group of participants as it appeared to me that she was interested in Judaism courses. The teaching students were aged 24 to 35.

Kindergarten teachers: 3 kindergarten teachers participated . 2 of the three kindergarten teachers serve as field mentors for our students and the third teacher is a first year kindergarten teacher who is about to graduate this coming year. The age of the teachers is 32 to 54(32, 41, 54). All of the teachers are born in Israel.

The college staff

Judaism lecturers: two of the lecturers have been teaching the 2nd year students during 2010-2011 and were involved in the planning of the second year student assignment. One is a male(aged 60, born in Israel) and the other one a female (aged 34, born in Columbia).. They both have a M.A. degree in Judaism studies. The third Judaism teacher is the Head of Judaism studies(aged 64, born in Israel) she is teaching Bible courses and has a Ph.d in Bible studies.

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College mentors: 2 female college mentors participated. They are 51(born in Israel) and 60(born in Romania), they are enrolled in their Phd studies in Education. They were responsible for guiding the students to plan the short plan and to implement it at the field placement.

The Head of the School of Education (aged 63, born in Argentina), holds a Phd in Education and had been for many years an elementary school teacher and director of an elementary school. She is the Head of all age teaching programs and is coordinating and implementing the community learning of mentors and

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4. What are in your opinions the desired expressions of Jewish education of teaching young children in kindergartens in today's Israel ?

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Participants were requested to respond by mail and were awarded about a month to respond. All of the Levinsky teaching staff who was approached responded and only one student and one kindergarten teacher did not respond

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Findings

My approach to reporting the findings

Due to the necessity to present a relatively short account of the findings I chose to treat all the participants as members of a community of learners rather than presenting comparisons among perceptions put forward by subgroups included in this community (students, teachers, mentors, administrators and so on). The question what might be the commonalities and differences among these subgroups is a legitimate and important one. However, forced to shorten my paper I decided that learning about central issues related to Jewish education by our entire community was more important than focusing on a comparisons among subgroups.

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Although participants answered four main questions in addition to providing in a relatively narrative style their biographical data, their accounts are sometimes a combination of answers. My job was thus to try to at first deconstruct the participants' accounts according to what I perceived as central themes that emerged from the analysis of all data. At the end I will try to reconstruct the main findings and to present an intermediary summary related to possible implications for future Jewish education at the Early Education department at Levinsky pending that the principal stakeholders will agree to take part in the effort to discuss these findings and possible ways to implement them.

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Education makes sometimes a difference and sometimes it does not

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We will start presenting some of our main findings by addressing some of the participants' perceptions related to the effectiveness

of the Jewish Education-that is, to the impact it has or does not have on the students' and or the children's lives. Edith's(the Head of our School of Education) account points to the dramatic impact learning in a Jewish school in Argentina more than 40 years ago had on her and her family's daily life. Coming from a Jewish Zionist home that had little knowledge of Jewish ceremonials and traditions she was caught by the livelihood of the Jewish ceremonials related to Shabbat(Kiddush) and holidays(Passover Seder) that were taught at her Jewish school and decided to lead her family to willingly adopt these ceremonials as a way of her family's life. Starting from that point as a teenager on, she sees herself as a "traditional Jew". Ortal, a teaching student, wrote about the impact participating in a "Modern Jewish Identity" course in her first year of study at Levinsky, had on her decision to work out a way to define her and her future husband's common way of life related to contradictory positions focused on the observance of Jewish traditions. She writes that she was willing to maintain a somewhat traditional way of life whereas her future husband wanted a complete secular lifestyle(such as no Rabbi at their wedding and an initial opposition to Brith Mila in case they would have a son). At the time she started her studies at Levinsky, she felt "stuck". She remembered the lecturer talking in the Judaism course about the existence of a continuum between ultra-secular and ultra religious identities. This perception, as opposed to a dichotomous perception of secular, traditional and religious groups made her believe in the possibility to work out an agreement with her future husband about a half-way life style that would accommodate both of them. And this is what they finally did.

On the other hand, Aliza, a young Judaism lecturer at Levinsky was disappointed to find out that almost none of the students participating in her "Hag Umoed" class during the 2010-2011 school year could remember a meaningful experience related Jewish tradition from their past school experiences- as opposed to relatively rich memories of such events experienced at the students' homes. Also, Yael a second year student wrote about her disappointment over her college mentor's[2] refusal to allow her teach 4 year old children at her placement this year, about Egyptian ancient Art as part of a larger teaching plan focused on Passover, because she wanted the children to look at Egyptians in a complex way and she was worried about the children forming a one sided negative image about the them. During a casual talk with her a few weeks after her completion of this study's questionnaire, she told me that she eventually presented her ideas about how Passover should be taught to her colleague students in her 'Hag Umoed' course led by a lecturer who was one of the participants in this study.

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What can we learn about the way participants portrayed their biographies and identities?

One can be struck by the complexity of the background data provided by participants and by the diversity of their biographic descriptions. I think that the decision to ask openly about the religious affiliation (rather than the usual request to identify oneself as either religious, traditional, ultra religious[haredi]or secular) enabled each participant to find his or her way to describe their Jewish affiliations. This was true about the teaching staff as well as about most of the students and preschool teachers. Detailed accounts offered to this question raised the impression that participants were glad to have the opportunity to spell out how they perceive their Jewishness in an open way.

Some gave information about the parents' house. And indeed when allowed to describe their Jewish affiliation, many participants opted to offer complex descriptions. For example, a 35 years old ,second year student described herself as well as her parents as "secular tradition observers"(as they do Kiddush and her mother lights candles each Shabat Eve(but "we do not observe Shabat"), respect and observe main holidays and fast on Yom Kippur.

In this study we thus witness all kinds of self definitions additional to the "conventional" religious, traditional secular ones: "secular observant of tradition", "secular with internal faith", "Jewish, secular, Israeli who loves(likes) the Jewish religion and chooses to adopt those parts of the religion that make me feel good", "I define myself as a person for whom values related to religion are important and meaningful. I would not define myself [however]as a religious person or as a person that believes in God", "an Israeli atheist" and so on. Two individuals restrained from using a certain label in order to define their religious affiliation. One participant did not relate to the question at all, and another described background details- such as, what she does and what her sons do in relation to Mizva observation but refrained from using a specific label in order to define her religious affiliation.

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One of the main inferences deriving from listening to the participants' voices is that the labels "secular", "traditional" and "religious" bear very different meanings for each individual. Identities are complex formations residing in the individuals and largely influenced by their personal histories and environmental influences. Families, schools, peers, communities and the states in which people grow and develop leave traces on the their identities. Nevertheless, each and every person transforms the incoming contents and values and integrates them within their own forming identities and formulates her/his own definition about what means to be a certain "type" of Jew for him/her. The zeitgeist now in Education and to some extent in Social Sciences in general(see for example Kagan, 2009) is at least at a declarative level, to be more attentive to the individuals' voices and therefore to treat the data qualitatively and not(only) quantitatively. For example, it seems meaningless to count how many secular, traditional and religious persons participated in our small study, as the meanings attributed by them to these definitions are already mentioned very different.

Furthermore, one cannot escape the impression that daily, intensive encounters with people different from ourselves, people that we learn to respect and cherish make us think about ourselves and our identities. Lilach one of the participating students writes: "Lately due to the encounter with religious students[at Levinsky] and the journey to Poland I feel that I learn to know other sides of Judaism, observation of Mitzvas, I am developing a new view about the religion...[!]" find myself ponder [the meaning of] my being Jewish and everything that is related to it". Living in "two worlds" as Ortal, another teaching students, articulated it in respect to having both religious and secular close family, or the experience of going to a Jewish not necessarily religious school while living in a strict orthodox home, or the case of the participant who grew in a Zionist detached from Jewish ritual home, but went to somewhat traditional school in Argentina, lead individuals in a relatively liberal, democratic world to ponder their identities and to tailor them,

being lead by personal choices and comparisons to other people. Identities are thus dynamic and directed to some extent by persons' choices and by encounters and comparisons with other people who are different from ourselves. "Diversity has always been an inseparable part of my Jewish-religious identity.", states Aliza, lecturer of Judaism who was raised in an orthodox home in Columbia but went to a Jewish non religious school. She says:
 "... I find it difficult to define my childhood and adolescence educational and social experience as orthodox...".

It is also of interest to find out to whom people compare themselves when they make assertions related to their identities. Most participants (both those born in Israel and those born in other countries) seem to have compared themselves with other "types" of Jews. Only a few respondents mentioned in one way or another non Jews as people who need to be addressed either in the process of self identification or in the educational process. Edith, The Head of The School of Education writes that she does not feel that her identification with Judaism limits her ability to listen to other people's opinions and interpretations and to learn about and even participate in Christian and Muslim religious ceremonies. She mentions that she enjoys listening to non Jewish colleagues' interpretations of the Bible.

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Interpretations of Jewish Education Â emerging from the present study

Do Jewish values really exist ?

Values are often reminded by the participants as part of the Jewish education. Some participants address them as "Jewish values", whereas other participants talk about universalistic valuesÂ as a foundation of everything else. For example we can compare Ortal's (a teaching student) statement: "The contents I choose to teach are influenced by the Jewish values that lead my life.", to Gal's(another teaching student) statement: "I do not think that there should be uniformity in the expression of the Jewish education in preschools because the way they are dealt with depends on the environment' on the preschool teacher' on the family so that each parentÂ would be able to consider what is suitable to him(in terms of the way Jewish education is dealt with)". Lilach, a teaching studentÂ reminds us of the Golden Rule (Love your fellow man or neighbor as you love yourself) as a central Jewish value that guides her educational practice. And indeed The Golden Rule is largely perceived by Jews as a central JewishÂ value. However , The Golden Rule or the ethic of reciprocity isÂ perceivedÂ by almost all religions as a guiding value. The Religious Tolerance siteÂ proposes that:" In our opinion, the greatest failure of many organized religions is their historical inability to convince their followers that the Ethic of Reciprocity applies to all humans, not merely to fellow believers like themselves" (<http://www.religioustolerance.org/reciproc1.htm>).Â Some of our participants do extend the application of this value to non-Jews as well. Lilach herself writes that she intends to educate young children to be respectful and generous towards other children-Jews and non-Jews. However, she perceives the Golden Rule as a "Jewish" value and as many others her approach lacks a critical perception of Judaism. Yael, a second year student clearly states that Judaism is part of mankind and therefore Â "Education in preschools ought to first of all teach children to be human beings and therefore contents related to Jewish kids are veryÂ 'important' but in my opinion less important than learning basic values related to general humanism".

These accounts raise in my opinion the question :Â Do Jewish values really exist ?

I would like to shortly present common definitions of values in order to help at the end of this section answer this question. "A value is an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end state of existence" (Rokeach, 1973, p.5). Values are also defined as "broad tendencies to prefer certain states of affairs over others"-by Hofstede's(2001) simplified version of Kluckhohn's definition. Williams (1979) claims that overt and articulate values turn into criteria guiding judgments and preferences, whereas latent and unconscious values have an impact on people's daily choices. The latter definition indicates that values cannot be fully understood and meaningfully measured, without reference to attitudes and behaviors (words and deeds) that are the essence of making choices and therefore express them. (Tal & Yinon, 2002). Theories of values perceive (Schwartz & Bilsky, 1987; Schwartz & Sagiv, 1992; Hofstede, 2005) them as a component of the human mind that help human beings all over the world deal with seemingly universal human concerns focused on :a) the need to cope with uncertainty (which has an impact on the basic approach to changes and novelty), b) the welfare of individuals and c) the need to arrange the exchanges between individuals and the groups they belong to, in order to ensure social order. As researchers we may be interested in individuals' organizations', communities', nations' value preferences. When we are speaking about national, organizational, pedagogical values, these authors really mean national, pedagogical, organizational practices and strategies reflecting some central basic values which are universal, abstract criteria guiding their behaviors. Thus, as the answer to the first question we conclude that there are no "real" national (Jewish or other nations' values) or organizational or feminine or masculine values, but rather universal values that may be shared by groups and translated by them into certain practices, social conventions or personal preferences. It follows that we should find ways to inform our teaching students of value definitions in meaningful and convincing manner.

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Components included in the definitions of Jewish Education

Participants' definitions of Jewish education included the following components:

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Affiliation with the Jewish

people: for example Gal states: " That's an education that guides us to feel affiliated through observance of traditions" ; Chaya states: that Jewish education can help find ways to unite a divided society" through learning biblical texts.

2.Â Â Â Â

Identification with the Jewish

people, religion, history through rituals, observance, respecting holidays: for example Ortal writes: A Jewish education is in my opinion an education

focused on all times Jewish values and traditions-starting the Biblical stories including such Memorial events as the Holocaust day; Gal writes: "and" The main goal is for us to remember, understand and appreciate our existence in the state of Israel through our identification with our nation as Jews"

3. Contribution to the

construction of our identity: for example Aliza asserts: " Jewish Education is the kind of education that gives the student the tools and experiences needed for the construction of their meaningful Jewish identity that will be part of their entire life." And Racheli affirms: " The main goal of Jewish Education is familiarity with the roots from a proactive perspective related to who I am today."

4. Perseveration of traditions and

values- The goal of the Jewish education is the perseveration of traditions, values lessons and Jewish continuation in future generation.

5. Being knowledgeable of Jewish

texts such as the bible in general and Tora stories in particular(Chaya) and modern history and literature and the acquisition of Hebrew both modern(Miri) and the Bible language(Chaya)

6. Attachment of feelings, such as

pride to be a Jew-for example Lilach: " One has to raise the children on the basis of the Jewish heritage, I am proud of my religion, of its customs, history" or Chaya: To contribute to the learners becoming citizens that are not ashamed to be a Jew

7. Thoughts about possible links between a Jewish an Israeli

identity. between being Jews and being Israelis- for example Yael writes:" we need in my opinion to examine relations between Jewish and Israeli education: commonalities as well as differences among them" and Chaya asserts that on should help the Israeli become closer to the Jew inside of him"

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The components included in the different definitions point to the inevitability to see Jewish education related to a combination of national, communal and religious components. Two participants also addressed the need to find ways to make connections between the Jewish and the Israeli identity and one participant emphasized the need to address citizenship in Jewish education. In terms of processes, participants highlighted identity, identification, and affiliation and emotions as main processes that play a central role in Jewish Education.

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Educational worldviews reflected in definitions focused on Jewish Education

Yoram, a Judaism lecturer defines Jewish education in terms that can be regarded as well aligned with Barbara Rogoff's socio-cognitive approach (as can be seen in Table 1 below). His definition addresses numerous issues that are inherent in the Jewish education in a coherent, meaningful manner. His view takes into account the multifaceted nature of Judaism as well as the diversity among students and allows for choices made by the students -choices that are likely to lead to an increased responsibility assumed by them as young and contributing members of the Jewish collective. He expects students to be on the one hand knowledgeable of the Jewish history and tradition through the educators' mediation, and on the other hand to assume an active and even critical approach towards what is being offered to them by educators of Judaism. It is the educators' of Judaism responsibility to make texts and symbols accessible to the young members of the culture. It is the students' responsibility to participate in learning, to choose what is suitable to them and to contribute and transform the existing heritage. These perceptions are, as previously mentioned well aligned with the socio-cognitive approach espoused by Barbara Rogoff who states emphasizes that cultural tools are both inherited and transformed by successive generations.

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Table 1: Barbara Rogoff 's(2003) perception of Culture versus Yoram's definition of Jewish Education

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Rogoff's definition

Yoram's definition

Cultural

tools are both inherited and transformed by successive generations. Culture is not static; it is formed from the efforts of people working together, using and adapting material and symbolic tools provided by predecessors and in the process of creating new ones.

Individual and cultural processes are mutually constituting rather than defined separately from each other(Rogoff, 2003, p. 51).

People of each generation, as they engage in social cultural endeavors with other people, make use of and extend cultural tools and practices inherited from previous generations. As people develop through their shared use of cultural tools and practices, they simultaneously contribute to the transformation of cultural tools, practices, and institutions (Rogoff, 2003,

p,51).

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Jewish education or education for Jews creates the foundation for a lively and meaningful attitude of the student towards Jewish history and tradition. This tradition is multifaceted and is based on multiple valuesÂ and therefore members of this community are for ever required to share the responsibility to choose the values and their representations and moreover to add their own input to what already exists. In order to contribute to an appropriation of a viable and significant approach towards tradition, [we] should offer the student a foundation of knowledge as well asÂ meaningful experiences. This sort of preparation is likely to offer accessibility to formative texts, an understanding of central symbols related to the events that are sacred along the year and of the main persons who contributed to the formation of the Jewish culture.

We need to put a continuous effort in order to afford students venues of belonging to theirÂ heritage

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Aliza, anotherÂ Judaism lecturer defines Jewish Education as "the kind of education that gives the student the tools and experiences needed for the construction of theirÂ meaningful Jewish identity that will be part of theirÂ entire life. The goal of the Jewish education is the perseverationÂ of traditions, values lessons and Jewish continuation in future generation...Building blocks of Jewish identity and assuring the future existence of the Jewish people."

Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Whereas Yoram perceives Jewish education as a tool to help children and students feel well and familiarized within their heritage, AlizaÂ as well as additional participants perceive Jewish education primarily as tools that assure the future existence of the Jewish people. While it is true that both Aliza and additional participants such as Racheli, a second year student emphasize the contribution of Jewish Education to the identity formation ofÂ the young people initiated to Judaism, they do not perceive the younger generations as active contributors to their culture but simple as recipients of contents and rituals.

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Pedagogical considerations

The ambivalent attitude towards knowledge in Early Childhood Jewish Education

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General mention of knowledge as a component of Jewish Education is reminded by the participants. However the attitude towards contents to be taught(such as Bible studies in general and Torah stories in particular, History, Geography) seems to be ambivalent especially when applying Jewish Education to young children. On the one hand, Chaya asserts that children need to learn Bible and Torah stories and she insists that it is important that preschool children become familiar with the language of the Bible. An opposite position is presented by Gal:

" A possible solution to the diversity is to restrain from teaching Jewish contents. As a preschool teacher to be, I don't think that it is right to mandate Jewish contents as such;
In spite of the fact that we live in a Jewish state, the fact that children from different cultures and ethnic backgrounds learn in schools raise the need to accommodate them."

Aliza, A Judaism lecturer points out that it is more important to open an appetite to learning about Jews than to "cover" numerous contents. And Yoram asserts that Jewish education is bound to contain both a solid foundation of knowledge and meaningful experiences.

These accounts are brought as examples of ambivalent attitudes towards teaching Jewish contents that are found among participants. One way to deal with this dilemma, particularly in preschools is to arrange for experiential learning that is frequently focused on rituals and commemorations.

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Everyone agrees that experiential learning is a necessity

All participants seem to agree (maybe with the exception of Chaya- the Head of Bible studies) that children and students learn best on the basis of experiences. Nobody defined experiential knowledge. However, some participants offered detailed examples of such experiences that supposedly translate their values. I will present a detailed Ortal's account:

"The contents I choose to teach are influenced by the Jewish values that lead my life. Therefore, when I choose to deal with a topic I do my best to create interest and respect towards it. For example, when teaching about Holocaust: I have to start teaching it a long time before the memorial day and to explain about the Israeli flag, what does it mean to fly the flag to half mast what it symbolizes so that when Holocaust memorial day arrives-these

elements will be present in the class-and
in addition to the memorial of the holocaust the preschool setting will reflect the state of Israel as the Jews' state. Following that, so that children develop respect for memorial days (such as Holocaust and yom Hazikaron memorials), I will set breakfast tables with light colored tablecloths, on drawing tables I will offer only white and blue colors, I will lead learning encounters in these days without music or with quiet music' I will tell stories related to relationships among people on these days

 \hat{A}

Ortal's mode of commemoration reflects indeed her intention to raise respect for national memorials. She describes an experience that is likely to encourage nationalistic feelings. No attempt is made to encourage an understanding of the event or to allow children venues of expression (for example, only blue and white colors are offered for drawing). No doubt related to the suitability of the commemoration of Holocaust memorial with young children is raised.

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Encouraging children to make choices

A small minority of participants point to the need to encourage "making choices as an essential part of Jewish Education. Yoram, the Judaism lectures perceives encouragement of choices made by all learners-children included-as an essential part of Jewish education and as an expression of the responsibility attributed to learners as new members of the collective. Yael' a second year student writes:"

When I teach children I try to make learning an experiential event, in which almost always children can choose some things "either related to the content or the process of learning." I encourage pluralism and containing the person different from myself by allowing children the choice."

 \hat{A}

Relationships

Participants indirectly addressed the need to adapt to the diversity characteristic of children. However, a straightforward emphasis on relationships as basic building blocks in Jewish education are not mentioned. Relationships are mentioned sometimes as contents to be talked about (for example Ortal writes about reading stories about relationships among people on Holocaust memorial day). Aliza, the Judaism teacher calls for collaboration with children's parents and to a need to deepen their involvement in Jewish Education in schools. However, the need to build "good relationships with learners (students and children)" as an infrastructure of Jewish education is not dealt with. It could well be, that participants perceive relationships with children as self evident elements. Nevertheless they do not seem to be regarded as integral components in Jewish Education.

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Discussion

Â Â Â Â Â Â Â I feel

obliged to warn the readers that my approach in summarizing the data is colored, as the study in its entirety by my educational worldview in general and by my thoughtsÂ about Jewish education, in

particular. I must admit that the repeated reading of the written accounts of the Levinsky participants, as well as listening to the research group presentations succeeded to "touch"Â

me, to make me think about my own worldviews and the way they are Â related to Jewish identity and education and certainly had a welcomed contribution to organizing and consolidating my thoughts related to these topics.[3]

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Â Â Â Â Â Â Â It appears from the inquiry of the written accounts that, issues related to Jewish identity preoccupy the participants in our study: students, field mentorsÂ

and teaching staff, alike. We can also see that people undergo transformations throughout their lives as related to their Jewishness in general, and Â apropos religious issues,

in particular. It seems that, as asserted Â by Herman(1989) and Eisen(1998)Â that none of us can divorce our communal and

ethnic perceptions from religious practice. Eisen (1998) posits:"..that Jews for the most part navigated their way through modernity's unfamiliar terrain much as we do today: via eclectic patterns of observance and varied, almost individual, sets of meanings discovered in those patterns or associated with them. (p.2). Â Â

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Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Moreover, the accounts related to the participants' Jewish identities Â seem well aligned with the Sovereign Jewish assertion espoused byÂ Cohen(2008, pp.

78-79)Â Â -that in our days people use open ended definitions of Jewish identities and do not feel compelled by external constrictions but rather feel free to choose what is most suitable for them .This applies both to the students and the lectures -but it should be mentioned that Levinsky belongs to the general education(non-religious) sector.

Moreover, most if not all participants mentioned learning, teaching and/or experiencing holidays andÂ memorials as central contents and methodologies to enhance the young children's Jewish identity.

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Â Â Â The perceived goals of Jewish

Education differ among respondents. Many Â tend to emphasize primarily the assurance of the continuation of the Jewish people and its heritage as the main goal of Jewish education. Affiliation to the Jewish collective is also presented by

many as a goal of Jewish Education. Affiliation to the Jewish religion/nation

could be perceived however as a venue of assuring the existence Â of the Jewish people or primarily as a venue to enable the young to feel secure and belonging' or both. And indeed,Â a "minority" view emphasizes also

or even primarily the young people's feelings ofÂ security and belonging as a goal of Â Jewish Education that enables the young

members of the Jewish collective to feel familiar and at ease due to an

understanding of the social space they live in..And still another minority view perceives Jewish education as only secondary to humanistic education.

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Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â A majority of theÂ participants tend to view the children as mostly recipients of knowledge, rituals and values that they inherit from their ancestors through the mediation of parents and formal educators. Only a few participants perceive the young members of the Jewish collective as active and contributing participants to their culture. Thus, only a minority of participants regard Jewish education as a constructivist socio-cognitive endeavor.

Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Furthermore, inquiry intoÂ the participants' prescribed pedagogy of Jewish contents, rituals and values strengthens the impression that the participants, at large do not necessarily perceive Jewish Education as a Â constructivist endeavor. Many participants strengthen the need to teach Judaism in general and to young children, in particular,Â experientially . Vivid experiences have the potential of making the contents significant and meaningful to the children. Nevertheless meaningful experiences that are repeatedly practiced without their integration with knowledge through a real "dialogic" discourse are likely to be rememberedÂ but are unlikely to bring aboutÂ a deep understanding and transformation in the learner and certainly not Â in the cultural heritage itself. We presented in the Findings sectionÂ a student's detailed example on how she implements her worldviewsÂ in a thorough preparation and commemoration of Holocaust day with preschool children. The preparation and the commemoration are solemn and respectful of the history and the dead people. Â Â Â Â Â Â Â However, her account shows that there is no place for the children's self expression and certainly no place is left for a critical and thorough discourse about Holocaust. I really do not think that young children should be engaged in dialogic discourse focused on the Holocaust. However, one of the considerations in choosing foci of learning in any domain Â and in Jewish Education is the ability to engage learners in a real discourse including "true" and unexpected questionsÂ stemming from the children's curiosity. The mere experience, unaccompanied by a thorough discussion is likely to bring to an incorporation of what is learned leaving no room for real transformations.

Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Coming from people believing in traditional learning that aims at assuring the Jewish heritage this approach is sensible. However, when the approach comes from people believing in the learners' ability to be actively engaged in learning a pedagogy based on experiencesÂ divorced from reflection and knowledge is certainly insufficient.

Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Being open to engage learners(children and students alike) in a real dialogic discourse can be risky because it exposes both the educator and the learner to the potential of real transformations. Nevertheless, authentic constructivist education is about the ability to learn about the past and to transform it and our minds as well. Chaya's(the Head of Bible department at Levinsky)Â biography indicates indeed that her Bible studies at the University led her out of the religious world she was educated in. However, these studies led her be a teacher and a lecturer who devotes all her professional life to encouraging the young to get a deep understanding of the contents and beauty of the Bible.

Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Thus real socio-cognitive constructivist pedagogy implemented in Jewish Education needs

to be based on a combination of knowledge' experiences , reflection and dialogic discourse.

Closely related to the issue of a dialogic inquiry is the extent to which moral dilemmas and tensions included in Jewish formative texts and rituals should be surfaced and dealt with, with learners in general and young children in particular. This issue was only very subtly raised by the participants in this study. One participant(a second year student) suggested that we need to reevaluate our entire perception of Jewish versus Israeli education while other two participants subtly reminded the existence of conflicts and tensions within Judaism (two staff members at Levinsky). As mentioned before, if we perceive learners as real and equal participants in the learning discourse our readiness to allow discourse focused on moral dilemmas and tensions is inevitable. We just have to be prepared to cope with the consequences of such a discourse.

Topics really need to be suited to the young children's age. However, we have to take into account that young children are inquisitive and sharp persons. Listening to their comments and true questions could potentially lead us as to the directions our discourses with them might take. However, I am more worried by emotional turmoil possibly inflicted to children by stories and events that bear frightening meanings young children are not built to deal with (such as Binding of Isaac and the death of first -born sons plague) than by the children's inability to understand the texts. Similarly, encouraging children to ponder Holocaust at a preschool age is something that we have to seriously consider as educators. Assuring the children's well being and -security feelings and belonging to a collective included-might be considered by those really believing in a moral developmentally appropriate practice as something that is more important than assuring the continuation of the Jewish heritage. Value oriented education is about making choices after all. The individual educator's decision to prefer at a certain point in time the children's welfare or the respect of tradition is an implementation in everyday educational life of visions and worldviews.

Therefore, I think that we should prepare teaching students to be aware of the responsibility they are assuming when they make real pedagogic decisions. We should encourage them to understand the consequences of these decisions rather than declaratively presenting grand educational visions.

Diversity among children related to family background, ethnic and religious affiliation is reminded by some respondents as a serious consideration that influences their teaching plans. While some participants propose that we make adaptations of our teaching in order to accommodate the diverse population of children, primarily reflected in tolerance of different views-others suggest that we expose the children to cultural creations that are not necessarily Jewish. One participant suggested that we refrain from teaching Judaism at school and leave this task to the parents' discretion so that we do not hurt those children who adhere to different rituals than those that we offer at school. However, I think that refraining from building a foundation inclusive of both knowledge and a wealth of experiences we contribute to ignorance about our own heritage.

Nevertheless, even though

all stakeholders seem to be interested in issues related to Jewish Education and even though their backgrounds could be viewed as a significant resources in constructing a meaningful Jewish Education at Levinsky, the impression is that we have been doing in this area is far from creating a community of learners who contribute to a constructivist, vivid pedagogy. There really are many good reasons why such a task is hard to achieve. However, in view of the rich and diverse accounts raised by both the "providers" and the "recipients" of Jewish Education at Levinsky I would like to end the paper by raising an issue that could possibly give rise to an additional step to this study: How to use the wealth of personal experiences as resources "owned" by the participants in the teacher preparation enterprise in order to construct a real socio-cognitive pedagogy of Jewish Education in the Early Childhood Education Department at Levinsky ?

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Considering the diversity of voices espoused in this study we can make the following inferences that are related to early education and preparation of early education teachers:

1/ One must assume diversity of affiliations, interpretations and early real life experiences related to "being a Jew" of children, students, field and college mentors and lectures.

2/ The processes underwent by individuals in the process of establishing religious, national, communal identities are an important part of the identity itself and of the process of education and teacher preparation.

3/ Educators and professionals involved in teacher preparation programs need to develop genuine interest in the children's, teaching students', colleagues' interpretations of Jewish affiliation and need to develop a non judgmental, containing attitude towards people different from themselves.

4/ Learning of Judaism contents (related to holidays, history, geography) has to be constructed in a collaborative, emergent manner on the basis of the learners' and teachers' existent attitudes, knowledge, beliefs, doubts and criticisms.

5/ One should of course develop ways to differentiate between acts of opposition as part of power struggles between figures of authority and the young people depending on them, and opposition and rebellion that are part of an internal continuous struggle to develop and maintain a viable identity.

6/ Opposition, arguments, and even rebellion are part of the "natural" process of identity formation and therefore they should be perceived as an important part of learning and identity formation of individuals.

7/ All participants' histories, perceptions, identities and knowledge are perceived in this study as important, indispensable resources in education in general and in early development early education in particular.

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Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â What I

suggest practically that we do at Levinky on the basis of the present study is:

a. To discuss the findings with the participants in this study and to think together of a way of translatingÂ the understandingsÂ extracted from their accounts into a policy of teaching Judaism in our college and into possible curricula stemming from this policy.

b. to offer teaching students an elective course that deals with emergent curricula in teaching Judaism-course that will guide them to construct emergent teaching plans related to holidays and other topics related to Judaism to young children.

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Appendix
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ÕÞÜéèÐÜ .Â Â èÕÜ ÜÕÜ ÕçéÑÕ ÜÕæâÔê ÕÞxçè éÜ
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Â Appendix 2

Clodie Tal-Biographical note related to Jewish identification and identity

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IÂ was born in 1955 in Romania and myÂ family immigrated to Israel in 1970. I am married and have two daughters and Â a grandson.

I have a Phd in Psychology however I've spent most of my professional career doing teacher and preschool educators' preparation.

As of 2007 I am the Head of the Early Childhood Education Department at the Levinsky College of Teachers' Education.Â

I grew in what I perceiveÂ as an "isle of liberal education". My parents' Â liberal approach was expressed both in their humanistic approach towards "the other" ("otherness" related to Â national belongingness, various political views,Â or range of abilities) and in their approach to our education. I remember them for example being very understanding about my inability to learn meaningless contents by heart, and about my refusal to drill calligraphic writing. They taught us to be particularly respectful of people who are in a marginalized position(Gipsy people in Romania, disadvantaged people, those working for our family).Â Â In Communist Romania nobody (not only Jews) was allowed to practice openly his or her religion.Â My family was not religious, but at the same time we openly accepted our Jewishness as a "fact of life" as a "natural" component of Â our identity. Moreover, I remember my grandmother (who lived with us) being somewhat apprehensive around Easter as she remembered pogroms against Jews during the Easter-Passover times. I inherited from her some apprehension over

exposure to lit candle parades during Easter and I somehow internalized the perception that the abolition of religious ceremonials in communist countries served as a protective factor for the Jewish minority. That's why I felt very comfortable with my family's non-religious identity. However, after immigrating with my family to Israel and after marrying a husband who originated from a religious-Zionist family and after having my older daughter married to a Zionist-religious man-I learned to understand that there are all kind of religious persons and that knowledge of the Jewish traditions and ceremonies is essential to a fuller, more self aware and richer identity as a Jew. Nevertheless, even though in our home we have separate meat-milk dishes, we observe Passover(completely Kosher) and perform Kiddush every other week(when my daughter's family come to visit us) I did not strengthen even a bit my faith in God. Moreover, my initial somehow "blind" pride of the Jewish culture and people and my identification with them, gradually turned over the years of living in Israel and occasionally studying characteristics of different religious groups, into a critical approach towards expressions of racism and lack of tolerance towards members of other religions, such as the Arab minority in Israel, work immigrants and so on. Moreover, being a member of the Jewish minority in Romania (until my family's immigration to Israel- I spoke nothing but Romanian and a little bit of English) and a member of the Jewish majority in the State of Israel colored my perceptions and feelings toward what it feels like to be a minority as opposed to a majority and particularly sensitized me and contributed to an understanding and empathy towards members of minorities and marginalized groups in Israel of today. This background shaped my perceptions towards values. I think that there are no Jewish or Christian or American values but rather universal values.

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[1] see Appendix A1-the questionnaire and the appeal in Hebrew and AppendixA2 the English translation of the questionnaire and the appeal

[2] Â Her college mentor did not participate in the studyÂ

[3] See Appendix 2 for a presentation of a relevant biographical note