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THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE CHAI CURRICULUM

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The CHAI curriculum was created by the Union of American Hebrew Congregations as a way to standardize education for Reform Jews across the nation. Curriculum designers used backward design theory to create a comprehensive curriculum that emphasized Jewish learning and living beyond the classroom. Backward design structures lessons around enduring understandings, which are the big ideas that students should walk away with from a lesson. Each level of the curriculum has enduring understandings related to Jewish values that build on each other throughout the lessons. This study surveyed students, teachers, and education directors at two schools in Pennsylvania whose differences are valuable when evaluating the effectiveness of this curriculum. These schools have teachers with different levels experiences, different classroom sizes, and different outlooks as to the purpose of CHAI in their school. By analyzing the results of the surveys and interviews, the effectiveness of the CHAI curriculum is dependent more on an understanding of the backward design theory than the other factors, although the other factors do play a significant role.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

The number of people who enter the synagogue because of the school far exceeds the number who enter for any other purpose.

In 2001, at the Biennial Conference in Boston, Rabbi Eric Yoffie, who was then the President of the Union for Reform Judaism, announced a new curriculum that would begin to be phased into religious school classrooms across the nation in the fall of 2002. As the president for the governing body of more than 900 American congregations, the Union for Reform Judaism (URJ), the movement to which a majority of affiliated Jews in America belong, has as one of its most central tasks the education of children. Hebrew school is a “central activity of our synagogues.” However, the religious school system is not being used as effectively as it can. There are problems to be addressed: “limited instruction time, a shortage of teachers, [and] sporadic attendance.” Since the school is such a crucial component of the synagogue, the Union thought that a new curriculum was necessary to change the perception of the school—to change it

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2 Ibid.


4 Yoffie. “Boston Sermon.”

5 Ibid.
from a “failure” or “necessary evil” into a “promising vehicle for religious engagement.”6 Their answer was the CHAI curriculum, a flexible, seven-level set of lesson plans, family education programs, and Hebrew lessons that teach Jewish children the values of Reform Judaism.

According to the Union for Reform Judaism’s website, one of their four main goals is “to foster the vibrancy of Reform Judaism through Torah (life long Jewish education), avodah (worship of God through prayer and observance) and g’milut chasadim (the pursuit of justice, peace and deeds of loving-kindness).”7 Additionally, there is a saying in Pirke Avot (Ethics of the Fathers, 1:2) that says “the world stands on three things: Torah, avodah and g’milut chasadim.” It is said that these are the ways through which Jews work to create relationships between themselves and God, each other, and the world. The word chai in Hebrew means life, and it is fitting that the authors named the curriculum “life” when the topics they address teach Jewish children how to live Jewishly. It is for these reasons that each level of the CHAI Curriculum core is divided into three strands—Torah, avodah, and g’milut chasadim.

The strands are meant to be flexible and adaptable for each classroom, teacher, and school. Not everything needs to be adopted or implemented all at once. The important concepts that the CHAI Curriculum teaches are found in the enduring understandings, the take away messages, not the specific activities of the lesson plans. The CHAI Curriculum was written using backward design, explained in the book Understanding by Design by Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe.8 When planning a lesson, Wiggins and McTighe argue, the first step should not be the actual activities; rather, it should be determining what the outcomes will be, then how the

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6 Ibid.


outcomes will be assessed, and then how those outcomes will be taught. Through this method, curriculum designers created the CHAI Curriculum. By retaining the enduring understandings from the outlined lessons, teachers can adapt the learning activities to fit their classroom better while still transferring the knowledge that the curriculum designers planned. Additionally, the information students learn in Hebrew school “will go beyond the specific classroom activities and will reach a deeper enduring understanding, establishing the basis for later Jewish learning and living.”

Since its implementation in 2002, the Union has conducted surveys of teachers, students, education directors, and parents to analyze if their curriculum is as effective as they planned, to figure out what they like, what works, and if the enduring understandings are actually being transmitted to students. As a student and now as a teacher, I have been on both sides of the CHAI curriculum. I have noticed some limitations from working at a small synagogue that were not present in the larger school I attended. I wanted to explore if this was true for other teachers who do not have a different school to which they can compare their experience. Additionally, I wanted to examine what makes the CHAI curriculum more effective, are there strategies or training sessions that could be learned to make the CHAI curriculum’s messages easier or more readily grasped by the students? I hope to make suggestions to the teachers and schools for how they could better implement the CHAI curriculum, ensuring continuity both from classroom to classroom and year to year.

This thesis will explore the effectiveness of the CHAI curriculum in different settings. Previous surveys interviewed teachers with years of teaching experience. Are the same results achieved for teachers with less experience? Is the curriculum adaptable for classes of six students

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instead of twenty? And finally, is an understanding of backward design or training required to effectively use the CHAI curriculum? Chapter two will give a very brief introduction to the history of education in the Reform movement, in an effort to place the importance of this thesis within the larger framework of a culturally valued education. Next, chapter three will summarize *Understanding by Design*, the comprehensive book explaining why and how to use backward design. Chapter four will show how the CHAI curriculum is outlined and explain the big ideas for the two strands focused on in the surveys. The two schools in this study will be introduced in chapter five, describing their histories and philosophies before comparing their vast differences. Chapter six will survey the literature, a collection of previous studies conducted on the CHAI curriculum. The actual results from this study will be presented in chapter seven, and the conclusion can be found in chapter eight.
Chapter 2

Education in the Reform Movement

One of the major tenants of Judaism is education. There is one particular verse from Deuteronomy (6:6-7) that emphasizes education: “Take to heart these instructions with which I charge you this day. Impress them upon your children.”¹ Proverbs 3:1-2 also has a line stressing the value of education, claiming that it will lengthen days and years of life.² Finally, there are many Talmudic passages in Pirke Ḥaṭṭot (Ethics of the Fathers) that delineate instructions for schooling—at what ages children should begin education, methods of instruction and punishment, and topics of education.³ The emphasis placed on education in religious documents was translated into Jewish cultural practices. This can especially be seen at the time of the Enlightenment in Europe.

Enlightenment was spreading across Europe in the late 18th century. Prior to this, education for Jews was limited only to men, and the focus of their studies was Jewish texts like the Talmud (rabbinic commentaries on oral traditions) and the Torah (the word of God given to Moses at Mount Sinai). During the Enlightenment however, education was changing. In deciding whether or not to assimilate into the cultures of the countries in which they lived, some Jews favored the creation of new schools that taught secular subjects in addition to religious ones. Naphtali Herz Wessely advocated for New Jewish schools, the first of which were established in

²Ibid., 1602.
Berlin. Most opposed to the new schools worried that nationalism and citizenship duties would become more important than traditional Jewish practices. Additionally, there was a fear that Judaism would become just like Christianity where the synagogue was the center of religious life like the church, music was taught to children for synagogue use like choirs, and worship services were conducted in the vernacular, not Hebrew. The latter occurred when David Friedländer and Isaac Euchel translated the liturgy into German in 1786.

In 1791, Jews were emancipated in France, meaning they were their rights of full citizenship. This was the reason that some Jews reconsidered their relationship between Judaism and their nationality; maybe now, Jews could be both citizens and religiously observant, without rejecting one for the other. Israel Jacobson was impressed by the French emancipation of Jews and felt that emancipation must be granted for the Jews of Germany before reform could occur successfully.

Following the emancipation of Jews in Westphalia in 1807, Jacobson established a reformed school in the Seesen Temple. This school restructured the school system for Jewish children in Germany. Previously, only boys were educated in a school setting, while girls were informally educated at home by their mothers on how to run a Jewish home. Israel Jacobson

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5 Ibid., 24.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid., 25.

8 Ibid., 31-2.

9 Ibid., 32, 38, 42.

brought girls into his new classroom with boys, teaching them both secular subjects like math, science, and German. Additionally, his schools were not only for Jews. He welcomed non-Jewish children into his school in order to teach both groups about the other. Finally, when the Jewish religion was taught in school, it was treated as another subject like math or German, taught in an “orderly, logical fashion.”

In keeping with the ideologies put forth in Germany by Friedländer and Jacobson, Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise promoted the values of education and organized religion to American Jewry. He realized that Reform American Jewry needed an institution of higher education that would train rabbis and create educational and spiritual standards, to guarantee the survival of Reform Jews. Wise began by forming the Union of American Hebrew Congregations in 1873 of thirty-four synagogues that would create a need for a theological school to be founded. It is important to note that the Union was established as a federation of synagogues before the seminary was created; the synagogues take precedent before the college, unlike the Conservative movement where the Jewish Theological Seminary overshadows the congregations. The synagogues still play a dominant role in the policy that the Union issues, while the rabbis, cantors, and educators instructed at Hebrew Union College, the Reform seminary, are the ones instructing the next generation. The preference of synagogue or school is an important distinction to keep in mind, but both the synagogues and the seminary play an important role in Reform Jewish education. “In

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11 Ibid., 6.

12 Ibid.

13 The Union of American Hebrew Congregations would later change its name to the Union for Reform Judaism (URJ).


1875, the Hebrew Union College was launched in Cincinnati, the first permanent Jewish institution of higher learning in the New World.”

According to the Union for Reform Judaism website, two out of the four goals in the Union’s mission statement are still related to education. One is “to foster the vibrancy of Reform Judaism through Torah (life long Jewish education)” and the other is “to support the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, enabling it to train rabbis, cantors, educators and other professionals and scholars who are essential to the spiritual and educational life of our religious community.” Again, the goals of the URJ focus first on lifelong education (through the synagogue) and then in the seminary; both are instrumental for the continued education of Reform Jews. Without training the next generation of religious leaders and teachers, the movement would cease to exist as it currently does.

In order to fulfill the first goal, the Union has an entire section of their website dedicated to learning and Torah. They have a weekly commentary about the current Torah portion (parsha), resources for teachers, parents, and teens, as well as information about adult study and Judaism classes. There is a Commission on Lifelong Jewish Learning that is “designed to meet the need for a structured, ongoing forum in which the overarching vision and priorities for Jewish Education in the Reform Movement emerge.”

Another important factor of education in the Reform Movement is Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC). HUC is the institution of higher education for the

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movement. It is dedicated to advancing Jewish culture and the pluralistic spirit of the Reform Movement through its spiritual and lay leaders. Its purpose is to serve as the hub of Reform Judaism education, have values of God, Torah, avodah (religious work), and Tikkun haOlam (repair of the world), and be a resource for spiritual leaders, congregations, and the greater Jewish community.

Today, most children learn about Judaism from practicing it at home with their families and in Hebrew school. Hebrew schools vary by congregation and typically meet one to two days a week. During this time, students might learn how to read and sometimes how to understand Hebrew. They might learn about the practices, customs, traditions, or histories of various Jewish holidays. There are sometimes courses or grades that focus on Israel, Torah Study, the Holocaust, and/or Jewish values. Hebrew schools show the continuity of the importance of education in the Jewish religion, from the all-male yeshiva (school) that only looked at religious documents, to co-ed schools that taught subjects like math and history; the value of education has not wavered in Jewish history. In order to standardize the education of Reform children, the Union for Reform Judaism (URJ) created the CHAI Curriculum based on backward design. This step shows the commitment of the Union to educating the next generation. They dedicated time and resources to work with some of the best educators in the country to compile a comprehensive curriculum that promotes Jewish values and foster relationships between emerging Jewish adults, God and their community. With the outcomes of cultivating engaged Jewish youth, the curriculum designers worked backwards to outline seven levels of lesson plans using the backward design educational theory. The next chapter will explore backward design in more detail.

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20 Ibid.
Chapter 3

Backward Design

The CHAI Curriculum was written using the educational theory of backward design, developed by Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe, explained in the book *Understanding by Design*. The main premise of this book is teaching effective understanding. The first step of backward design is to figure out the expectations that students should come away with from the lesson. What are they supposed to learn? Second, the teacher determines how to evaluate the students. What will prove that they understand the material? Only after these two steps have been met can the actual learning activities be planned. The overall design process, as outlined in the book *Understanding by Design*, can be seen in the design matrix below (Figure 3.1). This chart outlines the key questions, design considerations, design criteria, and design accomplishments in an organized manner.

The authors highlight the differences between understanding and knowledge. Knowledge “is focused on a set of facts, skills, and procedures that must be ‘learned by heart’.“\(^1\) Whereas understanding is different:

Doing something correctly, therefore, is not, by itself, evidence of understanding. It might have been an accident or done by rote. To understand is to have done it in the right way, often reflected in being able to explain why a particular skill, approach, or body of knowledge is or is not appropriate in a particular situation.\(^2\)


\(^{2}\)Ibid.
Table 3.1: Design Matrix based on Understanding by Design

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Design Questions</th>
<th>Design Considerations</th>
<th>Filters (Design Criteria)</th>
<th>What the Final Design Accomplishes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Stage 1**                                                                          | - National standards  
- State standards  
- Local standards  
- Regional topic opportunities  
- Teacher expertise and interest                                                                 | -Focused on big ideas and core challenges                                                              | - Unit framed around enduring understanding and essential questions, in relation to clear goals and standards |
| - What are worthy and appropriate results?                                           |                                                                                                     |                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                    |
| - What are the key desired learnings?                                               |                                                                                                     |                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                    |
| - What should students come away understanding, knowing, and be able to do          |                                                                                                     |                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                    |
| - What big ideas can frame all these objectives?                                    |                                                                                                     |                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                    |
| **Stage 2**                                                                          | - Six facets of understanding  
- Continuum of assessment types                                                                 | - Valid  
- Reliable  
- Sufficient                                                                                      | - Unit anchored in credible and useful evidence of the desired results                                             |
| - What is evidence of the desired results?                                           |                                                                                                     |                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                    |
| - In particular, what is appropriate evidence of the desired understanding?         |                                                                                                     |                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                    |
| **Stage 3**                                                                          | - Research-based repertoire of learning and teaching strategies  
- Appropriate and enabling knowledge and skill                                                                 | Engaging and effective, using the elements of WHERE TO:  
- Where is it going?  
- Hook the students  
- Explore and equip  
- Rethink and revise  
- Exhibit and evaluate  
- Tailor to student needs, interests, and styles  
- Organize for maximum engagement and effectiveness                                            | - Coherent learning activities and teaching that will evoke and develop the desired understandings, knowledge, and skills; promote interests; and make excellent performance more likely. |
| - What learning activities and teaching promote understanding, knowledge, skill, student interest, and excellence? |                                                                                                     |                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                    |

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3 Adapted from Figure 1.5 The UbD Design Matrix in Wiggins and McTighe, *Understanding by Design*, 34.
This distinction is important when designing lesson plans. Many teachers will ask students to “understand” material, when they only require students to memorize facts and regurgitate them on a multiple-choice test. Understanding, true understanding, will ask those same students to understand the concepts of the material, the big ideas, and apply them in a new way on the exam. For example, a student could know how to do long division. They’ve learned the long division process of dividing, multiplying and subtracting. Yet, when asked how many buses are needed to transport 1,128 students if each bus holds thirty-six students, and they answer thirty-one remainder twelve, there is a lack of understanding. They computed the problem correctly, they know long division but they do not understand it: they didn’t comprehend that a remainder of twelve students would require a thirty-second bus.4

What these students were missing the authors call “transfer.” Transfer is the ability to apply the knowledge they have been taught in class to a new and maybe confusing situation. A new situation is not one where only the numbers have been changed. A new situation would by like the school bus problem. It was not like the standard long division problems where “thirty-one remainder twelve” would have been an acceptable answer. This problem now required students to understand what the questions was actually asking and apply their long division skills in a specific context. Understanding is also not achieved when students can answer only a certain phrasing of the question—they are not able to apply their knowledge to other questions.5

Related to the above situation are misunderstandings. Rather than indications of no transfer or wrong information, misunderstandings highlight confounding logic. Students try to transfer the information, and succeed in a plausible but misunderstood way. They show where the transfer got sidetracked. These misunderstandings show the teacher how to improve the lesson,

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4 Ibid., 2-3.
5 Ibid., 48.
how to explain the topic so that those unsuccessful transfers can become successful. One problem that can sometimes lead to misunderstandings is the “expert blind spot.” This is a term that the authors use to explain excessive coverage. Covering all of the material presented in the textbook does not make students understand for two reasons. First, they are usually being lectured at, and therefore they are not being required to apply the material. This can cause misunderstandings because the students are just being asked to spit the information back on a test, rather than transfer and apply their knowledge. Second, the information is being presented in a way that does not indicate what the students should retain. Why are they being taught this? What is so important about this topic? Without the direction of “why,” coverage of material is like a sea of knowledge, unending and overwhelming, both of which intimidate students from achieving transfer.

All of these parts of understanding, application, transfer, and misunderstanding are made accessible to students when teachers take the time to determine the established goals, enduring understandings, and essential questions of the lesson. Goals are the long-term standards or program objectives for the lesson or unit design. Enduring understandings, on the other hand, are the “transferable big ideas that give the content meaning and connect the facts and skills.” The essential questions are the focus of the lesson that highlight the importance of this information being taught currently.

Wiggins and McTighe explain that goals are derived from the established standards set forth by the program, department or state. They are the benchmarks for where students should be at each grade level, organized by curriculum and typically compiled by state. However, the authors point out that goals for a lesson or unit cannot be simply copied and pasted from the state standards. Rather these standards are the guidelines from which goals can be created. Two main

\[6\] Ibid., 44-6.

\[7\] Ibid., 57.
problems arise when copying standards. They are identified in the text as the “overload” problem and the “goldilocks” problem.

“Overload” is the situation where there are simply too many tasks to complete in one year, let alone within the time a student attends schools. After reviewing 160 different state and national standards, Marzano and Kendall (1996) found 255 specific standards and 3,968 benchmarks that students should master. The number of tasks is more than overwhelming for a teacher to teach, and even more so for a student to learn and understand. The second problem is the “goldilocks” problem. This one comments on the specificity of each standard—some are too general, while some are too specific. If the standards are too broad, there is not enough focus for teachers to create a lesson or unit. However, if the benchmark is too specific, students may incorrectly understand that school is about coverage and merely memorize facts to pass tests.

The solution according to the authors is to determine the big idea. Several standards probably overlap in the understandings they hope to impart on students. For the standards that are too broad, detailed examples from the too explicit standards might help focus the lessons. “Big ideas are at the ‘core’ of the subject; they need to be covered.” The work that goes into understanding the big idea may help students reach several benchmarks. Some characteristics of big ideas include being broad and abstract, universal in application, and timeless. The abstract quality of big ideas is intriguing because it makes them easy to apply in many contexts, yet the potential for misunderstandings increases. These concepts are not meant to be understood readily; they have to be “uncovered,” yet this very feature of big ideas makes them hard to work with.

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8 Ibid., 66.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid., 69.
Framing the big ideas as questions is one way to make them more accessible for students to comprehend.

In order to uncover the big ideas, the established goals, the authors explore the different ways transfer can occur. These are explained through the six facets of understanding. They are explanation, interpretation, application, perspective, empathy, and self-knowledge. These six facets are the different sides, the different meanings of understanding. They show the different kinds of transfer that can be achieved from learning. When teaching, the goal should be to fully develop each one of these types of understanding. They even help to guide the types of assessment necessary to observe each type of transfer.

Being able to explain something means that students can make connections between different data points and justify why something occurred the way it did. For interpretation, students internalize the information and present it in their own way. Application refers to the ability of “doing” a subject. Take the Pythagorean theorem and apply it to solve a word problem. Perspective is looking at a story from different sides as well as “seeing the big picture.” Empathy is “understanding” what someone is going through when they lose a pet. It is “finding value in what others might find odd, alien, or implausible.” Self-knowledge is when people can understand themselves to know their limitations and weaknesses—a “metacognitive awareness.” These are the six facets of understanding towards which essential questions should be geared.

Essential questions are “not answerable with finality in a brief sentence…their aim is to stimulate thought, to provoke inquiry, and to spark more questions.” In the context of a lesson, the essential questions guide students to the purpose of the session. Essential questions point out the big ideas, help connect ideas from one topic to another, and encourage transfer of knowledge so that students understand. There are four characteristics to essential questions. They can be

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11Ibid., 106.
questions that pop up again and again in our lives. They can also be related to the core ideas.

“What is healthful eating” would be an example of a core idea for a nutritionist. Essential questions also help students learn by promoting transfer and making connections between topics and ideas. Finally, questions are essential when they engage students—if it is a question about which students are curious, it will be more meaningful for students to explore its answers than a question geared toward adults about which students have no interest.

When designing an essential question, the authors suggest that it should have six objectives, as outlined on page 110 in the text. The first is that it will cause students to ask more questions, to be curious about the big ideas. Secondly, it will open thoughtful discussion, where students are seriously thinking and participating in uncovering the idea. Third, it will require students to observe the questions from different perspectives and weight the alternative possibilities. Fourth, an essential question will ask students to rethink what they may have already learned. Next it will allow students to make connections between old material and life experiences, to make the idea personal and meaningful. And finally the essential question should occur repeatedly in a natural way, where students can apply this newly learned material to new topics.

When designing essential questions, there is another factor to consider in addition to the six aforementioned characteristics. The authors differentiate between topical questions and overarching questions. Topical questions are specific, and usually are seeking a certain answer. Overarching questions on the other hand are more general. Neither is “bad,” but their distinction is worth pointing out because they have different uses within a lesson. Overarching questions can be used to frame the lesson, while topical questions can be used to get the students thinking about specific examples. For instance, an overarching question for a nutrition course could be, “how do...

\[12\text{Ibid., 109.}\]
our various body systems interact?” There are many lenses through which this question could be explored—from structural (skeletal) standpoint, by looking at the nervous system, etc. Yet, knowing that this is for a nutrition class, the topical question in place, “how does food turn into energy?” focuses the lesson on a nutritional perspective examining food moving throughout the body.

Understandings, like essential questions, can be topical or overarching. Overarching understandings are, like essential questions, more general. They provide more easily transferable big ideas that allow students to make connections with topics in other lessons or disciplines. Topical understandings are more specific. These are the specific ideas teachers expect students to grasp within a lesson, that nest within the overarching general understanding. But understandings are not facts. Understandings require inferring information from the facts to draw logical conclusions or applications. As defined by the authors on pages 128-129, understanding has several distinct features: it is an important inference, it is about a transferable big idea, understanding is typically an abstract concept, it usually must be uncovered to be obtained, and it is a summary of important principles. When designing understandings, one should be conscious that abstract understandings must be explained in clear terms so that they are fully understood by students. This means that teachers should focus on one overarching understanding as a priority and a few topical understandings to frame the lesson, without overwhelming the students with too many foci or no focus at all.

Once the established goals and essential understandings have been designed, it is much easier to establish what assessments will be useful to verify if the students understand what they are expected to understand. Assessments are used to evaluate how much students have uncovered from the essential questions and they can be created only once the criteria for what will indicate

\(^{13}\)Ibid., 115.
understanding has been established. How will students show that they understand the material? This is different progression than a typical lesson planning strategy. Rather than focusing on the teaching points and lesson activities, backward design asks the instructor to create assessment plans and determine what evidence would show understanding before the lesson is actually planned. This change allows teachers to focus on transferring understanding to students, ensuring that the lessons are about understanding the material, not just a few fun, unrelated activities. This change takes the form of “authentic performance.”

A performance is authentic if it contextualized in the learning, if it requires students to critique and create new ideas, if it forces students to apply what they have learned in challenging situations—not merely recite, if the activity asks students to compile their knowledge from cumulative tasks rather than just using a selected set of skills to complete the activity, and finally if students are given the opportunity to improve their performance after receiving feedback from peers and teachers. These five criteria are what will cause an assessment activity to be authentic rather than just something to do in order to earn a grade.

The authors suggest ways to make performance activities authentic through the acronym GRASPS: Goal (the objective), Role (the character: a teacher, student, researcher, parent etc.), Audience (to whom this solution will be presented), Situation (the problem), Performance (what the solution will entail), and Standards (criteria on which the solution will be judged).

Additionally, the six facets of understanding, explained above, should also be used when creating assessment activities. Understanding does not need to be presented in one particular view. It should not be assessed from one perspective. All six facets (explanation, interpretation,

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14 Ibid., 153-4.

15 Ibid., 158.
application, perspective, empathy, and self-knowledge) should in some way be addressed throughout the assessment period for a particular big idea (See Table 3.2).

Authentic performance activities, while useful in assessing understanding, are hard to use because of the open-ended nature of the questions and tasks. This feature requires criteria to be established so that students and teachers alike know what counts as understanding. These criteria should be established for all six facets of understanding. For a vague example, a student will understand this by: explaining that concept, interpreting this story, applying that theory, viewing this event from two different sides, empathizing with that person and reflecting on this idea or revelation. Rubrics are a good way of organizing all of the criteria for an activity.

The other aspect of performance activities, besides the criteria with which the tasks will be evaluated, is validity. How accurate are these assessments in determining how well a student comprehends the big ideas. Wiggins and McTighe ask two questions for their validity test:16 (1) can a student do well on the performance task without demonstrating the desired understanding? (2) Can the student do poorly on the performance task while really understanding the big idea? If either of these questions has affirmative answers, then the performance activity is not a valid assessment of understanding and should be revised so that the activity accurately assesses the uncovering of the big idea.

Having established overarching goals and determined what assessment activities will be appropriate; it is now finally time to begin planning the lesson learning activities. This is the lesson plan that will be used to teach students, to provide them with the opportunity to transfer information and understand the big idea. But how do educators teach for understanding?

16Ibid., 184.
Table 3.2: The Logic of Backward Design\(^\text{17}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If the desired result is for learners to…</th>
<th>Then you need evidence of the students’ ability to…</th>
<th>So the assessments need to require something like</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understand that</td>
<td>Explain</td>
<td>-Develop a brochure to help younger students understand what is meant by a balanced diet and the health problems resulting from poor eating.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-A balanced diet contributes to physical and mental health</td>
<td>-A balanced diet</td>
<td>-Discuss the popularity of fast foods and the challenges of eating a healthful diet in today’s fast-paced world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-The USDA food pyramid promotes relative guidelines for nutrition</td>
<td>-The consequences of poor nutrition</td>
<td>-Plan a menu for a class party consisting of healthy, yet tasty, snacks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Dietary requirements vary for individuals based on age, activity level, weight, and overall health</td>
<td>-Why we eat poorly, despite the information available</td>
<td>-Conduct and present research on the impact of diverse diets on health and longevity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Healthful living requires an individual to act on available information about good nutrition even if it means breaking comfortable habits.</td>
<td>Interpret</td>
<td>-Describe how your life would be affect (and how it might feel) to live with dietary restriction due to a medical condition, like diabetes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And thoughtfully consider the questions…</td>
<td>Apply, by</td>
<td>-Reflect on to what extent are you a healthy eater? How might you become a healthy eater?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-What is healthful eating?</td>
<td>-Planning healthy menus</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Are you a healthful eater? How would you know?</td>
<td>-Evaluating various plans and diets</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-How could a healthy diet for one person be unhealthy for another?</td>
<td>See from the points of view of</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Why are there so many health problems in the US caused by poor eating despite all the available information?</td>
<td>-People of other cultures and regions in terms of their dietary beliefs and habits</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Empathize with</td>
<td>-A person living with significant dietary restrictions due to a medical condition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reflect on</td>
<td>-Personal eating habits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Whether foods that are good for you always taste bad</td>
<td>-Conduct and present research on the impact of diverse diets on health and longevity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{17}\)Adapted from Figure 7.8 The Logic of Backward Design with the Six Facets from Wiggins and McTighe, *Understanding by Design*, 162.
The authors suggest that the focus of the lesson plan shift from teaching to learning. The objective here is for students to learn. If the focus is on teaching, instructors might focus on how clear their lecture slides are or fun activities. When the focus shifts to learning, teachers put the students and understanding first and focus on activities and lessons where the students have the opportunity to transfer information about the big ideas. In order to accomplish this shift in focus, Wiggins and McTighe suggest the acronym WHERE TO. WHERE TO stands for: Where and Why, Hook and Hold, Equip, Rethink, Reflect, and Revise, Evaluate, Tailored, and Organized.\(^{18}\)

The Where and Why focuses the students on the goals, objectives and purpose for the lesson. It is more than just an instruction sheet; the difference is context. Tell the students the essential questions and explain to them why this lesson will help them uncover its answers. Additionally, the Where of WHERE TO can also focus on what the students already know, “where” are they coming from.

Hook and Hold is the aspect of the lesson that gets the students engaged with the material. “Make the knowledge worth knowing,” and students will more likely be excited to learn. The trick with this aspect is to make the knowledge essential and meaningful. Do not show the video just to show a video, rather show the video to hook the students into the lesson and get them excited about uncovering answers to the essential question.

Equip the students so that they have the tools to perform well on the final performance activity. Let them experience transfer rather than shove information at them. Students need the opportunity to practice understanding—homework assignments and lesson activities should give them the tools to deepen their understanding by internalizing the information, and transferring

\(^{18}\)Ibid., 197-8.
what is taught in class into ways of thinking about problems. This will equip them with the knowledge of how to solve a problem, not just memorize random facts.

Reflect, Rethink and Revise asks students to constantly consider the big ideas in new contexts. How will what I just learn change my answer to the big question? “Built-in rethinking is a critical and deliberate design element, central to learning for understanding...[they] highlight the facets of perspective, empathy, and self-understanding.”

Evaluate is not assessment from a teacher for a grade, but rather a self-assessment where students can think about what they know and where they need more information. This revisionist nature of the lesson asks students to rethink that they know about the big ideas, be aware of their own self-knowledge, and get feedback on their transfer thus far.

Tailored lessons are individualized for the students. When designing a lesson or an assessment, do not ask all students to fit into one model. Teach the material in a variety of ways to access the visual, auditory, or tactile learner. Have a variety of assessment projects that will all demonstrate transfer and understanding of the material where all students will succeed.

Finally, organize the lesson to make the most effective lesson for understanding possible. What will be the first and last topic taught? The answers may seem obvious, but they need to be considered. The where and the why should be explained towards the beginning of the lesson, but they should also be repeated frequently so that students remember where this lesson is going and its purpose.

When considering WHERE TO, the authors highlight that the six facets of understanding should not be forgotten and should be incorporated into the learning activities. The purpose of these learning activities is to establish in the students the evidence that demonstrates their

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19 Ibid., 215.
understanding of the essential questions. This lesson plan design all goes back to empowering students with an understanding of the big ideas.

When teaching, it is important to remember that the lesson is about the student understanding the material, not covering as much as possible. The authors term this distinction as “uncoverage,” not coverage. Uncoverage is the process of understanding a big idea or discovering answers to the essential questions. Coverage, on the other hand, is the act of teaching every concept and detail in the book. Without explaining the meaning, or emphasizing the big idea, students won’t understand the material, and thus coverage is not an effective or efficient way to teach a concept.

Teachers need to know what style they are using when teaching material and understand that not all students learn in the same way. Teaching styles need to be varied to accommodate the various types of learners, so that every student can transfer the information using the six different facets of understanding. Additionally, by using “checks for understanding” teachers can see where the class is and revisit areas that need more attention for a particular question. A check for understanding could be an index card summary, a one-minute essay, a concept map, or oral questions. These simple tasks can show the teacher what the students know and which topics need more attention; the tasks can point to misunderstandings before the concepts are hard to correct.

In conclusion, the premise of backward design is to teach for understanding. In order to teach for understanding, one must first establish what the students should come away with from the lesson. What are they suppose to know from this lesson? What are the big ideas? Once the big ideas have been established, the evidence for what will show that the student understands the big ideas need to be developed. What will show that this student has transferred the material and understands the big idea? Only then, after the goals have been outlined and the evidence of understanding determined can the actual learning activities be created. The purpose is not to teach as much material as possible, but to have the students learn as much as they can, understand the
material, transfer and internalize the information so that they can apply their knowledge in other situations. This is the theory that the designers of the CHAI curriculum used to develop a comprehensive series of lesson plans in an effort to ensure that future generations of Jewish youth would live Jewish-value-filled life.
Chapter 4
The CHAI Curriculum

The CHAI Curriculum is a seven level standard of teaching for Reform religious schools across the nations. It was developed in 2001 by the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the National Association of Temple Educators (NATE), and the education faculty at Hebrew Union College. They based their curriculum on the educational theory of backward design. Each lesson is designed to impart understanding to students, by a structured layout that focuses on understanding. The content is derived from Jewish values. As addressed in the introduction, the word *chai* in Hebrew means “life.” The purpose of this curriculum is to uniformly educate Reform Jews nationwide about the values, traditions, customs, and history of living Jewishly.

While the standards are not structured like those found in a state curriculum, there are standards that can be inferred from the enduring understandings and essential questions found in every lesson of CHAI.

Each lesson begins with an introductory paragraph, explaining the significance of this lesson and the general goals of this strand. This is then followed by the “enduring understandings,” a list of bullet points that highlight the main take-away messages of this strand. These are derived from the “essential questions,” which follow in the lesson outline. The essential questions express not necessarily what the teacher will be asking, but rather highlight, for the benefit of both the student and the teacher, the purpose for the activities in this strand.

Each of the nine lessons at a given level in any particular strand has the same enduring understandings and essential questions. The nine lessons work together to transfer the knowledge

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1Yoffie. “Boston Sermon.”
from the essential questions and enduring understandings to the students. However, these topics are different for each stand. For example, the first and second lessons of the level six Torah strand have the same enduring understandings and essential questions. Yet, the first lesson from the level six Torah strand and the level six avodah strand are different, as well as the first lesson from the Torah strand of levels six and seven.

Enduring understandings and essential questions are two of the main components of transfer as described above in backward design. In addition, each lesson is equipped with “questions to be addressed,” which are specific questions connecting the essential questions to this particular lesson. The questions to be addressed are more topical, while the essential questions are overarching for the entire strand. In order to “understand” an essential question, both topical and overarching, students must demonstrate to the teacher their evidence of understanding, specific objectives that indicate the transfer of knowledge.

Finally, in an effort to preview the lesson, CHAI provides a lesson overview, an outline of the different components of a lesson and the approximate times each part should take, lesson vocabulary that may be unfamiliar to the teacher, and materials needed, providing the teacher with the information to be completely prepared for this class, allowing time to acquire the necessary props or make suitable substations. The rest of the lesson is the learning material, the worksheets, scripts, questions, and outlines of activities for teachers to use.

Each level of CHAI provides a series of lesson in three strands: Torah, avodah, and g’milut chasadim. The CHAI Curriculum is meant to serve as a resource for teachers, parents, and synagogue administrators, bringing a love of Torah into the lives of Jewish children today.2 It

2Ibid.
focuses on celebration, *Torah* stories, worship practices, and acts of loving kindness, rather than centralizing on Holocaust and a history of Jewish suffering.

Each level has a different theme and each of the three strands in that level is connected to that theme. The sixth grade at the synagogue in the rural college town synagogue focuses on level six of the CHAI Curriculum. Sixth graders at the Metropolitan Synagogue use level seven in Jewish studies courses. Below is an outline of what the different strands focus on for these levels.

*Level Six Torah*[^3]

The theme for level six is revelation. More than just the revealing of the *Torah* to the Jewish people at Mount Sinai, Reform Judaism focuses on new revelations that occur in our everyday relationship with God. The enduring understanding for the *Torah* strand at level six is “studying Jewish texts allows us to explore our relationship with God and reflect on the ways God is continually revealed to others and to ourselves.”[^4] Having just explored the book of prophets (*Nivi’im*) in level five, level six explore this idea through the book of writings, *k’tuvim*. As sixth graders, as early adolescents, students are constantly struggling with their worldview—what is real, what is changing, and how to make sense of it all. The focus on this strand at this level is not that they understand every minute detail of the lessons, but that they grapple with their relationship with God. Rather than reading every story and taking its meaning at face value, the lessons at level six ask students to read between the lines, consider multiple possibilities and examine the evidence (or lack their of) for the role of God in several stories like the Book of Ruth, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Psalms in order to discover their relationship with God.


[^4]: Ibid., 3.
Level Six Avodah

Because the theme for this level is revelation, it is fitting that the topic for the avodah strand is the Torah service. Also, this coincides nicely with the timing of b’nai mitzvah training as sixth graders are working towards their bar or bat mitzvah. When we stood on Mount Sinai, we received the Torah. Today, we treat every Torah service as if we were again at Mount Sinai and we were again receiving the Torah. The enduring understanding for this strand is “avodah is the work we do, by exploring our personal and communal role in revelation, to find sacred connections to God, community, and self.” The nine lessons in the avodah strand dissect the Torah service into smaller sections and ask students to question their role in the community and the role of revelation as it relates to each component of the Torah service. Again, these lessons are not designed so that students merely know the different components of the Torah service or a definition of revelation. These lessons are meant to get students thinking, questioning and critiquing their relationship with God and Judaism as they transition into their adult Jewish self.

Level Six G’milut Chasadim

This strand of g’milut chasadim focuses again on revelation, but this time through the medium of community, or rather world service. Several acts of loving-kindness are presented at a global level and students are asked to consider how they can find or build a relationship with God through one of these projects. Some examples include protecting rainforests, recycling, protecting animals, world health problems, peace, world hunger, and civil rights. Each lesson invites students to investigate the response Judaism provides for this issue as well as to consider how


6 Ibid., 97.

their work to solve or help to alleviate a problem could help them with their own revelation. Some questions are “How can I experience revelation by working to protect/fighting for/fighting against…fill in global issue.” While similar in structure, the idea is that students will experience revelation in different ways and that maybe working to protect animals will help one student strengthen their relationship with God, while working to fight world health problems might help another students. Again, like the Torah and avodah strands, the focus of this strand is to facilitate a discussion within a student on their relationship with God.

*Level Seven Torah*\(^8\)

The theme of level seven is *Hineini*—here I am. It focuses on defining the individual—your identity as a Jewish person. The Torah strand explores this concept by returning to the first book of the Bible-Genesis (*B’reishit*) to explore the examples of individuals we are given. Like Abraham, what kind of journey are we expected to go on? Like Cain and Able, how do our sibling relationships define us? Like Isaac, how can we honor our parents, even if we don’t always obey them? How does Rebekah, in addition to the other women of Genesis teach us to make difficult decisions? What does the relationship between God and Abraham reflect about my relationship with God? How is my own personal struggle with my self, my family and my relationship with God similar to Jacob’s struggle? These stories are explored in a new way, just as the students being taught are examining themselves, yet again, this time with a new lens. Here the lens is of the Jewish adult they are growing into, mimicking the Jewish tradition of revisiting the same stories, each time with a new lens, each time learning more.

Level Seven Avodah\(^9\)

Again reflecting on previous topics, this strand asks students to look at life cycle, holiday observance and Jewish identity in a new light. “The message and power of prayer can help me understand and define myself as an individual and as an authentic member of the Jewish community.”\(^10\) Students look at how participating in Jewish life cycle like b’nai mitzvah events defines their Jewish identity. They will extrapolate from Jewish rituals on birth and death and conclude their own views on the purpose of life as Reform Jewish adults. Next, students will consider what their role is for continuing Jewish holiday traditions. What do the customs of Yom Kippur and Kol Nidre say about how we change as Jewish people? How does Passover comment on passing tradition down from generation to generation and what is my role in that chain? How will I help the Jewish people survive, like the themes of Hanukkah and Purim describe? Finally, students will question what it really means to say, “here I am—\textit{Hineini}” as a Jewish adult—what must they do to be a Jewish adult? What must they believe? Through these three mini-units, students will begin to define their Jewish adult identity.

Level Seven G’milut Chasadim\(^11\)

The focus in this level of g’milut chasadim is ethics, ethical behavior, and the role ethics play in defining a Jewish identity. This unit explores ethical connections to topics relevant to adolescents, such as loyal friends, truth, taking action, staying calm, being pleasant, courage, generosity, and helping to repair the world. Ethics are checks to make sure our behavior matches our beliefs. “We are not expected to be perfect, but we are expected to constantly strive to have


\(^10\) Ibid.

our positive actions outweigh our negative ones.”¹² These nine lessons ask students to balance their own behaviors, thoughts and feelings with those of the people around them. This strand allows students the opportunity to explore the “connection between personal values and behavior”—the perfect concept for emerging young adults. These conversations, questions, and lessons will play a crucial role in defining the responsibility these Jewish adults will have in tough situations. The job of the educator here is not to teach students what to do in a specific situation, but to equip them with the necessary tools to handle any situation while remaining true to their Jewish self.

¹²Ibid., 183.
Chapter 5
The Schools

In order to conduct this research study, I selected two schools in Pennsylvania. One located in a rural college town, the other near a metropolitan area.¹ This chapter will give a brief history and description on each synagogue, before moving into descriptions of the Hebrew schools themselves. These schools were selected because I have a relationship with both synagogues, making the procurement of study participants easier. Additionally, they both have several years of experience using the CHAI curriculum throughout the Hebrew School. Finally, the schools have many differences that may influence the effectiveness of the CHAI curriculum. The differences will be discussed at the end of this chapter.

I Rural College Town Synagogue and School²

The rural college town synagogue (RCTS) is a Reform congregation with about 200 families. In the 1930s, the congregation worked with Jews in a neighboring town to create a Jewish community. Jewish families worked with the local Hillel to create a Jewish Community Council (JCC), officially incorporated in 1954. As the Jewish community was growing, they outgrew their space and decided to separate the JCC from the Hillel group and built their own

¹Due to confidentiality, the sources in this section cannot be properly cited, as they reveal the identity of the schools surveyed. The various sources will be identified as Source A and Source B, etc, to differentiate between the sources. For further information, please contact the author.

²Source A.
building, dedicated originally in 1965. About twenty years later, they built an expansion, giving the community center a larger sanctuary, a library, and more classrooms. In 1979, the community center gained the title of “synagogue.”

Having just been established, the RCTS needed to determine its affiliation, if any, with a specific movement of Jewish ideology. Before, when they were just the JCC, affiliation was not really an issue; they were a lay-led congregation without the financial resources to affiliate. However, becoming a synagogue changed the situation. Researching the Reform, Conservative and Reconstructionist movements in American Judaism, the RCTS decided to affiliate with the Reconstructionist movement, hoping to “serve congregants of all backgrounds without challenging old movement loyalties.”³ In 2001, after fourteen years in the Reconstructionist movement, the RCTS decided to join the Reform movement, reflecting “the increasing acceptance of traditional ritual within the Reform movement.”⁴ In the course of thirty-five years, the RCTS has seen eight different rabbis. Three trained at a Reconstructionist seminary, the remaining five, including the current rabbi were trained at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, the main rabbinical seminary of the Reform movement. While the synagogue is affiliated with the Reform movement, there are services offered in both Reform and Conservative styles. Members who belong to the RCTS congregation fall along a wide spectrum of Jewish beliefs and practices. This is the only synagogue in the area, with the exception of the Hillel and Chabad centers, which cater to the college-student population on campus, not the full range from kindergartener to senior citizen and everything in between that a synagogue or JCC would accommodate.

³ Ibid.
⁴ Ibid.
The Hebrew school at the RCTS is “dynamic and creative.” The school runs from kindergarten through high school. Kindergarten, first, and second grades meet once a week on Sundays for two hours, learning mostly about Jewish holidays, values, and Torah stories.

Beginning in third grade, students come twice a week to learn Hebrew. Hebrew is taught for two hours each week—one day during the week for an hour and an hour on Sunday mornings. The second half of Sundays are spent with the Jewish Studies teachers learning about Torah, avodah and g’milut chasadim from the CHAI Curriculum.

Currently, the school has about fifty students and twelve teachers, split between Jewish studies and Hebrew. Some teachers teach both Jewish studies and Hebrew. Almost every grade has two classes for Hebrew, allowing teachers more one-on-one time with individual students. Twelve teachers for fifty students may seem excessive, but education is a very high priority for this congregation. School administrators are presently discussing ways to cut back on the actual number of teachers, without losing the quality education that is already in place. An important factor to consider is that all of the teachers at the synagogue are college students. Most of them have very little, if any experience teaching, managing a classroom, or writing effective lesson plans. But the resources available to a small congregation in an isolated part of the state are limited compared to a larger, metropolitan school.

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5 Source C.
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
8 Source B.
9 Ibid.
II Metropolitan Synagogue and School

Started by a group of families in a metropolitan city, the Metropolitan Synagogue (MS) was accepted into the Union for Reform Judaism in 1955. This group of seven families worked together to pool their funds enabling them to rent a basement in a private home for services and meetings. After being affiliated, the synagogue moved to a new home and began additions until the mid 1960s when the members realized they needed to move in order to attract new members. In 1974, that move to the suburbs occurred. Working hard to build the congregation’s membership, establishing a school, and creating exciting programs, the new building was growing small. After twenty-two years in this building, the MS decided to relocate yet again, this time doubling the size of their previous building. The clergy at the MS is comprised of a senior rabbi, an assistant rabbi, a cantor, and an adjunct cantor, all affiliated with the Reform Movement. Today, there are approximately 1,100 families belonging to the MS and 700 students in the religious school, the largest in the area.

The Metropolitan Synagogue School has about thirty teachers who educate approximately 700 students a year. With so many students, the MS school runs in two sessions on Sunday mornings. One from 9:00 - 10:45 in the morning, followed by a thirty-minute break for teachers, and then a second session from 11:15am - 1:00pm. Jewish studies classes meet on Sundays and use the CHAI Curriculum. Third through sixth graders meet on Sunday mornings in order to:

- Learn about the concepts of God and holiness; study *Torah* through the text and apply its ancient lessons to their own lives; get connected to the Land of Israel by learning about

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10 Source D.

11 Although it was first established in a metropolitan city, it is important to note that the MS is currently located in a suburban setting.
its people and customs; become acquainted with the journey of the Jewish people throughout history; learn how to make our lives holy by the ritual observance of Shabbat, the festivals and the major events of a Jewish lifetime; study the history and heroes of the Holocaust; and celebrate the Jewish holidays throughout the school year.\textsuperscript{12}

These students also meet one day a week for ninety minutes to study Hebrew.

Students learn Hebrew through prayer; decode Hebrew and understand the major prayers in the Shabbat morning and Friday evening service; learn key roots and vocabulary of the prayers; and understand the relevance and importance of the prayers and the ethical values associated with each one.\textsuperscript{13}

In addition to classroom learning, students at the MS school experience program based learning through a series of family education programs and retreats. Beginning in third grade, families participate in approximately three family education programs spread throughout the year. The sixth grade family education program is focused on the B’nei Mitzvah, with a series of four programs that teach about the significance of this rite of passage ceremony.\textsuperscript{14} Program based learning and the importance of \textit{tzedakah}, charitable giving, are greatly valued components of religious education at the MS School.\textsuperscript{15}

\textbf{III Important comparisons}

There are several important differences to emphasize between the RCTS school and MS school. One is the experience of the teachers. All of the teachers at the RCTS are college students, most with very little teaching experience or training. At the MS school, the majority of teachers have full-time jobs as educators or have more experience teaching. Teacher experience can be a

\textsuperscript{12}\textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{13}\textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{14}\textit{Source F.}

\textsuperscript{15}\textit{Ibid.}
factor in executing a lesson plan effectively, managing classroom behavior, and modifying curricular objectives to suit the interests of the current class. Additionally, with college students as the hiring pool, there is bound to be teacher turnover at least every four years, if not more frequently. What skills these teachers may acquire in their time working at the RCTS school will be lost and have to be reacquired with the new selection of teachers.

A second difference is the time spent in the classroom. At the MS school, students are in the classroom for just under three hours a week, only one and a half of which is spent in the Jewish studies class. Hebrew is only taught one day a week for ninety minutes. The benefits of this system are that students are focused on each class depending on the day at school. When learning Jewish studies, they will not have come from an hour of Hebrew class, like the students at the RCTS school do. Sunday mornings are long days for RCTS students—three straight hours of learning, with maybe a ten minute break, depending on the teacher. The first hour is Hebrew, followed by an hour and a half of Jewish studies. Most students come to school tired and by the second half of the day, they are completely exhausted from Hebrew class, making Jewish studies a much more challenging class to teach. The benefit of having Hebrew two days a week is repetition. Most students at the RCTS do not practice at home, so having Hebrew class twice a week reinforces the students’ decoding skills.

Finally, classroom size is important to consider. The MS school has about 700 students, split into two sessions, divided amongst at least three grade level teachers for both Judaic studies and Hebrew classes. Class sizes are approximately twenty-thirty students in each class. At the RCTS, there are only fifty students in the school, about six students on average in any given grade. In the Hebrew classroom, these students are divided into two classes to help manage behavior problems. However, there is only one class per grade for Jewish studies and the behavior problems that were alleviated in Hebrew class reappear in Jewish studies. Additionally,
any absences make group work or games hard to plan, as a missing student could mean that teams can no longer be utilized, requiring a new activity with out any notice.

The differences between these schools are important to remember when analyzing the effectiveness of a curriculum. There are many variables that need to be accounted for, and school environment, teacher background, and class size are just a few. Both schools are Reform congregations where education is highly valued by the community. The combination of their differences and similarities makes these schools ideal for this study.
Chapter 6

Previous Evaluations of the CHAI Curriculum

Since the implementation of CHAI (life) in 2002, the URJ has hired third-party companies to research and evaluate the effectiveness of the CHAI Curriculum in various synagogue settings. These studies issued questionnaires, conducted interviews, observed classrooms, and held focus groups to get a wide range of opinions and feedback about the CHAI Curriculum. In addition to reporting their results, these studies suggest strategies and ideas for how the URJ could make CHAI fulfill its purpose better in the classroom. Three of these reports are available on the CHAI website and are reviewed below.¹

I Implementation Evaluation of CHAI

The Berman Center for Research and Evaluation in Jewish Education at JESNA, the Jewish Education Service of North America conducted the first survey in 2004. Through a series of hour-long phone interviews with “key informants” from a random sample of ten schools in North America, this study looked to accomplish four goals: to assess the (1) adoption and (2) implementation of the CHAI Curriculum into the school, (3) evaluate the first impressions of the effectiveness for CHAI as the core curriculum, and (4) evaluate the impact of CHAI on teachers,

¹See http://chai.urj.org/about/evaluation/ for the complete history of evaluations of CHAI.
students and schools.² The education director from each school compiled a list of potential key informants, including rabbis, educators, parents, education chairs, and teachers.³ 

This report found that in the majority of schools, the Judaic studies and not Hebrew teachers implemented CHAI as the core curriculum. The Torah and g’milut chasadim strands were utilized most frequently, while the avodah strand was perceived to be too challenging.⁴ Avodah lessons typically have more Hebrew and some teachers feel inadequately prepared to teach a lesson that requires more background knowledge.

Most teachers appreciated the core concepts highlighted in CHAI, while some were looking for more “meat,” more facts and figures.⁵ The purpose of backward design is to focus on the core concepts, teaching only facts that will help students transfer knowledge about the enduring understandings. “It only works if teachers put in the necessary preparation and adopt the experimental approach of the curriculum. The educator felt CHAI is not adequate for those looking for more “meat” (i.e. emphasis on facts), or unwilling to adopt a more experimental approach [backward design].”⁶

When compared to other curricula, CHAI was more structured, conceptual, and comprehensive.⁷ These features can most likely be attributed to the backward design nature of the curriculum layout. By working backward, by determining what they want students to come away

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³ Ibid., 3.


⁵ Isaacs, 6.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., 8.
from class with, educators are better able to plan activities that will transfer that information and cover the details that are necessary to accomplish their goals—making the lessons comprehensive, conceptual and structured.

The school that had the most positive experience with CHAI is the school that sent their teachers to a summer training session and had two in-service days with the regional educator, an employee of the Union for Reform Judaism (URJ) working to teach teachers how to use CHAI and backward design. “Congregations with the most formal training and support tended to be most comfortable and conversant with the approach and most positive about their experiences.”  

While the topics of those training sessions were not discussed, it appears that teachers who were most comfortable with the CHAI lessons, who understood how the lessons were put together and the way backward design works, were the teachers who were most effective transmitting the understandings from the lessons onto their students.

When analyzing the teacher friendliness of CHAI, the 2004 JESNA report found that while lessons are highly structured and laid out, they require a significant amount of preparation on the part of the teacher. CHAI provides a strong background with a lot of information in each of the lessons. However, it is sometimes hard to decipher what is relevant for class and what is not. These lessons were created to be adaptable, meaning that not every component is appropriate for every class. The teacher needs to read through the lessons and determine what will work well in their own settings. Without significant CHAI and backward design training, this task can be difficult. How do teachers know what is important to include and what is okay to leave out? With more training and a better understanding of the way CHAI works, maybe teachers would feel more confident to teach the CHAI lessons in an effective way. For the teachers who are resistant

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8 Ibid., 7.
9 Ibid., 9-11.
to change and are more traditional in their teaching methods (using a textbook, focusing on facts and a wide range of concepts), CHAI was a hard curriculum to use. Teachers “felt that there was little or no mastery of material, that vocabulary was not being absorbed, and they questioned how much content was being learned.”

By following the CHAI curriculum and understanding backward design, maybe this teacher would appreciate the importance of enduring understandings over vocabulary definitions.

The recommendations and conclusions from this report focus on two major themes. One is that teachers need advanced notice that they will be teaching CHAI and sufficient time to read through the lessons and prepare a lesson plan that works well in their individual classrooms. CHAI will not be successful if a teacher wakes up on Sunday morning, grabs the lesson, reads through it once and goes to teach; it requires preparation time. The second main point in the recommendations is emphasis on the backward design theory. In order for teachers to understand how CHAI works, they need to know the theory on which it is based. This training can come in many forms, like a backward design workbook, training sessions, in-service days with Understanding by Design educators and more. The schools that did best with CHAI were the ones who had the most training and understanding of backward design educational theory and were willing to apply that theory in their classroom. While training on a curriculum is important, it might not change epistemological assumptions of the teachers, their training on how knowledge transfers from teacher to student. The change that UBD mentions so frequently about focusing the education on the student rather than what teachers must cover during the year is a very challenging mindset shift, that may not, and probably is not, accomplished through a binder and a

\[10\] Ibid., 12.
training session. However, neither the binder of lesson plans nor training session on backward design would inhibit a change in mindset toward utilizing the CHAI curriculum most effectively.

II Executive Summary of the CHAI Impact Study

In 2005, in an attempt to measure the impact of CHAI on student learning, JESNA conducted a series of surveys of one hundred students and their combined six teachers at five schools. The criteria for being selected were using at least two lessons from the g’milut chasadim level five strand. The surveys used in the study conducted for this thesis are adapted from the surveys JESNA used to evaluate these schools.

This report indicated the key findings from the surveys. Most students had a general understanding of the concepts referenced in the surveys such as welcoming the stranger and visiting the sick. They were able to apply these concepts to give examples, while a smaller percentage were able to identify the concepts in specifically Jewish terms. “It is impossible to know the extent to which CHAI influence the students’ awareness of appropriate kind acts; it seems clear however, that many students did not fully integrate knowledge of Jewish terminology of “language” related to these acts.” This analysis brings up an important point Wiggins and McTighe make when discussing the validity of an assessment. An assessment is valid if these two questions are answered negatively: “can a student do well on the performance task without demonstrating the desired understanding and can the student due poorly on the performance task


12 Ibid.

13 Ibid., 3.
while really understanding the big idea.”\textsuperscript{14} This analysis made by Raff, Rosenblatt and Isaacs, fails both components. The students did well on the performance task without really understanding the big idea by connecting their examples with the scenario provided. However, they did poorly while understanding the overall concept by not knowing the terminology. A better assessment task would pass the validity test to accurately measure the enduring understanding.

Another important finding was the connection between the number of lessons taught and the ability of the students to explain the core concepts associated with those lessons. The more the students were exposed to the concepts and terminology, the better they were able to apply them and accurately answer questions.

In this study, only four out of the six teachers surveyed reported receiving any type of support or training for implementation of CHAI curriculum, and none of that training came from URJ materials.\textsuperscript{15} Additionally, teachers were less positive about their ability to implement recommended activities. Most followed the general lesson plan, utilizing parts of it, while the rest adopted the concepts without the learning activities.\textsuperscript{16} This is consistent with the previous study where teachers who were less trained in CHAI curriculum and backward design were less comfortable implementing the lesson plans as designed. It is impossible to tell if the teachers who adopted the concepts of the CHAI lessons were able to convey the enduring understandings to their students. Did these teachers understand the value of enduring understandings and the function of backward design? Again, more training about backward design educational theory would greatly increase the effectiveness of the CHAI curriculum.

\textsuperscript{14} Wiggins and McTighe. \textit{Understanding by Design}. 184.

\textsuperscript{15} Raff, Rosenblatt, and Isaacs. \textit{Executive Summary: CHAI Impact Study}. 5.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
III CHAI Curriculum Evaluation, Phase Two

In 2009, Susan Shevitz studied three schools that used the CHAI curriculum for at least three years. The schools were dispersed: one in Chicago, one in Long Island, and one in New Jersey. She visited these schools for an entire day where the educators, students, parents and lay leaders were interviewed and a few focus groups of teachers were conducted, in addition to observing fifteen classes. On average, the teachers at these schools had only been teaching the CHAI curriculum for a little more than two years while they had been working at the school or in the field for on average nine years. Others schools in the country have “more teacher turn-over, avocational teachers, and/or less experienced and knowledgeable teachers.” The experience of these teachers might explain why it was easy for some them to adopt this curriculum since they were confident with the information they needed to transfer to their students. However, their experience teaching could also explain why CHAI was hard to adopt for some: their previous experience and training made them reluctant to try a new system. Newer teachers might be more inclined to use a curriculum that is so structured.

One thing this report discovered was that these schools all prepared their teachers to use CHAI through meetings with other teachers and education directors who were more familiar with CHAI. Very few used the resources URJ provides, however those that did learned about backward design and the theory behind CHAI. As teachers gained experience with the structure, the theory, learn how their class works best, and become more comfortable with CHAI, they find

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17 Shevitz, 1-2.
18 Ibid., 3.
19 Ibid., 4.
20 Ibid., 7.
this curriculum to be easier to implement. As this occurs, teachers realize how flexible CHAI can be and adapt it to fit their class and the environment of the school better. They realize that the lessons and the strands do not have to be followed to the letter to still be effective. Experience comes not just from working with a particular class, it is also related to classroom management skills. The class whose teacher is able to better manage behavior problems can focus more on the content of the lesson rather than on the logistics of getting into small groups.

Again a recommendation made from this report was to prepare teachers on how to use CHAI effectively from training to lessons on backward design. This training is so vital to the effectiveness of the curriculum, that without it or a willingness to try it, the curriculum is ineffective at teaching students. This training could also help teachers adapt lessons to better fit the needs of their classroom without losing the backward design and enduring understandings inherent in the original curriculum.

\[21\text{ Ibid., 10.}\]
\[22\text{ Ibid., 11.}\]
\[23\text{ Ibid., 13.}\]
Chapter 7

The Current Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the effectiveness of the CHAI curriculum.¹ Is the backward design approach of the lessons being implemented appropriately so that the students are grasping the essential understandings outlined for each lesson? In the first school, located near a metropolitan city in Pennsylvania, I surveyed the three sixth grade classes for a total of thirty-two students. Additionally, I issued surveys to the three teachers of those classes and interviewed the education director. The second school is in a rural Pennsylvania college town. There is just one class of sixth grade and I surveyed its seven students as well as their teacher and education director. These schools were chosen because of their accessibility, their considerable differences (see Chapter Five), and their use of the CHAI curriculum for several years. I am connected with both of these schools as a student, teacher, and community member. My relationships with both schools made the coordination of issuing this survey much more feasible.² It should be noted that a third school was asked to participate, in an effort to provide more realistic results. Because only two schools were surveyed and the small sample size derived from these schools, the results from

¹This study was examined and approved by the Office for Research Protections at The Pennsylvania State University.

²While I have strong relationships with both schools, I hope to have approached this study from an outsider’s perspective. I gave detailed directions to the teacher whose students I had once taught and asked her to issue the survey and collect the completed forms in my absence. The teachers who used to be my teachers were mailed the survey and an instruction sheet and requested to return the questionnaires at their earliest convenience. The education directors and I had more personal communications, however, the information I reported is only taken from the relevant conversation. It would be interesting to compare the schools with which I am connected to an anonymous school and see how my personal biases influence the study methods.
this study cannot be generalized, considered definitive, or representative of schools across the nation using CHAI.

Every student in the sixth grade at these schools was invited to participate, but only the ones who had permission from their parents completed the survey. Each student survey contained approximately twenty questions (see Appendix A for the student survey). The surveys were adapted from the one used by JESNA (Jewish Education Services of North America) when they conducted their 2005 study of the CHAI Curriculum. The purpose of these surveys was to assess if students were able to apply what they were learning and give concrete examples of concepts and ideas. In addition to content, these surveys asked students about the ways they were learning. At the stage when this survey was developed, CHAI was still being evaluated, and the learning activities were analyzed to see from which strategies students were learning the most.

In addition to students, I studied four teachers, three from the metropolitan school and one from the rural school. This survey (See Appendix B for the teacher survey) was also adapted from the teacher survey that JESNA complied and used for their 2005 study. This survey focused on the methods of teaching that the teacher was using—which lessons were they teaching? Which learning activities worked best? How were the students reacting? The adapted version of the survey also included questions on backward design, a revision that addressed some of the issues brought up in the previous studies (see Chapter Six). Many studies brought up the fact that the teachers that were most prepared and most comfortable teaching CHAI were the ones who had training in backward design and support from CHAI professionals and their education directors. The survey used by JESNA to examine the effectiveness of the CHAI curriculum did not ask in-depth questions about the theoretical background and training of the teachers.

Finally, I interviewed the education directors from both schools. These conversations addressed demographic information about the synagogue as well as personal questions regarding the teaching philosophy of the education director and reasoning behind their decision to use
CHAI in their school. The interview questions can be found in Appendix C. The following chapter will provide the results of this study as well as analyze the effectiveness of the implementation of CHAI curriculum.

I Student Survey

The first part of the student survey asked students to give examples of different kinds of community service such as honoring the elderly, giving charity, and not being wasteful. The purpose of this question was to test the “questions to be addressed” for several lessons at different levels of CHAI. In level four, one of the question is “how can I show honor to the elderly?” By providing an example, students show that they understand this question and comprehend the mitzvah (commandment) of honoring the elderly. The same is true for the other two types of community service, tzedakah (charitable giving), and bal tashchit (do not be wasteful) with the questions, “how do I choose between many tzedakah opportunities?” and “What can I learn from Jewish sources about my responsibility for protecting nature and the environment?”

When asked to give examples of different kinds of community service (honoring the elderly, giving charity, and not being wasteful), every student gave very similar examples. For honoring the elderly, most students replied visiting at an elderly home. A few gave a specific example of which elderly home they would go to, implying a familiarity with this service project. Others gave specific examples of what they could do, rather than the general reply of “visit an elderly home.” Some of these examples included I could “certify my dog as a therapy dog and take him to an elderly home,” “wheel seniors down to services [for Jewish holidays],” “put tennis

balls on the bottom of their walkers,” and “help them cross the street.” These more specific answers show ownership of the activity.

When asked about tzedakah, or charitable giving, most students understood the concept of tzedakah. The root of the word tzedakah means righteous, but it has come to mean social justice, where everyone is responsible for contributing to a greater world, no matter how small the contribution. This value is regularly emphasized at both schools, typically by donating time or money, and most students said that in order to fulfill the mitzvah (commandment) of tzedakah, they could give money to charity. Some specified which charities they could donate to, including the Jewish National Fund, Juvenile Diabetes Research Fund, homeless people, World Wildlife Fund, victims from Hurricane Sandy, food pantries, and the SPCA.

Two students suggested something other than money. One said, “Instead of giving valuables, give time. My class could go to a hospital to help the people there who have no one visiting them or nothing to do.” This student understood that tzedakah is not exclusively giving money. Going and spending time with another person is just as valuable as donating to charity. This student is thinking about more than just themselves, considering the wants and needs of people around them.

A second student said, I could “go to a grave to put flowers.” Again, this student realizes that tzedakah is not just about money. Additionally, this person is doing something to honor the memory of someone who is no longer able to appreciate the gifts they are being given. One of the highest forms of tzedakah, according to Maimonides’ ladder of giving, is giving when the recipient does not know who is giving to them. The example of putting flowers on a grave fulfills this mitzvah because the family who sees the flowers does not necessarily know who left them.

The third Jewish value that students were supposed to provide an example for was bal tashchit, do not waste resources. Most students understood that in order to fulfill this mitzvah they should recycle. A few suggested composting, conserving water, or saving paper by using
computers. One said that their community could “take all the trees that fell during the storm [Hurricane Sandy] and use the wood to make houses for the homeless.” Here, the student is providing a clear and creative example of how they could recycle, rather than just stating “we could recycle.” The specific examples of what students could do individually or with their community show a sense of ownership over the mitzvah and willingness to participate in the community. They see themselves as people who can and should help make their world a better place and express this connection by giving specific examples of mitzvoth that they could perform.

The second part of the survey was for students to identify the Jewish value represented by a scenario and provide an example of what they could do to help. The first scenario told the story of a new student at school who doesn’t know anyone. The values to choose from were avoiding gossip, all men are created equal, welcoming guests, make new friends but keep the old, and giving anonymously. Of the thirty-six students who selected just one value, only eighteen of them selected welcoming guests, sixteen chose make new friends but keep the old, and two selected all men are created equal. Three students marked more than one answer, and their results are not included in this section. The Jewish value was visiting guests, hachnasat orchim. While the other choices were not wrong, those students missed the key word in the instructions—identify the Jewish value. “Make new friends but keep the old” is a saying attributed to a folk song with unknown origins. When asked provide an example of something to help this person, most students suggested saying hi, becoming their friend, and introducing them to other classmates. Their situations show that these students know how to welcome a new student into their classroom. However, the 50% response rate on the Jewish value identification shows that either they do not connect their actions with Jewish values or do not know the terminology to correctly select the Jewish value. Something similar, although less striking happened in the second scenario.
The second scenario described a classmate recovering from a broken leg at home. The values that students were able to choose from were be kind to everyone, love your neighbor as yourself, honoring the elderly, visiting the sick, and do unto others as you would have others do unto you. Twenty-three students responded with visiting the sick, nine chose love your neighbor as yourself, six picked the golden rule, one selected be kind to everyone, and one checked two boxes and is therefore not included in this section. The majority of students picked visiting the sick, bikor holim. Maybe they recognize this value more easily, or maybe this was the value that made the most sense to choose from on their list. The examples the students provided were all very similar: visit them at their house, bring them homework and tell them what they missed, play games and make them get well soon cards. It is impossible to tell how they learned what bikor holim means and if backward design and the CHAI curriculum had a role in that learning process.

Choosing a value, however, is not the main objective of these questions. Theoretically, any value could be correct, and if the question was just pick a value, then the assessment would not be valid (see Chapter Three). However, the test is comparing the students’ value to their example. If a student selected welcoming guests to define the first scenario, to be sure that they really understand this term and how it is applied in this situation, the example they provide should express welcoming a guest. For the student who selected welcome guests, but provided the example “give them money,” there is a lack of understanding about what the term welcoming guests really means. The student that selected “make new friends but keep the old” and then said that they could “make friends with the new person and introduce them to your other friends” understands the value and wrote down an example that supported their understanding.

The next two questions looked at g’milut chasadim, addressing the students’ understanding of the term and the importance this value has in Jewish tradition. The first one asked, “How would you explain g’milut chasadim to someone who doesn’t know the phrase?” In the introduction to the section, there was a quotation that said, “We have a responsibility to
perform acts of *g’milut chasadim* to make the world a better, holier place.” This quotation confused a lot of students. When they went to answer the first question, there were two main answers. One was “explain to the person that *g’milut chasadim* is making the world a better, holier place.” The majority of students understood the quotation to be written: “we have a responsibility to perform acts of *g’milut chasadim*, which means making the world a better place” where the second half of the sentence was defining the term *g’milut chasadim*. The quotation, to be clearer, should have read: we perform these acts in order to make the world a better place. Only one student correctly defined the term *g’milut chasadim* to mean acts of loving-kindness. The other typical answer was “give them examples.” These students focused on the word “how.” How would I do this? I would give them examples of *g’milut chasadim* or I would explain this term in English, for example.

The second questions asked why Jews have this responsibility. The responses from students were much more varied. Most suggest that since Jews are “God’s chosen people,” they have a responsibility to make the world a better place. Of the thirty-nine students who responded, eight used this explanation. Some used the Holocaust in their reasoning: “we learn about so many difficulties that happened back then, such as the Holocaust. Hebrew school teachers teach us ways that we can reduce bad things happening and make them better;” “we have faced tragedies and survived them;” and “because when Hitler was alive, we didn’t have much freedom.” The rest claim that Jews, as part of the human population, have a responsibility to take care of the world we were given. They say that this is not a Jewish obligation, but a human obligation. This shows a sophisticated level of thinking. These students understand that Jews are part of a larger community and have to act as members of that community.
Table 6.1: Student responses for each statement (N=39)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I can make a difference in the world</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is important that the Jewish community wants to protect the world in which we live</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is important for Jews to give money or time to take care of our world</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I should give money or time to help protect our earth and the people living on it</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The next section of the survey is a series of checkboxes, “how much do you agree with the following statement” questions (please see Table 6.1 for a complete listing of data). Every student agrees that they can make a difference in the world; the majority believes this statement strongly. Just about half of the students (nineteen out of thirty-nine) strongly believe that it is important that the Jewish community wants to protect the world in which we live, the other half agree. One disagrees. Maybe this student disagrees with the subject of the statement: Jewish community. Maybe this student feels that it is important for everyone to protect the world, not just the Jewish community. Or maybe they think that this is not important; it is impossible to know the real reason. The fact that the majority of students value protection of the world suggests that they have been taught about tikkun olam, the Jewish value to repair and protect the world.

For the third statement, most (eighteen) think it is very important for Jews to give time or money to take care of our world, sixteen think it is important and five disagree. One explained that anyone could help. It is possible that they disagree with the Jewish subject of this statement, arguing that not only is it important for Jews, it is important for everyone to take care of the world.

When asked about their individual responsibility to take care of the world, twenty-one strongly agree, sixteen agree, one disagrees and one did not respond to the question. While many
sixth grade students do not have the financial means or time to protect the earth, almost everyone agreed that they should. The wording of this statement is significant—it does not ask students if they will give their time or money, just if they should. Maybe the one student who disagrees misread the statement. One previous study\(^4\) implied that the lack of time and money may have caused some students to disagree with this statement—their lack of means inhibits them from thinking they can or should give because they might not be able to do so, without considering other methods of protecting and repairing the world outside of giving time and/or money.

Table 6.2: Student responses to religious school content statements (N=39)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHAT we have learned in religious school</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is interesting</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is important to my life, in general</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makes me feel proud to be Jewish</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is hard to understand.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When examining Hebrew school content (Table 6.2), there was a much wider range in student responses. The majority (twenty-six out of thirty-nine) felt that the content was interesting while the remaining eleven students disagreed. The eleven students are spread out evenly across all four teachers, Teacher B having the largest percentage of disinterested students (three out of eight). It is interesting that while eleven students do not find Hebrew school interesting, only five do not think this information is valuable. Of these five, three also said the classes were not interesting. Additionally, when looking at which students were not interested in or did not find Hebrew school to be important, six of them also found Hebrew school content to be hard to understand. Three of these students have the same teacher. The connection between these three students suggests that there is an obstacle between the students and the teacher. Maybe if they had

a different teacher, their responses would be different. These three students had very similar answers on their entire survey, suggesting that they might be friends and maybe worked on this survey together.

The final statement was “What I have learned in religious school makes me feel proud to be Jewish.” Of the thirty-nine students who responded, only one disagreed. This suggests that there is a strong correlation between Jewish values and the CHAI curriculum. Since the purpose of the CHAI curriculum is to establish a basis for Jewish living, it makes sense that this correlation exists. What is significant is that these students both recognize the relationship between the content they learn at Hebrew school and Jewish values and feel proud of their Jewish heritage.

Table 6.3: Student responses to various learning activities (N=39)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Learn the least from 1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>Learn the most from 5</th>
<th>We don’t learn this way</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group projects</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecture</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playing games</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role playing/doing skits</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a guest speaker</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening to music/singing</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worksheets</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology (computer, movies)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The next section asked students which methods work best for them when learning about a topic. This question could be misinterpreted. Rather than focusing on what actually happens in the classroom, students could abstractly answer from which styles they learn best without reflecting the learning environment in religious school. With this in mind, the results in Table 6.3 should be interpreted loosely. The lack of agreement between students in each classroom about which activities do not occur (The “We don’t learn this way” column) suggest that the students are not using their Hebrew school classrooms to answer this question. Additionally, students’
attendance could influence what they perceive to have happened in a classroom. If a student was absent on the day that the teacher brought in a guest speaker, then this student might check not applicable for guest speakers when that style of learning did actually occur in that class.

The lessons in the CHAI Curriculum use a variety of methods to convey the essential understandings. Almost every lesson has worksheet that students either read or fill out during the course of the lesson. However, when looking at the chart (Table 6.3), reading and worksheets have some of the lowest scores. This could be that students do not like reading or writing and mark these activities lower. It could also be that the ways these activities are integrated into the lesson are not as effective as lecture or games, two of the activities that scored highest. Most teachers rely on lecture to teach in their classroom. No students claim that their teachers do not use this method in Hebrew school. In addition, thirty-four out of thirty-nine students say they learn very well from this method.

The second most popular activity was playing games. It is not clear if the games are instructional games built into the lesson or activities teachers play if they ran out of instructional material for the given time slot. Skits are another popular activity for most students. Skits are a good way to get students conceptualizing the material in their own way, especially when teaching Torah or g’milut chasadim. Teachers rarely use technology (fourteen out of thirty-nine students say this method does not apply to their classroom), music (eleven of thirty-nine) or group projects (ten of thirty-nine).

Guest speakers are spread out over the spectrum. Some do not learn much from guest speakers, others learn relatively well from guest speakers, and some claim that their class does not have guest speakers. This could be for a variety of reasons. The guest speakers could be school-wide assemblies talking about a specific project or program, therefore unrelated to the topics covered in the sixth grade classroom. This could explain why some students do not learn from guest speakers and also why some say there are no guest speakers in their class. Large,
school-wide assemblies could also be very informative, teaching students something they would not necessarily learn in their classroom, explaining why some students learn a lot from these speakers. Some CHAI lessons ask the teacher to bring in guests, community members, clergy, or parents to come and speak to their class about a specific topic. Having a new voice and personality imparting knowledge could be why some students found guest speakers to be valuable learning activities. However, the types of speakers about whom the students answer the question cannot be obtained from the survey.

These surveys indicate a number of trends that defied the expected results. First, there are several questions whose responses do not show the effect of backward design and the CHAI curriculum. This is very clear in the first section of the student survey. The responses that students provided are very general and it is unclear how they learned what honoring the elderly or giving tzedakah looks like. They could have learned about these terms from their work in the g’milut chasadim section of CHAI over the past few years, they could have learned them from non-CHAI curricula used in Hebrew school (like family education programs or guest speakers), or they could have learned about these topics in other settings, like public school or at home. After reading through the answers, the questions asked on the survey do not seem to pass the validity test. While it is clear that the majority of these students understand these terms, the enduring understandings are not addressed. If the study were to be repeated, the survey should be altered to ask questions that would better assess the students’ understanding of the enduring understandings. For example, the enduring understanding for tzedakah was “how do I choose between many tzedakah opportunities?” A better assessment activity would be to ask students to describe how they would choose one opportunity and the other and explain the reasoning behind their choice.

Secondly, the first set of checkbox questions are important in identifying the transfer related to enduring understandings. The statements are derived from the enduring understandings
and essential questions of the lessons from levels six and seven. The degree to which students agree with these statements shows that students are learning about these topics and are developing favorable opinions (due to the observation that almost all students agreed with every statement) to the role of the Jewish community and their own role within the Jewish community to make the world a better place. The remaining set of checkboxes, while interesting to compare the various ways teachers utilize CHAI in the classroom, are not relevant for examining the way backward design influences the effectiveness of the CHAI curriculum. If this study were repeated, the last two questions would probably be cut from the student surveys, or replaced with short answer questions asking students to describe which ways they learn best.

Overall, the surveys were valuable for a few reasons. First, it allowed the students from different schools and classrooms to be compared on a standard question. Just like standardized testing for college entrance exams “equalizes” students in the admissions process by using the same criteria to judge the students, these surveys level the playing field for the students at both synagogues. Secondly, a version of these surveys had already been used and analyzed in a previous study, giving a baseline to which the current study could be compared. However, the purposes of both this and the previous study were different, causing the analysis to not be quite as helpful. Third, thirty-nine students were surveyed as part of this study. If the students had to be interviewed, not as many students could participate due to time constraints. With a sample size this small, surveys were the best and most efficient method to gather information from students. Additionally, student surveys serve as a check for the teacher surveys. What the teachers answer in their questions could be double-checked by the answers their students provided, confirming that what the teachers think is effective actually is comprehended by the students. The next

\(^5\)Ibid.
section will focus on the teacher surveys, the ones that provide the most information about the role of backward design in the CHAI curriculum.

II Teacher Survey

The teachers surveyed in this study have a wide range of experience teaching and using CHAI. For confidentiality reasons, the teachers will be identified as A, B, C, and D. To see an example of the survey that was issued to the teachers, please see Appendix B. The results from each teacher’s survey will be explored and then an overall analysis will be provided.

Teacher A is from the metropolitan synagogue. She has been teaching at this synagogue for twenty-three years, using CHAI for ten of them. Her students know about CHAI, as they were exposed to it last year, and she is unfamiliar with the term backward design. Since she has been teaching these lessons for so long, Teacher A does not spend a lot of time preparing her lessons—she is “very comfortable” with them. When CHAI was introduced, she had a faculty meeting with the education director explaining how to use CHAI in the classroom. Because that meeting was a decade ago, she does not remember what she learned or if it was useful.

At this point in the year, Teacher A has completed the entire level seven Torah strand, half (four out of nine) of the g’milut chasadim strand, and plans to start the avodah strand later this year. When teaching, she follows the general lesson plan and uses at least one of the given learning activities. She finds that the lessons are helpful for planning activities, providing content of lessons, and a framing the curriculum as well as easy to implement, clearly written, and applicable to her students (all fives).

To address her students, Teacher A believes the lessons are very understandable, applicable to their lives and engaging (on the survey, she checked “fives” for question thirteen). She is able to assess this because they can accomplish their tasks independently and can do
follow-up activities easily. She mainly uses group projects, games, skits, and guest speakers to teach her class. She believes that group projects (fives) and skits (fives) are the best ways that her students learned, followed by lecture, games, reading, guest speakers and technology (all fours). She has not tried music or worksheets as learning activities. With thirty to thirty-five students typically in her class, she is able to do all of the recommended activities. She claims that teachers need to be “flexible and organize activities with an open mind” for them to be successful. She would recommend this curriculum to other Reform movement teachers because she “loves it and feels it’s very teacher/kid friendly—easy to use—and activities are fun!”

Teacher B has been teaching Hebrew school for thirty-two years, eighteen of them at the current metropolitan synagogue, and using CHAI for the last eight. She checked yes when asking if she knew what backward design was, but did not complete the section asking her to define it. Teacher B is the only teacher to check yes, but because she did not define it, there is no way to know what her definition of backward design is. She spends about an hour and a half prepping her lessons by gathering information on the subject, taking notes from sources, making an outline and time frame, and copying materials for her students. It is unclear whether these sources are CHAI sources or additional sources. For their lessons, CHAI provided background material, worksheets, reading material and additional sources for teachers in addition to a timed outline of the lesson. When asked about training, Teacher B says she had a visit with a regional educator, a meeting with the education director and a faculty meeting. She found these training sessions useful because she got a new outlook on the old lessons. Additionally, she got insight from other teachers—lessons on what did and did not work.

In her classroom this year, Teacher B has used lessons from all three strands in levels six and seven: two from level six Torah, and four from level seven, one from level six avodah and two from level seven, one from level six g’milut chasadim and three from level seven. It is hard
to assess which enduring understandings she is focusing on in her classroom this year because she is jumping all over the lessons and levels.

When asked about her implementation, Teacher B uses the concepts and enduring understandings from the CHAI lessons while changing the learning activities. She rated the CHAI lessons very highly (all fives) in their helpfulness for framing the curriculum, lesson plan, and learning activities in addition to their easiness when implementing and the application for students. She found them slightly less clearly written (four out of five). For her students, she finds the lessons to be very applicable (five) and engaging (five) while slightly less understandable (only a four). To test their understanding, Teacher B asks questions and has students talk to each other about the concepts. She mainly uses group projects and worksheets as her learning activities. She feels that her students learn best from technology (five), followed by group projects, lecture, reading, and worksheets (all fours). She has not used games, skits, guest speakers or music in her classroom. With twenty-two out of a potential thirty-seven students, Teacher B is able to implement all aspects of the CHAI curriculum in her lesson plans. She would recommend this curriculum to other teachers because it has “good basic information, especially for new teachers.” She just cautions teachers to develop and use new ideas for their lessons, as the lessons can get stale after a few years.

Teacher C has only been a religious school teacher for six years, all of them at the metropolitan synagogue, and all of them using the CHAI curriculum. She uses the CHAI curriculum in her classroom but makes a point to supplement it “with other materials to significantly increase relevance and interest.” She is unsure if her students were exposed to the CHAI curriculum last year and does not know what backward design is. When preparing her lessons, Teacher C spent about three hours the first time using a lesson, but with more experience, that time has been reduced down to only thirty minutes. She did not receive training on how to use the CHAI curriculum in her classroom. It could be that she was not present or able to attend
when training was offered, but the questionnaire does not allow this clarification in its response choices.

Teacher C does not use any of the lessons from the CHAI curriculum in her classroom. This is an interesting response since she checked on the first page that she does use the CHAI curriculum. It could be that she uses the enduring understandings and objectives outlined in CHAI, but because she did not answer the question asking how she uses CHAI, it is impossible to determine if this is the case. Teacher C also did not comment on questions thirteen through sixteen, not answering if the lessons were clearly written, easy to implement, applicable to her student’s lives, a good framing of the curriculum, learning activities or lessons. Additionally, there is no information about how her students learn best or which kinds of learning activities she uses in her classrooms. With twenty-five of her thirty students, Teacher C claims that she is not able to implement all aspects of the CHAI curriculum in her classroom. But it might be that because the teacher does not find the lessons relevant or appropriate for her students that she chooses not to use the learning activities. She would not recommend this curriculum to other Reform movement teachers because she finds that her “students have difficulty finding relevance of curriculum.”

Teacher D is a brand new teacher at the rural synagogue. This is her first year teaching religious school and using the CHAI curriculum. She does know that her students used CHAI last year but does not know what backward design is. She spends about an hour preparing her lessons on a weekly basis—a lot of that time is spent reworking the activities that require a large number of students to participate. She received training in the form of a faculty meeting with her education director on how to use CHAI. The training session emphasized that teachers should thoroughly read the lessons and alter them slightly to fit the classroom. She found the session helpful and the curriculum easy to follow since it does not “require much training.”
In her classroom, Teacher D just began the level six Torah strand and has completed four of the nine g’milut chasadim lessons from the same level. She is not using the avodah strand in her classroom. To implement the lessons, Teacher D adopts the concepts but does not use the learning activities. She finds that the lessons are at a “four” in the clearly written, curriculum framing and lesson content categories but “threes” in the learning activities, easy to implement and applicable to students categories. She believes that her students find the lesson mostly (four) understandable, applicable to their lives and engaging. She can gauge this by their interest level in the activities and discussion. She mostly uses games and worksheets as learning activities. She feels that her students learn most from group projects, lecture, skits, reading, and worksheets (all fours), followed by games and technology (both threes). She has not tried guest speakers or music in her classroom.

With a maximum of eight students, and typical attendance of five to six, she is not able to use all of the learning activities that CHAI recommends. She must adapt the lessons for a smaller class size. Because of her lack of experience, Teacher D is unsure if she would recommend this curriculum: “I truthfully haven’t used it extensively or any other curriculum, so I’m not sure if it’s ‘good’ or ‘bad’.” She comments that “sometimes the games are cheesy (especially for the maturity level of my class), and I don’t think they’d learn much from them.”

There are a few important considerations to explore when evaluating these surveys. First, not a single teacher was able to define backward design. Only one checked the box that they knew what backward design was but failed to define it. Not knowing or understanding backward design, the educational theory on which the CHAI curriculum was developed, makes effectively implementing the CHAI curriculum a challenge. Two out of the four teachers (B and D) said that they adopt the concepts and enduring understandings but change the learning activities. Without a clear knowledge of backward design, this step seems hard to do. The learning activities in CHAI were only created after enduring understandings and assessments were determined according to
Without knowing the process of backward design, how can a teacher create learning activities that will transfer the knowledge of the enduring understandings to their students?

Secondly, three out of four teachers stated that they had faculty meetings with their education director. One teacher (C) did not have a meeting to learn how to best implement CHAI into her classroom. She just dove into the lessons without any suggestions from someone more experienced with CHAI on how to best prepare those lessons. Another teacher (A) had a meeting so long ago that she did not remember what was said or if the meeting was helpful. If the messages are not reinforced regularly, it is as if the meeting did not occur because the teachers forget what they learned. When explaining what they learned during the sessions, teachers B and D expressed how they were taught to teach the lessons, what they should do to prepare and how to keep the lessons new and exciting each year. Without any understanding of backward design, which could be discussed during these faculty meetings briefly, the teachers may cut out the wrong part of the lesson, or adjust the activities that effectively prevents students from learning the enduring understandings for the lesson.

The third point is that the newest teachers (C and D) are most reluctant to recommend CHAI. They both claim that the lessons and activities are not relevant for their students. Teacher C supplements the lessons to “significantly increase relevance and interest” and Teacher D does not use the games because they are too “cheesy” for her class and she does not find them very informative. However, the teachers that have more experience (A and B) love CHAI. They like how it is so easy to use, teacher/kid friendly, fun, and informative. Maybe because they have more experience these teachers are able to better adapt the lessons to fit their classrooms. Or maybe they are not aware of the interest levels of their students. Just because students are participating in an activity does not mean that they are interested in the material. It is intriguing that the more experienced teachers were so willing to use CHAI. As the review studies showed
(Chapter Six) most experienced teachers were unwilling to change or to fully commit to a new curriculum. So while these teachers may not be connected with the likes and dislikes of their students, at least they are willing to fully use CHAI.

Finally, it is interesting that within a single school, the metropolitan school, all three teachers utilized the CHAI curriculum differently. As a school, in sixth grade, the Torah and g’milut chasadim strands from level seven are supposed to be emphasized. Teacher A has finished Torah, is half way through g’milut chasadim and planning to work through avodah for level seven. Teacher B has used lessons from all three strands in both levels six and seven. And Teacher C has not identified any lessons from either level six or seven that she used in her classroom. While every teacher has their own teaching method, the continuity and development of the CHAI curriculum is lost when teachers do not follow the outline set forth by the school. As one previous study mentioned the lessons are more effective at transferring the enduring understandings to students if an entire strand is taught rather than a few lessons. At the rural synagogue, only two strands are highlighted as Teacher D is just teaching level six Torah and g’milut chasadim. At the MS, Teacher A might be the most effective teacher at this school as she has adopted the most lessons from a given strand. It might be useful for the metropolitan school to assess which lessons its teachers are teaching to confirm that all (or most) of the lessons from the Torah and g’milut chasadim strands are being taught each year.

III Education Director Interview

I interviewed the education directors at both synagogues using a series of five questions (see appendix C). The metropolitan school director interview was conducted in person, while the

\[\text{6}^{\text{Ibid.}, \ 4.}\]
rural school director replied through email. The answers from the metropolitan school are notes that I made during the interview while the rural school answers are in the voice of the director. This section will mainly focus on their responses to questions two three, and five, while the others are addressed in various parts of this thesis.

The metropolitan school director, whom I will call Anne, has been the director at this synagogue for seventeen years. They switched to the CHAI curriculum about ten years ago. This school already had a curriculum in place when they decided to switch to CHAI. Now, CHAI has become the main curriculum at the school. They adopted it, but shifted which levels they do in which grades because it already fit in with the curriculum. For example, second grade does CHAI level one and does all three strands because the avodah strand focuses on Jewish holidays. Sixth grade does level seven, and levels five and six are skipped. They mostly added the Torah strand because the teachers liked that learning Torah could fit into their already established curriculum. Additionally, they added the g’milut chasadim strand, a nice complement to their family education and learning-through-doing program. It is unclear from her responses why this school decided to switch to using the CHAI curriculum.

The style of education at the metropolitan synagogue is very much program-based or experiential learning. There are a number of family education programs every year in addition to class retreats and school wide social action projects. Anne has focused much of her career at this synagogue to developing the family education and tzedakah programs. Not only does this fit in with the themes related to each grade’s curriculum (like Israel or Jewish holidays or Bar Mitzvah), it establishes a sense of community—the families all working together on family education projects and the community working toward social actions goals. The nature of the synagogue fosters a huge building-wide community from the Hebrew school to adult education, youth groups, preschool program and summer camp. Education is a life-long journey at this
schools and is supported by everyone. Using the CHAI curriculum is just one way of continuing
to build community and continuity throughout the religious school.

At the rural synagogue, the curriculum was in place when the education director, whom I
will call Melissa, arrived.

I believe CHAI was chosen because of the transient nature of our teachers and the lack of
a strong Jewish educational background of our school leadership at the time. They chose
CHAI because they were not able to give a lot of guidance in creating effective lesson for
religious school settings…I believe there are many benefits to CHAI. I like that it
contains the same three meta elements over the years (Torah, avodah, and g’milut
chasadim) while changing the content as appropriate, thus insuring continuity as well as
building upon itself. I like that it uses understanding by design. I also appreciate the fact,
as with any (good) curriculum, the writers who created it had far more time and expertise
than any of my teachers have—therefore my teachers are able to teach effective and well
thought-out lessons that they would otherwise, due to lack of time or experience, not be
able to do.

The transient nature of her teachers comes from the fact that her hiring base is a college
town, and any teacher would only be available for four years at most. The teacher turnover rate is
quite high at this synagogue. This means that new, inexperienced teachers are hired regularly and
unable to provide well-planned lessons because of their lack of experience. Before Melissa, the
school leadership consisted of a volunteer education director, the vice president of education (a
one year lay leadership position) and the rabbi. The volunteer nature of the previous
administration is what Melissa refers to when she described the lack of a strong Jewish
educational background. Melissa has a master’s degree in Jewish education, presumably more
experience and knowledge than a typical synagogue volunteer.

Melissa likes the continuity in the strands of the CHAI curriculum. However, teachers are
able to choose which of the three strands they would like to teach (there is usually only enough
time to teach two out of the three strands in a school year). There may not be continuity between
teachers. For example, if Teacher X teaches the Torah and g’milut chasadim strand to his fourth
grade students but Teacher Y focuses on the avodah and g’milut chasadim strands in fifth grade,
there is a lack of continuity. The students do not have the prerequisite information in fourth grade on *avodah* and they do not continue learning about *Torah* in fifth grade. By selecting two strands for the school to focus on, like the metropolitan synagogue chose *Torah* and *g’milut chasadim*, they can ensure continuity in meta-elements from year to year.

Finally, Melissa likes that the CHAI curriculum uses understanding by design and backward design educational theory. However, this is also one of her concerns. “My biggest concern is that it is very ‘idea’ focused, and I wonder how much ‘tachlis’ actual, useable knowledge my students walk away with. I wonder at times how practical it is.” Since it is so well put together by experienced teachers, its usefulness and quality is unparalleled at the moment. Melissa has an understanding of backward design, but it is unclear if her teachers are well versed in this theory. If they were able to take the ideas that CHAI focuses on and develop more relevant learning activities that transferred the same enduring understandings of CHAI in more interesting or current ways, this curriculum could be updated. However, as Melissa points out, the inexperience of her teachers makes this task daunting and impractical.

From these interviews, it is clear that the metropolitan and rural synagogue schools are quite different. The metropolitan synagogue has established teachers, a large synagogue community and uses the CHAI curriculum as a connection between the school-wide focus on social action and the Hebrew school classroom. The curriculum has been used for about a decade with little reevaluation from the synagogue community. The newer teacher is reluctant to use the designed lessons, as they are irrelevant to her students. While the students are learning and can apply the enduring understandings, maybe the disinterest is a clue that the way CHAI is being implemented needs to be reevaluated at this school. At the rural synagogue, the small community, high teacher turnover rate, new education director, and previous less-experienced lay leadership essentially require the CHAI curriculum. Teachers with little experience or time to prepare lessons need a curriculum already outlined by professionals. The CHAI curriculum fits this
school environment. The education director has her concerns about its effectiveness. However, without the means to effectively replace what the CHAI curriculum supplies, it has to suffice for the time being. Maybe emphasis on backward design rather than how to prepare CHAI in teacher training sessions would allow teachers to understand how CHAI was constructed so that they could try to do something similar.
Chapter 8
Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis was to examine the effectiveness of the CHAI curriculum in various synagogue school settings. Created in 2001 by the Union of American Hebrew Congregations as a way to reinvest in the future of religious schools, the CHAI curriculum has been adapted by numerous congregations across the nation. Several surveys were conducted when the curriculum was first introduced as well as a few years after the curriculum had been in place. Those studies focused on how teachers were adapting to the new curriculum as well as how students were responding. A few key results were found, including that the schools that taught teachers about backward design were best prepared to teach the CHAI curriculum. And this result is a focus of the study. Is backward design being taught to teachers? If not, is the CHAI curriculum effective? Additionally, the CHAI curriculum is advertised as being flexible and adaptable. But is that really the case? Does the CHAI curriculum work in a classroom of six students rather than twenty? Is the curriculum well structured and easy to implement for the new teacher, unfamiliar with both managing a classroom and the CHAI curriculum? Finding answers to these questions was the purpose of this study.

I conducted a series of surveys issued to both teachers and students as well as interviews with the education directors at two schools. The student surveys were adapted from the surveys used by the Jewish Educational Services of North America in their 2005 study of the CHAI curriculum. Adaptations were made to reflect the levels of CHAI that the students are learning in their classroom. For example, rather than asking questions about the enduring understandings from level five, the current survey focused on level six. The teacher surveys had additional
questions that asked about backward design, classroom preparation, as well as provided more opportunity for explanation than just yes or no checkboxes.

The results from these surveys were very revealing. First, some of the questions on the student survey did not ask the proper questions. When the surveys were edited the questions were meant to address the enduring understandings found in the CHAI curriculum. However, when the results were interpreted, it was challenging to ascertain if the students comprehended the enduring understanding or just could give an explanation of the Jewish value provided. Additionally, one question was vague in the way it expected students to answer a question. Rather than explaining the concept of *g’milut chasadim*, some students expressed that in order to tell someone about the Jewish value of doing acts of loving-kindness, they would give examples or explain to them what the term meant, without defining the concept. These questions seemed clear to interpret when the surveys were being written, however the responses received showed that more revisions needed to occur in order to clarify the results and expectations of the students answering.

One section on the student survey was particularly useful in evaluating students’ understanding. This section provided a scenario, asked students to select which Jewish value could be used to figure out how to help this character and then provide an example of what they could do to help the person. This was a useful section for two reasons. One, it provided a real-life example of a situation when the student would need to help someone, causing the students to apply what they learn in Hebrew school to real life situations. Secondly, it asked students to connect these values with a specific example of something they could do. Theoretically, any value could be applied to the given scenario. However, the object was for students to provide an example of that value that would help in the specified situation. If the student selected value C, but the explanation of what they could do to help that person was not related at all to value C, then the student did not understand the value they selected. In addition to ascertaining what students are learning in class from the CHAI curriculum, the student surveys served as a check
for the teacher surveys, making sure that what the teachers claim occurs in their classroom is also noted by the students in some form.

The teacher surveys were probably the most valuable of the different kinds of data collected. Teachers had the opportunity to define “backward design” in their own words, if they knew what it meant. Only one of the four teachers surveyed checked that they knew what backward design meant, and she failed to define it. Because of this and the survey that claimed teachers who were most effective were the ones trained in backward design, it can be concluded that the present teachers were not as effective at teaching the CHAI curriculum as they could have been. With training and refresher sessions every year, the important concepts and ideas from the CHAI curriculum and its design could be reinforced to the teachers working with the lesson plans and make CHAI as effective as possible in educating Jewish youth.

Moreover, the teachers with more experience, not only teaching but with the CHAI curriculum specifically, were better able to implement CHAI into their classrooms. The teacher with only six students in her class had to work that much harder to make the lesson work in her classroom. The lessons were created for larger classrooms, using group projects and games. Without enough students to form groups or work in teams, these learning activities could not be utilized. The flexibility that CHAI claimed did not exist for the small classroom. How does the inexperienced teacher cope? Does she just cut that part of the lesson out? How does that affect the enduring understandings of the lesson? Does she adapt the activity to fit her class? Is she doing it in a way that still conveys the enduring understandings? Without knowledge of backward design, this teacher cannot really understand how to fix her lesson in an effective way.

The education director is responsible for the lessons being taught in the religious school. When CHAI was introduced in the metropolitan synagogue, the education director had a faculty meeting with the staff. From the teacher surveys, it appears that the faculty meeting only happened once. Without the necessary reinforcement of ideas and theory, the understanding of
backward design that is so crucial for the curriculum to be effective disappears. One of the
teachers at the metropolitan synagogue did not recall ever being trained to use CHAI and does not
find it effective or valuable as a curriculum. Since the education director at the metropolitan
synagogue elected to phase the CHAI curriculum into her school, it is imperative that her teachers
continue to receive training on utilizing the CHAI curriculum creatively and effectively.

At the rural synagogue, the education director is hesitant about CHAI. It was already in
place when Melissa came on staff, and thus she did not have any say in whether or not CHAI
should be used. Her wariness comes from the fact that it is so structured that her college-student
teachers feel as though they do not need to prep the curriculum at all. Rather, they tend to skip
over the enduring understandings and questions to be addressed in the lesson plans— the heart of
the CHAI curriculum— and just begin by reading the learning activities on the day they are
supposed to teach the lesson. Her teachers do not give themselves time to effectively prepare their
lessons and are surprised when they have to change games or activities on the day of class.
Nevertheless, even with these issues, the CHAI curriculum is unlike anything else available for
Melissa to introduce to her school. The teachers do not put enough time into lesson planning and
thus, having a well-structured lesson plan keeps the teachers from wasting class time (mostly).

From this study, the curriculum had similar results from both schools—all students were
able to reasonably complete the survey with very similar answers. This could be due to the fact
that the survey did not address the enduring understandings as effectively. Maybe the different
teaching styles would be reflected if the big ideas, and not the vocabulary, was more directly
tested. In the smaller school, where the teacher was not able to play all of the games or do all of
the learning activities, the students were still able to answer the questions on the survey. So while
the lessons may not be as adaptable as CHAI claims them to be, the big ideas, or at least the
terminology from them, are being conveyed to the students. None of the teachers had a clear
understanding of backward design, and this could be the reason that the results were so similar. If
this study were repeated, backward design knowledge from the teachers and education directors should be a factor when choosing participants in order to differentiate results of teachers with and with an understanding of backward design. While there are various conclusions throughout this thesis as to why some results may have appeared from different teachers or classrooms, there are many similarities among the students in all four classrooms. It is not clear why the results are similar, but it can be concluded that the size of the classroom and experience of the teachers did not play a large role, at least from this study, in ascertaining the effectiveness of the CHAI curriculum.

An effective curriculum is one in which students are learning what they are expected to learn, as defined by standards set up by the school, district, or governing body. For the CHAI curriculum, this means students comprehend the enduring understandings outlined in every lesson plan and carefully developed by the curriculum writers. Students who understand should be able to explain a concept in their own words. The problem on this survey was that the concepts are not unique to the CHAI curriculum and students’ understanding could have come from sources other than ones based on backward design. Additionally, the questions mainly address vocabulary, and are therefore not testing the enduring understandings but rather definitions. The questions should be reworked to better reflect the enduring understandings, not just the topics on which the enduring understandings are based.

If the students do not understand, one place to look for missing links is in the teachers: ensure that the teachers are teaching the enduring understandings. Without knowledge of backward design and the function of enduring understandings, a teacher might easily mistake an activity crucial to the transfer of knowledge for a student as a boring activity that her students would not enjoy, and skip over it. By taking this action, the teacher is doing a disservice to both her students and their future teachers. The students do not get the opportunity to learn this crucial concept and the future teacher has to backtrack and teach her students about this concept before
she can move on and build on the idea. Additionally, if the teacher is just adopting the concepts from the CHAI curriculum without an understanding of how the curriculum was designed, the teacher cannot be sure that the activities she plans will transfer the same information and enduring understandings to the students.

Finally, the education director is responsible for what her students are learning and what her teachers are teaching. The director is responsible for making sure her teachers are prepared to teach the curriculum, from training them in the theory to checking in to make sure that they are following the appropriate tracks for the school. While the education director must trust that the teachers she hired are effective and well prepared, check-ins and evaluations are a good way to ensure quality and effective teaching. Faculty meetings, at least once a year if not more frequently, are necessary for maintaining the overall organization of the school and curriculum.

The CHAI curriculum has the potential to be very effective. However, the teachers using CHAI must be trained in backward design, the theory behind CHAI, so that they can most effectively adapt the curriculum and ensure that the students have the opportunity to transfer the enduring understandings from the specified strands. Education directors are responsible for making sure that their teachers are well equipped to do the job required of them, and students must be willing to participate in the learning activities, allowing the teachers to do their jobs.

If this study were to be repeated, the first step would be to involve more schools. With more schools, more students, teachers, and education directors could participate giving survey results that could be better generalized to a larger population. Additionally, there would be a greater likelihood that some of the teachers would be familiar with backward design, causing that variable to be better analyzed than in the present study. Secondly, the questions described in the student survey as less effective should be rewritten to better address the enduring understandings and be more clearly worded. The teacher surveys should direct a few more questions toward how the CHAI curriculum is utilized in the classroom, asking teachers to explain how they adopt
concepts without the learning activities or how they adapt games to fit a smaller classroom. The education director interviews should include questions about their own understand of backward design as well as teacher training for CHAI.

From the biblical commandments to teach the words of *Torah* to your children, to the emphasis on education when Jews were assimilating in Europe, to the creation of a federation of synagogues across the nation giving greater resources and a larger network to religious schools of North America, Jewish education has seen many different environments. One aspect that has remained a constant though is the importance of a Jewish education. The commitment to religious school education was shown when the Union of American Hebrew Congregations collaborated with educators to create the CHAI curriculum, a standardized curriculum emphasizing the values of leading a Jewish life in seven flexible levels. That commitment was reinforced when synagogues adopted this curriculum as their core curriculum in the religious school.

However, in order to maintain their commitment to Jewish education, the URJ needs to revise CHAI to make sure that it is as accessible as possible. The URJ needs to make sure that CHAI is adaptable for various congregations and teachers of varying experience. Maybe, rather than having two to three pages of text before the lesson activities explaining the enduring understandings and essential questions, these features could be incorporated into the learning activities to better show the teachers how the activities are connected with the transfer of knowledge regarding the big ideas in each lesson.

Additionally, religious schools need to ensure that they are using the CHAI curriculum as effectively as possible. This includes giving teachers background information on backward design so that they can modify it to fit their classroom without compromising the enduring understandings of the lessons. All of the material is available in CHAI, the curriculum just needs to be revised and educators need to be trained to make sure that curriculum is as effective at teaching the next generation of Reform Jews as it was intended and designed.
Appendix A

Student Survey

CHAI Student Survey

Our school is participating in a study to learn more about what you are have learned in your classrooms about g'milut chasadim. This is NOT a test for your religious school class, and you are not being graded on these answers. Please help me by filling out this survey. There are 4 pages; please make sure you answer all the questions. Thank you.

Synagogue Name: __________________________

Teacher Last Name: __________________________

How old are you? _________ Are you male? ☐ female? ☐

Did you go to Hebrew school here last year? Yes ☐ No ☐

Part 1: Give an example for the following Jewish values:

1. Kibud Z'keinim: Honoring the elderly
What could YOU do that would be an example of Kibud Z'keinim?

2. Tzedakah: Righteous giving
What could YOUR CLASS do as an example of Tzedakah?

3. Bal Tashchit: Don’t destroy or waste resources unnecessarily
What could YOUR COMMUNITY do (or what does your community already do) as an example of Bal Tashchit??
CHAI Student Survey

Part 2: Read the stories below and answer the questions as best as you can.

1. Your religious school teacher introduces a new student. The teacher explains that the new student doesn’t know anyone in the class.

   a. What Jewish value helps you know what to do in this situation?
      Avoiding gossip
      All men are created equal
      Welcoming guests
      Make new friends but keep the old
      Giving anonymously

   b. What could you do to help this person?

2. Your friend from religious school broke her leg and is not able to leave her house for two weeks.

   a. What Jewish value helps you know what to do in this situation?
      Be kind to everyone
      Love your neighbor as yourself
      Honoring the elderly
      Visiting the sick
      Do unto others as you would have others do unto you

   b. What could you do to help this person?

Surveys adapted from JESNA Berman Center for Research and Evaluation CHAI Student Survey available at http://chai.urj.org/_kd/Items/actions.cfm?action=Show&item_id=1091&destination=ShowItem
CHAI Student Survey

Part 3: “We have a responsibility to perform acts of *g’milut chasadim* to make the world a better, holier place.”

a. How would you explain *g’milut chasadim* to someone who doesn’t know the phrase?

b. Why do Jewish people have a responsibility to make the world a better, holier place?

Part 4:
*Place a check mark in the box that shows how much you agree or disagree with each statement. Please check only one box per question.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I can make a difference in the world</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is important that the Jewish community wants to protect the world in which we live</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is important for Jews to give money or time to take care of our world</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I should give money or time to help protect our earth and the people living on it</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAI Student Survey

This section is about your thoughts and feelings about what you are learning in religious school this year. Place a check mark in the box that best describes your answer. Please check only one box per question.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHAT we have learned in religious school</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is interesting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Is important to my life, in general</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Makes me feel proud to be Jewish</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Is hard to understand.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

This section is about how you well you learn in your religious school class from different activities. Place a check mark in the box that best describes your answer. Please check only one box per question.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How well do you learn from each of the following activities?</th>
<th>Learn the least from 1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>Learn the most from 5</th>
<th>We don’t learn this way</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group projects</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Having my teacher tell us information</td>
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<tr>
<td>Playing games</td>
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<tr>
<td>Role playing/doing skits</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
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<tr>
<td>Having a guest speaker</td>
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<tr>
<td>Listening to music/singing</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worksheets</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Technology (computer, movies)</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thank you!

Surveys adapted from JESNA Berman Center for Research and Evaluation CHAI Student Survey available at http://chai.urj.org/_kd/Items/actions.cfm?action=Show&item_id=1091&destination=ShowItem
Appendix B

Teacher Survey

CHAI Teacher Survey

Synagogue Name: __________________

Teacher Last Name: ____________

As part of an effort to evaluate the CHAI Curriculum, I ask you to take a few minutes to answer the following questions. Please read the questions carefully and answer them thoughtfully. For written answers, the last page has additional space to complete your answers, if you don’t have enough room in the allotted space. Thank you for your time.

1. How many years have you taught religious school? (If first year, write “first”) ______ How many years at this school? ______

2. Is CHAI the recommended curriculum for your school? Yes ☐ No ☐

3. Have you used CHAI in your 6th grade classroom this year?
   Yes ☐ No ☐
   a. If no, please explain: __________________________________________________________
      __________________________________________________________

4. Were your students exposed to CHAI last year?
   Yes ☐ No ☐ Unsure ☐

5. How many years have you taught using CHAI (if first year, write “first”) ______

6. Do you know what Backwards Design is? Yes ☐ No ☐
   a. If yes, please briefly explain your understanding:
      __________________________________________________________
      __________________________________________________________
      __________________________________________________________
CHAI Teacher Survey

7. How long do you typically spend preparing your lesson plans? Please include any time spent reading and reviewing the CHAI outlines.
   a. Briefly explain your prep process:


8. Did you receive training on how to implement CHAI into the classroom?
   Yes□ No□
   a. If yes what types? (Check all that apply)
      □Regional educator visit
      □Meeting with your education director/principal
      □Meeting with experienced teacher
      □Online course
      □Retreat
      □Other

   b. Briefly explain what you learned during training:


   c. Briefly explain if the training was useful:


Surveys adapted from JESNA Berman Center for Research and Evaluation CHAI Teacher Survey available at http://chai.urj.org/_kd/items/actions.cfm?action=Show&item_id=1092&destination=ShowItem
The following relate directly to the Torah strand of CHAI

9. Have you used any of the Level 6 or 7 lesson plans of the Torah strand of the CHAI curriculum in preparing lessons for your 6th grade students this year? Yes □ No □

   a. If yes, which of the 18 lessons outlined in the teacher guide did you use? (Check all that apply)

Level 6
□ Lesson 1: Introduction to K’tuvim/Writings
□ Lesson 2: The Book of Ruth: Mining the Text for Meaning
□ Lesson 3: The Book of Ruth: Finding God in Moab and Canaan
□ Lesson 4: Introduction to Wisdom Literature
□ Lesson 5: Mishlei/Proverbs: Wise Words for All
□ Lesson 6: Kohelet: Wise Man or Cynic?
□ Lesson 7: T’hillim/Psalms Session Alef: Poetry and Liturgy
□ Lesson 8: T’hillim/Psalms Session Bet: Images of God
□ Lesson 9: God: How are You Revealed in the World and what is my Relationship with You?

Level 7
□ Lesson 1: Lech L’cha: The Journeys We Take
□ Lesson 2: Cain and Abel: Family Relationships
□ Lesson 3: The Binding of Isaac: Honoring, Not Necessarily Obeying, Parents
□ Lesson 4: Rebekah: A Virtuous Woman?
□ Lesson 5: Rebekah: Tough Choices
□ Lesson 6: God and Abraham: A Relationship Like No Other
□ Lesson 7: Jacob and the Ish/Being: Struggling to Change (Alef)
□ Lesson 8: Jacob and the Ish/Being: Struggling to Change (Bet)
□ Lesson 9: Our Lessons from B’reishit/Genesis

□ Did not use any of the lessons
CHAI Teacher Survey

The following relate directly to the *Avodah* strand of CHAI

10. Have you used any of the Level 6 or 7 lesson plans of the Avodah strand of the CHAI curriculum in preparing lessons for your 6th grade students this year?  Yes □ No □

   a. If yes, which of the 18 lessons outlined in the teacher guide did you use? (Check all that apply)

   Level 6
   □ Lesson 1: Standing at Sinai: My Role in Revelation
   □ Lesson 2: The Torah Service as Public Reading
   □ Lesson 3: The Torah Service and Community Building
   □ Lesson 4: Finding Our Way to Sinai: A Map of the Torah Service
   □ Lesson 5: Choreography and Etiquette of the Torah Service
   □ Lesson 6: The Blessings of Torah
   □ Lesson 7: What is the Haftarah?
   □ Lesson 8: The Role of Sh’liach Tzibur
   □ Lesson 9: My Communal Role in Revelation: Entering the Covenant as a Jewish adult

   Level 7
   □ Lesson 1: Introduction to the Jewish Life Cycle
   □ Lesson 2: B’nei Mitzvah and Marriage: Responsibility and Relationships
   □ Lesson 3: Birth and Death: Teach us to Number Our Days
   □ Lesson 4: The High Holy Days: Focus on Repentance
   □ Lesson 5: Pesach—The Questions: Then and Now
   □ Lesson 6: Chanukah and Purim: Do You believe in Miracles (and Boundaries)?
   □ Lesson 7: My Jewish Identity: Eilu D’varim—What Must I Do?
   □ Lesson 8: My Jewish Identity: Sh’ma—What Do I Believe?
   □ Lesson 9: My Jewish Identity: Hineini

   □ Did not use any of the lessons
CHAI Teacher Survey

The following relate directly to the G’milot Chasadim strand of CHAI

11. Have you used any of the Level 6 or 7 lesson plans of the G’milot Chasadim strand of the CHAI curriculum in preparing lessons for your 6th grade students this year?  Yes □ No □

   a. If yes, which of the 18 lessons outlined in the teacher guide did you use? (Check all that apply)

   Level 6
   □ Lesson 1: Finding God in Our World through Acts of G’milot Chasadim
   □ Lesson 2: Bal Tashchit: Protecting the Rainforests
   □ Lesson 3: Bal Tashchit: Recycling and Conserving Energy
   □ Lesson 4: Tzaar Baalei Chayim: Care and Protection of Animals
   □ Lesson 5: World Health Issues
   □ Lesson 6: Peace
   □ Lesson 7: World Hunger
   □ Lesson 8: Jews and the Struggle for Civil Rights
   □ Lesson 9: Hineini: Embracing our People around the World

   Level 7
   □ Lesson 1: Time for a Checkup
   □ Lesson 2: That’s what Friends are For: Being a Loyal Friend
   □ Lesson 3: Truth as an Act of Kindness
   □ Lesson 4: Stop the Bullying Now!: Not Standing Idly By
   □ Lesson 5: Keep Your Cool: Being Slow to Anger
   □ Lesson 6: What’s With the Attitude? Have a Pleasant Demeanor
   □ Lesson 7: Courage!
   □ Lesson 8: Living Generously
   □ Lesson 9: Hineini—Here I Am! I am Ready to Act!

   □ Did not use any of the lessons
CHAI Teacher Survey

12. What would best describe the primary way in which you utilized the above lessons? (Check only 1 answer please)
   □ I followed the general lesson plan and utilized at least one of the suggested activities in each lesson plan
   □ I adopted the concepts and enduring understandings, but I changed the learning activities
   □ I used the activities suggested but did not follow the lesson plan
   □ I used the CHAI lesson to supplement other material
   □ Other

Utilizing CHAI Curriculum:

Please pick and circle one strand (Torah, Avodah, or Gmilut Chasadim) to Answer Questions 13 and 14.

13. Using a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being “not at all” and 5 being “very much,” please answer the following questions related to the lessons in the specific strand you selected of the CHAI curriculum.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Were the lessons...</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>Very much</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>NA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clearly written</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helpful in providing an overall framework for class curriculum</td>
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<tr>
<td>Helpful for planning activities</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Helpful for providing specific content for lessons</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Easy to implement</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Applicable to your students</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAI Teacher Survey

Student Reactions:

14. Using a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being “not at all” and 5 being “very much,” please indicate how you feel your students reacted to the specific strand you selected of the CHAI curriculum.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Did your students find the G’milut Chasadim lessons to be…</th>
<th>Learn the least from 1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>Learn the most from 5</th>
<th>NA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understandable</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applicable to their own lives</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Engaging</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. Please explain how you were able to gauge student reactions to the lessons: ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________

15. Have you used any of the following recommended teaching methods from the CHAI curriculum? (Check all that apply)
   □ Group projects
   □ Games
   □ Role playing/skits
   □ Guest speakers
   □ Music/singing
   □ Worksheets

Surveys adapted from JESNA Berman Center for Research and Evaluation CHAI Teacher Survey available at http://chai.arj.org/_kd/Items/actions.cfm?action=Show&item_id=1092&destination=ShowItem
CHAI Teacher Survey

16. In your experience using the CHAI curriculum, how well do students learn through the following teaching methods?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How well do you learn from each of the following activities?</th>
<th>Learn the least from 1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>Learn the most from 5</th>
<th>NA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group projects</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having the teacher tell them information</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playing games</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role playing/doing skits</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a guest speaker</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening to music/singing</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>Worksheets</td>
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<tr>
<td>Technology (computer, movies)</td>
<td>☐</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

17. Do you have any children in your class(es) who have special needs?
   Yes ☐ No ☐
   a. If yes, were you able to employ all aspects of the CHAI curriculum with this (these) students? Yes ☐ No ☐
   b. Please explain:________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________

18. How many students do you have registered for your class(es)? _______
   a. On average, how many students do you actually have in class on any given day? _______
   b. Are you able to employ all aspects of the CHAI curriculum with this class typical class size? Yes ☐ No ☐
   c. Briefly explain:

________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________

Surveys adapted from JESNA Berman Center for Research and Evaluation CHAI Teacher Survey available at http://chai.urj.org/ kd/Items/actions.cfm?action=Show&item_id=1092&destination=ShowItem
CHAI Teacher Survey

19. Would you recommend the CHAI curriculum to other teachers in Reform Movement schools?
   Yes ☐ No ☐ Unsure ☐
   a. Please explain: __________________________________________________________
       __________________________________________________________
       __________________________________________________________

20. What else would you like to tell me about the lessons from the CHAI Curriculum?

       __________________________________________________________
       __________________________________________________________
       __________________________________________________________

21. Other comments (please use this space to answer questions you did not have enough room for above):

       __________________________________________________________
       __________________________________________________________
       __________________________________________________________
       __________________________________________________________
       __________________________________________________________
       __________________________________________________________
       __________________________________________________________

Thank you for your time!
Appendix C

Interview Questions for Education Director

1. How many students do you have in your school? How many teachers?

2. Why do you use CHAI? As an education director, what do you feel are the benefits of CHAI?

3. Please provide a little background on the synagogue including how many families there are, how big the preschool is (if any), how many members send their kids to Hebrew school, and the importance of education to the synagogue environment.

4. Describe a typical day for a sixth grade student. How many days a week are they in Hebrew school? Which days do they study Jewish Studies? Hebrew?

5. How many years have you been a religious school director? At this synagogue? What is your educational philosophy?
BIBLIOGRAPHY


ACADEMIC VITA
Sarah Dafilou
sarahdaf13@gmail.com

Education:
Bachelor of Arts Degree in Jewish Studies, The Pennsylvania State University, May 2013
Minors in Hebrew and Anthropology
Honors in Jewish Studies
Thesis Title: The Effectiveness of the CHAI Curriculum
Thesis Advisor: Tobias Brinkmann

Related Experience:
Hebrew and Jewish Studies Teacher at Congregation Brit Shalom, January 2010-present
Chavayah (experience) specialist at Kaiserman JCC Day Camp, Summer 2012
Student Board Member for Penn State Hillel
- Holocaust Education Chair 2010
- Vice President 2011
- Religious Co-Chair 2012
External Relations Intern for Penn State Hillel, August 2010-November 2012

Honors and Awards:
Presidential Leadership Academy, 2010-present
Phi Beta Kappa and Phi Kappa Phi National Honor Societies, 2013
Jerome Markowitz Family Undergraduate Scholarship, 2012
Minerva Lehrman Brown Liberal Arts Scholarship, 2012
Lori Master Essay Contest Prize for Undergraduate Jewish Studies, 2012
- “The Effect of the CAY Program on the Life Course of its Participants”
Jabir Shibley Memorial Scholarship for Ministry Preparation, 2011
Phi Sigma Delta Sigma Educational Foundation Scholarship, 2011