Insights on Student-Centred and Knowledge-Centred Teaching: Jewish Studies Teachers, Pedagogy and Community

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Abstract

The contrast between student-centred and knowledge-centred teaching is explored through a qualitative case study exploration of the pedagogies (Bruner's 'folk pedagogies') of six teachers of Jewish studies. These teachers, based in orthodox Jewish schools in the UK and Australia, discussed their roles as teachers in the context of their responsibility for inducting students into the Jewish community. They appear to overcome (or at least mitigate) the tensions between being student-centred and knowledge-centred through understanding both students and knowledge in communal terms. This communally-focused approach, drawing on the philosophers of 'personal' knowledge such as Polanyi, and of personalist approaches to schooling such as those of Macmurray and Noddings, is then proposed as of value in debates on schooling and the curriculum in general, well beyond the religious context of this particular research.

Keywords: pedagogy, community, Judaism, student-centred, knowledge, Buber, Biesta, Bruner

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Introduction

There is a long-standing contrast in school-based literature between being 'student-centred' (or 'child-centred') (Wright, 2013, Seligman et al., 2009, Joseph et al., 2020) and 'knowledge-centred' (Hegarty, 2000, Hordern and Tatto, 2018). The disciplines contributing most to the debates on student- and knowledge-centredness are psychology (the general psychology of learning, and positive psychology in particular, Joseph et al., 2020) and philosophy (the philosophy of education generally, and Dewey's pragmatism in particular, Dewey, 2011, Trask-Kerr et al., 2019). Some debates have focused on an apparent battle between student-centred and knowledge-centred teaching (Pring, 1989), and although such a battle is rarely fought – in such pure terms – in academic publications, there are serious academic theories at play in the background. And there have been several attempts to overcome the contrast, notably in both philosophical and psychological traditions (Buber, 2002, Bruner, 1996, Biesta, 2020). In this article, we explore the academic and pedagogical tensions between student- and knowledge-centred approaches

Buber's work on dialogue in education goes beyond the simple contrast between *I-Thou* and *I-It* relationships (Buber, 1958). He contrasts 'genuine' dialogue (which is personal) and 'technical' dialogue (aiming at 'objective understanding') with 'monologue disguised as dialogue' (Buber, 2002, p 22). Within Buber scholarship 'technical' dialogue is rarely regarded as significant, but his description of it as intending 'objective understanding' clearly marks it out as important – if less existentially, personally, important than 'genuine' dialogue.

In a description that draws on Jewish religious as well as philosophical traditions, he describes institutions as often dominated by technical dialogue, 'where all sorts of aims are pursued … [and] the process of affairs is fulfilled', and homes as the place for 'feelings', 'where life is lived and man recovers from institutions' (Buber, 1958, p. 62). But they must be combined, as 'the separated *It* of institutions is an animated clod without soul [a translation of the biblical 'golem'], and the separated *I* of feelings an uneasily-fluttering soul-bird … [as n]either of them knows man: institutions know only the specimen, feelings only the 'object'; neither knows the person, or mutual life' (Buber, 1958, p. 63). In a similar way, Bruner sees dialogue as central to education, both in technical and personal forms, and he rejects all non-dialogic 'voice' as 'all single voices are abstracted from dialogues' (Bruner, 1990, p xii). His four perspectives on pedagogy, described in the following section of this article, are to be 'fused into some congruent unity' (Bruner, 1996, p. 65). The importance of Bruner's work for religious education has been noted (Shapiro, 1968). Biesta describes the three purposes of education as qualification, socialization, and subjectification (Biesta, 2020), which are also to be drawn together, and they have a parallel in his account of religion (for education) that is made up of 'beliefs', 'practices', and 'faith' (Biesta and Hannam, 2016). Such accounts, in turn, illuminate the wider issue of how we may go beyond a simple contrast between student- and knowledge-centred pedagogies.

This article therefore revisits the contrast between student- and knowledge-centredness and provides a distinctive new approach to overcoming the contrast, one in which both student-centredness and knowledge-centredness are in a dynamic relationship with notions of community. The approach is derived in large part from the a small cluster of qualitative case studies (Bassey, 1999, Starman, 2013) based on the analysis of interviews with Jewish studies teachers in two orthodox Jewish schools in the UK and Australia. The introduction of

religion, of a specific religion, to the debate not only illuminates the question of students vs knowledge, but also the debates within the field of religion and education (and religious education) and education and community more broadly (as also in Shapiro, 2013). Teachers of Jewish studies involved in this research described pedagogies related to community membership, rather than being *simply* student-centred, knowledged-centred or confessional. By exploring the six teachers' pedagogies (Bruner's 'folk pedagogies', Bruner, 1996, p. 53, described by us as 'intuitive pedagogies'), we clarify how students and knowledge are together understood in and through their communal contexts. Although the 'communities' for these teachers are religious communities, the lessons learned can further pedagogic debates – across the school curriculum – in more communal terms, following the principles of personal-communal knowledge (Polanyi, 1962) and schooling intended to create 'better' people (Noddings, 2015). The educational theories of Buber, Bruner, and Biesta are brought into conversation, to develop an understanding of a personal, communal, pedagogy that is neither simply student-centred nor knowledge-centred, and that goes beyond the belief-practice-faith description of religiosity.

Pedagogies, Students and Knowledge

There are many approaches to understanding the processes involved in school-based education. Pedagogy, the study of teaching and learning, is central to such an understanding. Whereas there is a wide range of academic pedagogies, the pedagogies described or practiced by teachers may have developed in part from such academic texts (directly, or mediated by teacher training or continuing professional development programmes), and in part from their daily professional practice. Bruner describes four 'folk pedagogies' that are held by many people who are involved in education – whether professional, as teachers, or as policy-

makers or politicians. These are:

1 seeing students as ‘imitative learners’ acquiring ‘know-how’ as ‘apprentice’ adults (Bruner uses the term ‘children’ but we use ‘students’);

2 seeing students as learning from ‘didactic exposure’ and thereby accumulating ‘propositional knowledge’;

3 seeing students as ‘thinkers’ who are developing through ‘intersubjective inter-change’ (‘as Dewey urged’); and

4 seeing students as ‘knowledgeable’ and as helped to ‘grasp the distinction between personal knowledge … and “what is taken to be known” by the culture’ (all quotations from Bruner, 1996, p. 53-61).

The first of these pedagogies might be regarded as including student-welfare-centred work (with an aim of becoming a ‘good’ or ‘flourishing’ adult) along with other ‘apprenticeship’ work, and the ‘practice’ approach to religiousness described by Biesta and Hannam (2016) or the ‘socialization’ of Biesta (2020). The second might be described as knowledge-centred, ‘qualification’ (Biesta, 2020) or ‘belief’-centred in the terms of Biesta and Hannam (2016). The third has – along with much of Dewey’s work – been stereotyped as student-centred and subjective (with students as the subjects) – although Bruner himself notes that this would be misleading, because there is clearly a mutuality involved. The fourth of the pedagogies could be interpreted as bridging both student-welfare- and knowledge-centredness, although the emphasis on cultural knowledge suggests an emphasis on the latter. Although both the third

and fourth might be considered related to the 'faith' approach of Biesta and Hannam, as it involves a degree of 'transcendence' and may be regarded as 'existential' (Biesta and Hannamm, 2016, p. 241), the transcendence is not clearly 'faith'-related, as described by Biesta and Hannam. Bruner's fourth pedagogy has more in common with Biesta's 'subjectification' (Biesta, 2020), although that is a 'here and now' being, rather than a longer-term 'becoming' (Biesta, 2020, p. 100). Buber's *I-It* relationship, characterised by 'technical' dialogue (Buber, 1958, 2002), is particularly close to the second of Bruner's pedagogies. However, *I-It* or *I-Thou* dialogue could be exemplified within any of the other pedagogies.

It should be noted that Bruner's four positions are presented as 'folk' pedagogies. We would prefer to call them 'intuitive' pedagogies, as we are concentrating on the experiences of those in the teaching profession (who will probably have encountered some academic work on pedagogy) rather than the general population. (We do not wish to imply teachers are entirely unaware of how they come to their views on pedagogy, but, rather, that many teachers teach without – at that time – thinking deeply about the formal pedagogic theories.) As such, the folk/intuitive pedagogies are not the same as – or intended to summarise – the pedagogies described or implied by psychologists or philosophers of education. And yet each is, unsurprisingly, related in various ways to some such academic theories, included those of Biesta and Hannam described above, with respect to religiousness. The first might also, for example, be associated with the theories of Lave and Wenger (1991) or Seligman (Seligman et al., 2009), the second with Hirsch (2016) or Prothero (2007), the third with Dewey (2011, as Bruner suggests), Vygotsky (1978), Rogers (Rogers and Freiberg, 1994) or Buber (2002), and the fourth with Oakeshott (1991) on education as inter-generational conversation. It is the contrast between the second and third of the folk pedagogies that is closest to the contrast between student- and knowledge-centred schooling.

Bruner follows in the tradition of Dewey in melding students and knowledge within a broader social context in a pedagogy that is 'never innocent' (Bruner, 1996, p. 63). 'In the end', he says, 'the four perspectives on pedagogy are best thought of as parts of a broader continent …. [and w]hat is needed is that the four perspectives be fused into some congruent unity, recognized as parts of a common continent' (Bruner, 1996, p. 65). In this, Bruner, like Dewey, is eschewing an attempt to create a 'universal' context-free educational philosophy. The more knowledge-centred education is, the more it can be treated as 'objective' and at a distance from the personal, existential, positions of students and teachers alike. The more student-centred or person-centred education is, the harder it becomes to ignore personal, existential, positions such as those related to religion. The difficulty of teaching 'character' or ethics was highlighted by Buber, writing in 1939 (when the issues could hardly be more sensitive): 'I try to explain that it is wicked to bully the weak, and at once I see a suppressed smile on the lips of the strong … [and] the difficulty lies still deeper[:] … as soon as my pupils notice that I want to educate their characters I am resisted precisely by those who show most signs of genuine independent character: they will not let themselves be educated, or rather, they do not like the idea that somebody wants to educate them [in character]' (Buber, 2002, p. 124-125). Buber's idea is that such learning happens through the personal relationship itself (a personal relationship that need not imply either friendship or wholehearted agreement between teacher and students), through the whole 'being' of the teacher and of the student: 'Only in his whole being, in all his spontaneity can the educator truly affect the whole being of his pupil … [so the teacher] need[s to be] a man who is wholly alive and able to communicate himself directly to his fellow beings' (Buber, 2002, p. 124-125).

Jewish Schools in the UK and Australia

In this article, we explore those tensions between student- and knowledge-centred approaches in response to research in two Jewish schools, one in the UK and one in Australia. The broader national policy contexts in the two countries are distinct – with Australia the more explicitly secularist context – yet the schools themselves are similar. Both are explicitly religious or 'confessional', i.e. inducting students into a particular religious tradition. (The term 'confession' is largely associated with Christianity, as a declaration of belief, so it can be misleading when use in other – especially primarily practice-based or community-based rather than belief-based traditions – although its use is retained in this article.) In Jewish schools, the acquisition of Jewish knowledge has always been seen as the focus of the educational endeavour (Schuster, 2019), although this has more recently come under more critical scrutiny (Woocher, 2012, Levisohn and Kress, 2018). The only questions were what sort of Jewish knowledge should students acquire and what was the purpose of such an education. Fox et al (2003) analyse the visions of Jewish educationalists. Twersky (in Fox, 2003) saw the Bible as the primary source of Jewish education, centred on the learning of Halacha (Jewish law), as central not only in strengthening the commitment to traditional practice but also for deepening the philosophical understanding of such practice. In contrast, Brinker's outlook (in Fox, 2003) was secular rather than religious, his orientation pluralist rather than orthodox. For him, acquisition of the Hebrew language was key to a successful Jewish education, as was familiarity with concepts and events of Jewish history preserved in the collective memory. A third educationalist, Meyer (in Fox, 2003), emphasised the importance of educating toward core Jewish values and the creation of an individual whose primary identity lay in being a Jew, open to a world of multiple traditions.

Initially, the research was carried out in order to explore the tensions between nominally religious and nominally educational pressures on teachers in such schools. The interviews themselves suggested that the tensions experienced by the teachers illuminated not just the religious-educational challenge, but the broader student- and knowledge-centred challenges and the whole range of Bruner's intuitive pedagogies. The research described in this article, more like the accounts in Schuster (2019), focuses on how teachers understand knowledge acquisition and student-centred learning in their daily work. Before describing the methodology of the study it is important to understand the context in which the six Jewish Studies teachers interviewed work in their schools.

The current Jewish community in the UK is about 292,000. less than half of one per cent of the total UK population which is about 68 million people (Ashery, 2020). The importance of Jewish education in the UK, and particularly Jewish schools, has grown significantly within the Jewish community over the last three decades. Today, more than 60 per cent of Jewish children (i.e. children who self-identify as Jewish) in the UK are educated in Jewish schools, as compared to less than, 20 per cent in the early 1950s, the majority of them within the state system (Commission on UK Jewish Day Schools, 2009). Boyd (2019), reports that the actual number has risen from about 5,000 in the 1950s to close to 35,000 today, a period which, by contrast, has also seen the UK Jewish population as a whole decline by about 30%. The most acute numerical increase has occurred over the past twenty years or so, with the total more or less doubling from about 17,000 in the mid-1990s to the level found today. This increase can be observed in both the mainstream and strictly Orthodox sectors: the mainstream sector had 1,666 more Jewish children in 2017/18 compared to 2014/15; the strictly Orthodox sector had an additional 2,367 children over the same period.
58% of Jewish children in Jewish schools are in strictly Orthodox schools; 42% in non-

strictly Orthodox or ‘mainstream’ Jewish schools. The annual growth rate of the strictly Orthodox sector is estimated to be about 4.3%, compared to 3.1% in the mainstream sector.

The growth of the Jewish school sector is a reflection both of high fertility levels in the strictly Orthodox part of the Jewish community, and a growing interest in Jewish schooling within the more mainstream part of it. UK Jewish community leaders have focused considerable attention on Jewish schooling in recent years out of concerns about declining levels of Jewish knowledge and engagement. However, as these schools have developed, considerable attention has focused on general academic quality which has helped to attract higher numbers of pupils. In turn, as the choice of Jewish schooling has become more common, it has also grown in acceptability, pushing up numbers still further. The three UK Jewish studies teachers interviewed in this study teach in the same modern orthodox state-aided school.

As of the last census, the Australian Jewish population is 117,903, with 54,735 in Melbourne, the capital of Victoria, and 47,800 in Sydney, the capital of New South Wales, constituting 84% of the Jews in Australia (Graham 2014). Currently, Australia has 17 Jewish day schools, the largest of which are modern orthodox, and the teachers interviewed were in such schools. Rates of attendance at Jewish schools are among the highest in the world. In Melbourne, about 70% of Jewish children attend Jewish schools, while in Sydney, about 62% of them do, but the percentage is declining in both cities (Rutland, 2007; Graham, 2014; Ben-Moshe and Mittelberg, 2012; Forgasz and Munz, 2011). A declared aim of Australian Jewry is that no child should be denied a Jewish education because of affordability. Nevertheless, there are concerns that some families believe Jewish schools are beyond their financial

means. This is major reason given for declining numbers of Jewish children attending Jewish schools.

Despite declining numbers in Australian Jewish schools and increasing numbers in UK Jewish schools, the proportion of Jews in Jewish schools in the two countries are now very similar (i.e. between 60 and 70 per cent), making the school communities more alike than in previous decades.

Methodology

Applying elements of the research of Crotty (2005) and Stern and Buchanan (2020) to teachers of religion in Jewish schools, the authors initially hypothesised that these teachers might experience being 'torn' between the aims of induction of children *into* Judaism, and education *about* Judaism. Although both sets of aims were evident, what the analysis of the in-depth interviews suggested was a distinct kind of challenge, between being more 'student-centred' or more 'knowledge-centred'. That challenge – tackled at least since Dewey wrote on the topic – could illuminate debates on teaching in general, rather than just teaching of religion, and were therefore treated as case studies as heuristic, interpretive, devices (Starman, 2013, p. 34). The analysis of the empirical research therefore explored the intuitive pedagogies of teachers of Jewish studies in orthodox Jewish schools. Six Jewish Studies teachers were interviewed from two Jewish schools with similar religious ethos; three in a UK Jewish school, three in an Australian Jewish school.

All of these teachers teach in modern orthodox Jewish state-aided schools. A modern orthodox school has a philosophy which emphasises the importance of a dual curriculum

which focuses, to a similar extent, on both general and Jewish studies. In addition, both sets of teachers in the UK and Australia are modern orthodox in their personal religious convictions and practice. The parent body of both schools is also similar in its expectations of what the school should be educating towards regarding religious beliefs and level of observance of Jewish law. As such, even though there is a geographical distance between the countries the teachers' views on the questions of pedagogy posed in the study would be expected to be similar, or at least influenced by similar religious and educational contexts.

The study followed a qualitative research case study model with semi-structured interview design and thematic content analysis attempting to capture what participants experience on the topic in their own words (Shkedi, 2003). Two Jewish schools were chosen for this study, one in the UK and one in Australia. Six Jewish Studies teachers, three from each school (pseudonymously Jacob, Chana and Simon from the UK school, Jonathan, David and Rebecca from the Australian school), were interviewed using semi-structured questions prepared in advance utilizing the model suggested by Patton (2003). All the teachers teach students between the ages of 11-15. They represented schools that are in the mainstream of orthodox Jewish education in these countries. As such their views may be characteristic of teachers in many similar ethos-based Jewish schools in the UK and Australia, although no generalised claims are made here. Among the interviewees were two headteachers, one from the UK and one from Australia. Both of them continue to teach Jewish Studies classes in their schools. These headteachers were asked to recommend Jewish Studies teachers to interview who had interesting thoughts to offer on the topic and not necessarily their own. These teachers were also interviewed and indeed offered contrasting views. At the point when these views had been expressed it was felt that a sufficient range of views had been presented.

Within an interview-based study such as this, with a small group of teachers, our intention was not to generalise. Merriam (2016) argues that whilst interview-based studies do not aspire to generalisability, their findings can have propositions for different settings. She reveals how semi-structured or open-ended interviews can create a platform where participants can share experiences and understandings, hence revealing the possibilities and limits of what people might do in similar situations, even when we cannot predict what they might do (Merriam, 2016). Similarly, in this qualitative interview-based study we did not intend to generalise the findings of this study beyond the group of teacher participants.

More specifically, we used an open, inductive approach to the qualitative nature of the object of study, drawing on elements of a phenomenographic approach (Marton, 1986, 2015, Hella, 2008, Wright, 2018, Brante et al, 2015, Holmqvist and Wennås Brante, 2011) to understanding the phenomenon (of teaching Jewish Studies in a Jewish school) from the second-order perspective of the research participants. Those participants identify their own beliefs and priorities and experiences, and present their own perspectives, rather than the researchers making direct observations of the participants' teaching. Intended to understand the variation in meanings in the experiences of being such teachers, rather than simply understanding individual understandings, this approach is intended to create a multi-perspective description of a phenomenon, letting the different perspectives to be read in their own words. By highlighting participants' challenges when teaching Jewish studies we can potentially create a platform to compare and contrast how others in different settings or contexts may feel about the issues raised. Although no systematic comparison was made between the contexts in which the participants worked, the value of considering participants in similar schools in different countries avoids some of the risk of parochiality in a study carried out in a single country.

Individual semi-structured interviews were completed over a period of two months, May to June, 2020. Six interviews were conducted. Each interview lasted 45-60 minutes and was conducted using the Zoom videoconferencing platform. The use of a semi-structured interview enabled us to probe the participants during their interviews for more detailed information on issues that we found to be particularly significant to our study. Probing during an interview is often used to add depth to an interview especially within qualitative research (Patton, 2015).

Our interviews were guided by the following two overall research questions:

1 Can you tell me what you see as the relationship between your role as teacher of religious practices and your role as teacher understanding the world of the student?

2 Can you give two or three examples of tensions between your teaching of religious practices and how students responded. Can you explain how/whether those were resolved, or could have been resolved?

We drew on Merriam's (2016) approach to conducting interviews in which she argues that as a researcher you are a guest in your respondents' world and thus it is important that as a researcher you appreciate the respondents' role as the host or guide who holds the experienced perspective that you require. Our participants were regarded experts on the research topic during the interview process.

This study was approved by the Ethics Committee of York St John University, UK, the then employing university of Stern, which now recognises Stern as an Emeritus Professor of the university.

Prior to conducting each interview informed consent to participate in the study, and to be recorded, was obtained from each pseudonymously-named participant. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and then coded, and analysed using thematic data analysis (Shkedi, 2003). Shkedi suggests that such coding allows a researcher to assess how often certain themes appear in a specific text and the occurrence of such themes can thereafter be compared and assessed.

Findings

We identify three themes under which these teachers described their intuitive pedagogies and what is most important to them: teacher-student relationships are nurtured; students and how they relate to their Jewish studies; students' personhood and identity as Jews and as being part of a wider community. We will examine each of the themes separately.

Teacher-student relationships

The importance of nurturing strong teacher-student relationships was seen by most of the interviewees as important in teaching Jewish studies. Levitt and Levitt (2005) describes the relationship conditions that a person-centred educator wishes to create for his or her students. What teachers are describing here is an ontological stance towards education in which a person's intrinsic motivation is cultivated, and their flourishing as human beings arises, not

by teaching them *about* resilience, grit, and so on, but by *developing* autonomy, agency, and self-understanding through the process of learning to learn.

> My view is that the relationship between the teacher and the children is the bond which you do not want to break, because a child who has a negative view, and a negative relationship with a teacher is not going to learn anything from them. (Jacob)

The relationships between teachers and students are described as being even more sensitive when the subject being taught is Jewish studies.

> Whereas with a secular teacher the consequences of having a negative relationship are less severe, it's limited to that year, so the child won't have a great academic year, but with a Jewish studies teacher we've got an added responsibility, which is to avoid putting anyone off. (Jacob)

Of course, 'putting someone off' might be a problem for any subject-teacher concerned about their subject, but the more personal character of Jewish studies – the existential significance of being Jewish in terms of community membership and identity – makes 'putting off' an even more important challenge to Jewish studies. Teachers of history or science may hope that some of their students become self-identified historians and scientists, but this is unlikely to be an expectation of all students of history and science. In contrast, teachers of Jewish studies might expect or hope for all their students to become self-identified members of the Jewish community. The subject and the persons involved in the subject are inextricably mutual, so that 'child-centredness' (or 'person-centredness') and 'knowledge-centredness' are complementary and not contrasting.

> I think the relationship is the key thing. I want the children to enjoy, I want them to be positively engaged, both with me, and with the subject matter that I'm presenting. (Jacob)

The following shows to what lengths Jacob goes, to ensure positive relationships with his students:

> Throughout the first and the second term of the year, we were really struggling, and breaking our heads and nothing was working. Eventually we said, okay, this is not working. So we scaled the syllabus [down] and we presented it [as] much more bitesize [and] achievable, something incredibly small, which we managed to put together. We just really ripped up the curriculum for this group of kids. (Jacob)

To break the curriculum into 'bitesize' pieces, and then to 'rip up' the curriculum, suggests that the subject is much more than its description in curriculum documents, and the relationship between teacher and students is again prioritised. Jacob gives examples of when teaching becomes counter-productive to building healthy teacher-student relationships.

> Then, you ask yourself, what are you trying to do? You're trying to just be the annoying teacher at the front, you'll be frustrated, the children will be frustrated, and no one's winning, no one's gaining. (Jacob)

Jonathan emphasises a different aspect of relationships: you do not want the students to feel that you are *judging* them. It may seem surprising in a subject like Jewish studies, in which judgements are central to the subject matter, but the key issue seems to be the right of

the teacher to build in their moral/religious judgements of the students to the lessons themselves.

> If I'm teaching Torah, there's a way to teach it that doesn't come across as I'm judging you, you're terrible because you're not like me, that's not how I want to teach it. (Jonathan)

The problem of a teacher acting as judge as well as teacher was highlighted by Buber, quoted earlier in this article, emphasising the personal, relational, nature of school work. Jonathan provides his own 'self' as an example for his students:

> I give my own example, at the age of 11, 10, 11, I wasn't sure if I believed in G-d. If you would have told me at that time that I was going to become a Jewish studies teacher I would have laughed you out of the room, but no one can judge another human being, and I always make that clear, because I have had kids put up their hands and say, does this mean that I'm not a good Jew? (Jonathan)

Jonathan emphasises that you cannot force students, in a statement that is very close to Buber's account of explaining 'that it is wicked to bully the weak', quoted above. It is all about relationships.

> You cannot force somebody who is 15, 16 years old. You can make them sure that they don't disrupt the rights of others, you can insist that they are respectful to other people who are praying, you can enforce consequences accordingly if they breech that, but you can't make somebody say the words, if the words are meaningless to them. Jewish studies

> teaching is all about relationship. (Jonathan)

Jonathan also emphasises the importance of respect, and the ability to disagree. Again, this reflects Buber's claim that 'the test of the educator lies in conflict with his pupil' such that 'whatever turn it may take, he has to find the way through it into life, into a life, I must add, where confidence continues unshaken – more, is even mysteriously strengthened' (Buber, 2002, p. 130).

> Kids do not mind if you don't necessarily agree with what they said, but they don't mind that, as long as you have a good relationship with them, and they are, certain that you are not judging them, for where they're at. (Jonathan)

There is a kind of respect-amidst-disagreement that is important to Jonathan.

> I think if you take the time to develop a relationship, and then you are encouraging, you are teaching in a way that is as respectful as possible, and the kids see that you're not just saying words, but you genuinely do respect them, even if you're not going to agree with them on certain things, I think that the child is fine with it.
> (Jonathan)

Indeed, it is the student-teacher relationships – sitting alongside disagreements – that is portrayed as most central to this teacher's pedagogy.

> I always tell my kids that within six months they're going to forget the assessment they did. What they're going to remember are the skills that they learnt along the way. We will

> forget the lessons we learnt in school; we don't forget how teachers made us feel, and how they built us up, or G-d forbid, tore us down. (Jonathan)

This is as far as the respondents went towards the 'student-centred' intuitive pedagogy. In the following section, we consider the more knowledge-centred – or subject-centred – pedagogies.

Student-subject relationships

A second theme that was identified as important for these teachers was that students should have a good relationship with their Jewish studies learning. Chana, for example, emphasises how Jewish studies should be loved and enjoyable:

> So I really think primary school is the time to make Davening (Prayers), enjoyable, with singing, with a piano, with a guitar. The kids should be happy. (Chana)

Jacob describes the importance of students engaging and loving the subject, in a statement that is categorised, here, as contrasting with Jacob's more fully-stated student-centred position quoted above.

> For years I've been quite unsatisfied with how we teach Passover. it's very boring. So two or three years ago, I did a Google classroom where each child was given different assignments. Did they have a solid grasp of the whole of the curriculum? Definitely not. But the elements that they were engaged in, and which they did their own research, and they created the pages themselves, was phenomenal. They were really engaged with it,

> and they loved it, they had such pride in the finished product, (Jacob)

Like Jacob, David focuses on the importance of students having love and passion for the subject.

> Teaching Jewish studies, is very interesting, because my experience tells me that, teachers of Jewish studies feel that it's not just good enough for the students to really learn the material, it's also about the students having some kind of relationship with the material, in other words they've got to love the subject. (David)

Research was not completed on 'love of the subject' with respect to subjects other than Jewish studies. However, as noted above, teacher expectations of self-identity as 'historians' or as 'scientists' may be less common in history or science than self-identity as a member of the Jewish community is for Jewish studies teachers, so 'subject-centredness' and 'child-centredness' are once again more complementary than contrasting, and this might be explored further for other subjects.

Students' personhood and identity

A third theme was identified through data analysis. Simon and Rebecca emphasise the teacher's role as guiding students in their search for meaning and developing their Jewish identity. For them it is paramount that their students both identify themselves as Jews while at the same time being integrated in the wider community. These teachers are torn with pedagogic dilemmas. How, on the one hand, do we encourage openness and questioning and

while at the same fostering students' identification with their own tradition? Simon, for example, reflects on the purpose of education.

> Do we impose on one hand the tradition and the way of doing things? If that [is] imposed, then how does that balance with bringing out the best in children? The nurturing side, which is where you allow the child to explore, to question, to live in the area of confusion. There's always something higher to achieve, there's always going to be deeper levels of meaning. (Simon)

The identity of the student is not wholly individual (or individualist) but communal. Simon discusses how important it is for students to feel connection.

> Our kids need to connect, especially today, in a post-modern world where nothing's important to them, nothing is cast in stone – they're going to throw it all off if we don't give them the deep connection, and the tools to be able to connect from a very young age. (Simon)

Rebecca emphasises the importance of students feeling positive about being Jewish and feeling part of the community:

> The kids are so far removed from Jewish practice that the first step is just to get them to be positive about being Jewish and to see that no matter what they're doing in their lives right now, they can still feel Jewish, they can still feel a connection, and they can still have a role to play as a Jew in the world. (Rebecca)

Just as Simon says ‘there’s always something deeper’, allowing for current uncertainty, so Rebecca describes this as ‘leaving the door open’.

> There’s a certain amount of knowledge that you give over, [but] there is more to learn, so you leave the door open. You don’t try to shove them through that door before they’re ready. I’m using that philosophy in my own teaching more and more, just keep the door open. (Rebecca)

Like David, Rebecca notes the distinctive quality of Jewish studies in the curriculum.

> I don’t see Jewish studies as a subject like any other. We’re talking about the essence of who these children are, so for me, it’s how can I use my own knowledge, my love of my Judaism, my connection to Israel, to try and facilitate their own journey, and help them come to an appreciation of who they are. And to try and figure out what their connection is, and understanding that my connection on a personal level may not be theirs, and that’s okay, as long as I’ve played my part in helping them find a connection, whatever that connection is for them. (Rebecca)

Discussion

Utilising qualitative heuristic analysis we were able to identify three recurring themes in the interviews, presented as ‘theory-seeking case stud[ies] leading to fuzzy propositions’ (Bassey, 1999, p. 14). The themes were generated by continual sorting and resorting of data and ongoing comparisons between the data and the developing categories of description, as well as between the categories themselves. The three themes identified were teacher-student

relationships, student-subject relationships, and students' developing personhood in a community. These themes inform our response to the initial concerns with, on the one hand, the tension between 'student-centred' and 'knowledge-centred' intuitive pedagogies, and on the other hand, the putative tension for teachers of confessional religious education between their educational and religious accountabilities (their 'bi-dimensionality'). The first of the themes, represented by quotations from Jacob and Jonathan, speaks to a more 'student-centred' pedagogy. A 'bond' can be created, and it is always worth discarding the details of a curriculum in order to get students interested in learning. Teachers should teach relationships, and – in doing this – should avoid a primarily judgemental relationship with students, and should build a relationship that admits to the teacher (as well as the student) being a person who changes views over time. Teachers and students may disagree and yet be bound by a relationship of mutual respect.

In contrast, the second theme, represented by quotations from Chana, Jacob and David, focuses on students and the subject called Jewish studies. To help students engage with and enjoy the subject is itself a (or the) prime purpose of teaching the subject. This may require students engaging with a narrower range of knowledge of the subject-matter, rather than simply expecting students to learn a comprehensive list of knowledge. One of the teachers contrasted Jewish studies with other subjects, suggesting that Jewish studies should be 'loved' in a way that is not so necessary in other subjects – which could be learned 'without love'. It might be said that all subject specialists will see their subjects as more important than other subjects and more 'loveable'. Yet it remains that there is a knowledge-centredness within the intuitive pedagogies of at least some of these teachers. It is the third of the themes, represented by quotations from Simon and Rebecca, that both explains why Jewish studies might be considered by these teachers to be more important than other subjects, and why the

teacher-centred and knowledge-centred pedagogies can be bridged. Nurturing children in a way that allows the students 'to be', and to engage and connect to community (or to a specific, Jewish, community) at deeper and deeper levels, whilst maintaining openness – openness to what students may contribute in their own right, as well as openness to what is as yet uncertain or unknown.

In this research, Jewish studies is described by several of the teachers as being different from other subjects, being described as distinctively 'existential' for the students, in contrast to providing (only) information and skills, and therefore as being a subject that can be taught in order to be 'loved'. In these ways, the teachers seem to be distinguishing between Jewish studies as a school subject and maths or geography or science which have more in common with academic disciplines which are more independent from the students' deeper identities. This distinction is worthy of much greater consideration than it can be given here. But Jewish studies, and religious education in many of its forms (both confessional and non-confessional), is explicitly of the form described by Macmurray as a means by which we may 'teach people' ('[w]e may act as though we were teaching arithmetic or history [, i]n fact we are teaching people [and t]he arithmetic or the history is merely a medium', Macmurray, 1946, p. 1). That is, Jewish studies inevitably involves 'teaching people'. Religious education more generally is described by Moran as a 'personal' subject, and this is indicated by the use of 'education' in its title:

> When we are doubtful that there is an academic subject and especially when we want a practical result, the word "education" shows up in the curriculum subject itself. ...for all the talk about phenomenology and objectivity, the British public (and their politicians) think that religious education ought to have some personal and practical effect. (Moran,

1989, p. 101.)

However, Beane makes a broader point, saying that all school subjects are personally implicated, and should be seen as distinct from academic disciplines. He says that ‘a discipline of knowledge and its representative school subject area are not the same things, even though they may be concerned with similar bodies of knowledge[, as t]hey serve quite different purposes’ (Beane, 1995, p. 617). What Moran and Beane agree on is that Jewish studies (as a form of religious education, or simply as a school subject) is personal, in the sense also described by Macmurray (1991, 2012). An even broader claim is that of Polanyi, for whom all academic disciplines, never mind school subjects, are ‘personal’ (Polanyi, 1962), related to the position of the scholar and the membership of scholarly and broader social *communities*.

The character of school subjects is, as has already been said, a debate worthy of a separate article. For the purposes of this research on intuitive pedagogies, however, one of the most significant implications of the three themes emerging from the research is the existential and communal character of Jewish studies. The ‘community’ may be the Jewish community, but that is seen by the teachers as part of and intermingled with other communities and social groups. Although student-centred pedagogies and knowledge-centred pedagogies may appear to be in conflict, or at least spread across a spectrum, once a ‘community’ is introduced into the character of subjects (as it is by Polanyi) and into the character of relationships (as it is by Macmurray), student-centredness and knowledge-centredness can both be accounted for within a pedagogy of relationships within communities. That is why the third theme has such an important role in these findings.

Conclusion

This article moves from the subjective personal development of students in school (Seligman et al., 2009) to Bruner's intuitive pedagogies and Biesta's work on the purpose of education, clustered around student-centredness and knowledge-centredness, and come to a position closer to the communal educational philosophies of Macmurray and Buber. Within this research, we do not take a position on the appropriateness of inducting the students in these schools into the specific (orthodox Jewish) communities described by the teachers. (As with debates on school subject and disciplines, such a topic would be worthy of a separate article.) But Jewish studies, and confessional (and much non-confessional) religious education more generally, forces educational researchers to consider students and knowledge (or subjects) as distinctively 'of communities'. In this context, Jewish studies is positioned in such a way as to bridge student-centredness and knowledge-centredness, through the community-centredness of a religious community. It is not an example of Bruner's fourth folk pedagogy, in which students are knowledgeable but are helped to *distinguish* between personal knowledge and 'what is taken to be known' by a social group (Bruner, 1996, p. 61, quoted above). Rather, it is an intuitive pedagogy in which personal knowledge and 'what is taken to be known' are *integrated* for the student. Students are not expected – by these teachers – to be inducted *unquestioningly* into the (Jewish) community. They are, precisely, expected to be and to remain open to changes, open to disagreement, whilst yet being introduced into the community. Just as scientists within disciplinary communities are expected to work within a paradigm whilst being open to developing ideas that would break the paradigm apart (as described in different ways by Kuhn, 1970, and Popper, 2002, as well as Polanyi, 1962), so these teachers see their students as joining a community *along with* their potential disagreements.

Macmurray described a community as necessarily allowing for disagreement. His model of a community is represented by families, schools, friendship groups, and religious communities. In a family, a child 'discovers himself [*sic*] as an individual by contrasting himself, and indeed by wilfully opposing himself to the family *to which he belongs*' (Macmurray, 1991, p. 91). In a similar way, the intuitive pedagogies described by the teachers in this study provide a model in which student, knowledge (or subject), and community are in a dynamic relationship. By considering Jewish studies, a subject that does not seem – even to its teachers – as similar to other school subjects, the intuitive pedagogies described may in turn illuminate not only religious education more generally, not only the other 'education' subjects (as described by Moran), but perhaps – following Macmurray and other personalist philosophers – the whole of schooling.

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The authors have no potential conflict of interest to declare.

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