

Israel

Makor Chaim Yshiva High School

This boys-only boarding high school (grades 9-12, age 15-19) combines full-day secular and religious studies, and focuses at students' meta-cognitive, personal, and interpersonal development. Lessons are designed to encourage students to take responsibility for their own learning, by choosing subjects and conducting research for a better understanding of the subject. By studying complex, non-linear Jewish texts in small groups, the students are challenged to develop their thinking abilities by interacting with each other and learning from their classmates. Each student has a homeroom teacher throughout the four years at school, who is a rabbi-teacher who functions as mentor and studies together with the students. In addition to a diploma, students receive a detailed personal assessment from their homeroom teacher every year. Admission to the school is selective and based on criteria such as students' self-awareness and autonomy as learners.

Main focus of Innovation: CONTENT, ORGANISATION, TEACHERS

Other keywords: alternative philosophy

General Information

Name of the ILE: Makor Chaim (Life source) - Yeshiva High School

Location/Address: Kibbutz Kfar Etzion, 90912, Israel

Website: <http://www.makor-c.org/>

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Rationale

Why do you suggest that it should be included in the project? How does it respond to 21st century learning challenges?

Makor Chaim is a boarding yeshiva high school (grades 9-12) for religious Jewish students (boys only), comprising 300 students and about 20 teaching staff. The main goal of the school is to encourage the youngsters to search for and develop their identity, religious beliefs, and the spiritual meaning of life, during adolescence when existential thoughts are the main concerns of the students. By providing a supportive and trusting environment, the teaching staff strives to develop autonomous, inquiring, and excellent students.

While only few lessons are taught frontally, most of the studies are in the following three practices:

Inquiry – a method in which students are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning, by choosing a subject and conducting research for a better understanding of that subject. The best part of this practice is the research project, which most of the students conduct as part of the matriculation examinations (which are required in Israel for entering higher education institutions).

Personal assessment is the second practice whereby each student learns about his progress. This is a detailed personal summary written jointly once a year by the homeroom teacher and the head of the Yeshiva, which is given to the student along with the diploma on his learning achievements.

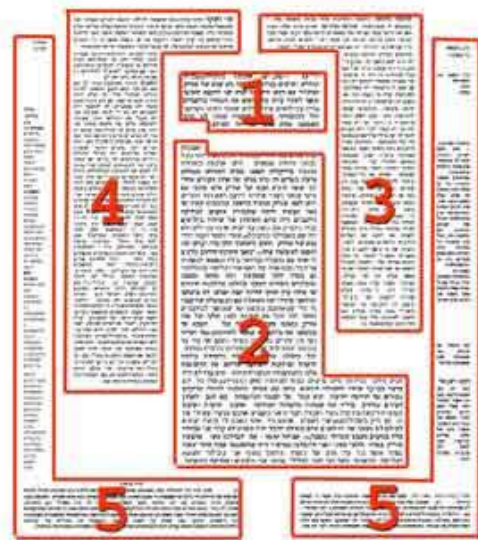
The third way – the most unique and intriguing practice, thus meeting ILE criteria, is *Havruta*.

Havruta (Hebrew: study with a friend) is an ancient Jewish technique for interactive textual introspection, used by religious scholars to study Talmud (the corpus of Jewish civil and ceremonial law) and Halacha (Jewish religious laws). *Havruta* conveys the notion that each person has access to a piece of the truth, but should talk to others to come closer to it, thus gaining a greater understanding of the text, himself, and his place in the world, rather than if studying alone. *Havruta* is based on several basic characteristics with regard to the text, the learners and the practices:

The text is a complex, non-linear composition of Jewish religious laws with layers of commentaries and interpretations collected over hundreds of years, which has become one of the most important books among orthodox Jewish scholars. It is written in Aramaic and Hebrew, and requires a high degree of proficiency for fully understanding it. The following illustrations present the text's structure.



Page from the Babylonian Talmud



The structure of Talmud Page

- 1 - The Mishnah - a text edited in the Land of Israel in the second century CE, presenting situations of disagreement or a conflict.
- 2 - The Talmud, a commentary of the Mishnah which was composed in Babylon between the third and the eight centuries CE.
- 3 - Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo Yitzhaki) – a medieval French rabbi who wrote the most important and comprehensive commentary on the Talmud.
- 4- Tosafot (Hebrew: additions) - are medieval commentaries of European rabbis on the Talmud, that came immediately after Rashi
- 5 – Rishonim and Achronim (primary and latest) – additional commentaries from Jewish scholars from the eleventh to the sixteenth centuries CE.

The learners – All the students experience *Havruta*, usually in pairs, for about two or three hours a day. The pairs are determined by the students themselves or by the homeroom teacher, sometimes as heterogenic pairs in which the faster student can help the slower one. Although Talmud studies are considered very difficult, many Makor Chaim students found them challenging and developed their thinking abilities.

The practices – In this method, each small group of students (two or three) are given a text. One reads aloud and the other follows the text. If the text is long, they take turns reading different sections. After reading the text, they answer the guiding questions provided with the text, taking brief notes while discussing the answers, and then having a class conversation based on students' responses.

There are several ways of studying in *Havruta*. The differences depend on the order of the subjects during days, weeks and years, the emphasis on the different commentaries, the division between class and pairs materials, and so on. Some researches indicate that these differences continue through the higher educational phases, after high school¹

The social aspect of *Havruta* challenges prevalent ideas about learning as individualistic, passive, and measured by its outcomes². In addition, in the digital and postmodern age, when "the medium is the message", and where the text appears in many ways and changes its meaning according to context, *Havruta* brings the text back to conversation, offering a new (and ancient) path to human accumulative knowledge.

The specific way in which *Havruta* is applied in Makor Chaim will be the subject of the next steps in the ILE study, to better understand how it is done, what answers *Havruta* has for students' diversity, what benefit the students found in this method, what (if anything) they can transfer to other learning settings, and which characteristics of this practice can be relevant to other texts and context.

Learning Aims / Intended Learning Outcomes of the ILE

What are the core learning aims and which knowledge, skills or attitudes are to be acquired? (These may include outcomes related to learners' social, interpersonal, or meta-cognitive development)

Through combined secular studies (mathematics, sciences, the humanities, and social studies) and religious studies (Talmud, Halacha, etc.) the school strives to develop Jewish believers that are constantly searching for their life mission, while being honest with themselves and others, and caring for the Jewish people and every person in Israel. This means to know, understand, and to choose on the meta-cognitive levels, to undertake and motivate on the personal level, and to care for others on the interpersonal level.

Learners

Which group(s) of learners is it aiming at? Who is eligible to take part? How many learners are there? What are their ages?

The 300 students, aged 15-19, comprise 10 classes, two for special education students who need extra support. The school accepts independent students, with high self-awareness, and the abilities of autonomous learners. Excellent but dependent and childish students, as well as confident students who lack learning abilities will not fit in. For checking the students' suitability, each applicant is required to conduct an 'honour test' at his home, based on full confidence in the student.

¹ Kanarek, J. (2010). The Pedagogy of Slowing Down: Teaching Talmud in a Summer Kollel. *Teaching Theology and Religion*, 13(1), 15-34.

Holzer, E. (2006). What Connects "Good" Teaching, Text Study and Havruta Learning? A Conceptual Argument. *Journal of Jewish Education*, 72(3), 183-204.

² Kent, O. (2006). Interactive Text Study: A Case of Havruta Learning. *Journal of Jewish Education*, 72(3), 205-228.

Facilitators

Who are the teachers/facilitators? Who are the leaders? What are their professional backgrounds? What are their roles?

Each class is under the responsibility of rabbi-teacher, who serves as a homeroom teacher for the four years, coordinates disciplinary study with the subject-matter teachers, and the mentoring of research projects. The rabbi-teachers have an academic degree in education, all or part of the rabbinic qualifications, and have served in the Israeli army.

Organization of the ILE

How is learning organised? How do learners and facilitators interact? What kind of pedagogy do they follow? What curriculum is used?

The school day starts with morning prayers at 07:00, continues with religious studies in the morning and secular studies in the afternoon, and ends with evening prayers at 19:30, with homework and social time at the evening. The teachers not only mentor the students, but they also study with them, and tutor teaching students from the nearby teacher training college.

Learning Context

In which context does learning take place? What does the physical learning environment look like? Are community resources used to facilitate learning and how?

The school building is located in Kibbutz Kfar Etzion, a small communal village south of Jerusalem. The place includes not only the school, but also a teacher training college which educates teachers in the special way of the school, and a seminary for educational leaders, educational scholars, and the general public.

History of ILE

Who initiated it? For what reasons was it started and with what purpose? Have these changed since?

Makor Chaim was founded in 1984, in Jerusalem, by the charismatic and Israel Prize laureate in Jewish studies Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz, who wanted a different education that nurtured students seeking the meaning of life and Jewish beliefs, and not just following orders. In just a few years it became one of the most famous and unique yeshiva high school in Israel, which has attracted the best religious students ever since.

It is important to note that in Israel there are three main sectors in education – the state sector which serves the non-religious citizen, either Jewish (about 40% of the population) or Arabs (20%); the state religious sector which serves about 20% of the Jewish population (and Makor Chaim among them); and the orthodox sector that serves an additional 20% of the Jewish population.

Funding of the ILE

How is it funded?

The school is funded by the Ministry of Education, parents payments (about \$4,000 a year), and donations, to support the small classes, extracurricular activities, and the unique programs (such as art, music, drama.)

Learning Outcomes

What are the learning outcomes achieved by the ILE, including academic, social, interpersonal and meta-cognitive outcomes? How is learning assessed?

The school was recognized by the Ministry of Education as an innovative model aiming to diffuse its lessons to other schools. In addition, the school alumni maintain close relations with the school staff, and many of them choose a career in which they continue to influence and develop their abilities, either in education, academe, and the army. Other indicators of the school's success are the sustainability of the teaching staff for the last 25 years, and the long waiting list, far in excess of the 70 students the school can accept every year.

In addition, several books, papers and articles which describe the school's way have been published, and many other reports were published in the Israeli press over the years, as can be seen on the school's website.

<http://www.makor-c.org/content.asp?pageid=225>