Integrating the Arts and Judaic Studies:

Benefits and Challenges of Theme-Based Arts Integration

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A research paper submitted in conformity with the requirements
For the degree of Master of Teaching
Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto

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Acknowledgements

This research project has been an extremely rewarding experience for me as a potential arts integrator, and it would not have been possible without the help of a number of people. I would like to thank: my research supervisor, Lydia Menna, who has been a source of guidance, encouragement, and insight – thank you for urging me to follow through with this topic; Dr. Susan Schwartz, for her endless support; my research participants, who willingly shared their passion, struggles and accomplishments with forthright clarity; and all of the Master of Teaching faculty who have opened my mind and heart to the complex possibilities of this profession. It has been a wonderful two-year journey.

I would additionally like to thank my family: My parents, who have been a source of support, in every way possible, always and forever, and especially when it has come to my education choices (my art and Judaic studies degree is starting to make sense!); my daughter, for being a constant reminder for why any of this even matters; and of course my husband, who has stood by me without hesitation as I disappeared for two years behind my computer.
Abstract

Students at Jewish schools often find the Judaic studies component irrelevant and boring, due to the complexity of the texts that are studied and the uninspiring manner in which they are taught. The arts at Jewish schools, meanwhile, are often neglected or considered a luxury, due to the time constraints posed by a dual Jewish and secular curriculum. This qualitative research study explores the strategies, benefits and challenges of creating a curriculum that integrates the arts with Judaic studies at a Jewish day school. The findings reveal that the integration of the arts and Judaic studies at one particular Jewish school enhances students’ understanding of Judaic texts, differentiated instruction and assessment possibilities, and student engagement in Judaic studies courses. The process of planning arts integration requires a time-consuming combination of collaboration and meaningful integration choices, but is well worth the effort.

Key Words: arts integration, Jewish/Judaic studies, cross-curricular integration
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. INTRODUCTION ................................................................. 7
   - Introduction to the Research Study ................................ 7
   - Purpose of the Study .................................................... 8
   - Research Questions ..................................................... 8
   - Background of the Researcher ....................................... 9
   - Overview ........................................................................... 11

2. LITERATURE REVIEW .......................................................... 12
   - Definitions ........................................................................ 12
     - Jewish day school ....................................................... 12
     - Arts integrated curriculum ....................................... 13
   - Models of Arts Integration ........................................... 14
   - Integration of the Arts and Judaic Studies .................... 16
   - Challenges of the Judaic Studies Curriculum ................. 16
     - Negotiating a dual curriculum: Time constraints .......... 16
     - Separation of Judaic and secular studies: An intellectual split .... 17
     - Emphasis on informational knowledge ....................... 17
   - Benefits of Arts and Judaic Studies Integration ............. 18
     - Making time for the arts ............................................ 18
     - Building connections ................................................. 19
     - The arts as a tool for holistic Jewish learning .......... 20
Differentiated instruction.........................................................22
Concerns About Integrating the Arts with Judaic Studies...............22
Conclusion...............................................................................23

3. METHODOLOGY.....................................................................25
Procedure.................................................................................25
Participants .............................................................................25
Instruments of Data Collection.....................................................26
Data Collection and Analysis.......................................................26
Ethical Review Procedures...........................................................27
Limitations.................................................................................27

4. FINDINGS.............................................................................29
Background Information on Research Participants.......................29
Background Information on the Hadas Jewish Day School.............30
Key Findings.............................................................................31

#1: Arts integration enhances students’ understanding of difficult Judaic texts.........................................................31

#2: Arts integration provides opportunities for differentiated instruction and assessment..............................................34

#3: Arts integration enhances the Judaic studies program through student engagement................................................37

#4: Collaboration and coordination are fundamental to successful integration..........................................................38

#5: Choosing meaningful components for integration is essential for successfully integrating curricula.........................40
Summary of Findings ..................................................................................43

5. DISCUSSION ..........................................................................................44

Reflections and Implications .................................................................44

Personal experiences and goals with arts integration ..................44

Teacher backgrounds ...........................................................................46

Implication for arts programs ...............................................................46

Limitations .........................................................................................47

Recommendations ..............................................................................48

Expand arts integration programs .................................................48

Increase professional development ..............................................49

Create opportunities for collaboration .........................................49

Future Research .................................................................................50

Conclusion ........................................................................................50

REFERENCES ........................................................................................52

APPENDICES .........................................................................................55

Appendix A: Letter of Consent for Interview ..................................55

Appendix B: Interview Questions .......................................................57

FIGURES .................................................................................................59

Figure 1: Service Connections ..........................................................59

Figure 2: Symmetric Correlations .......................................................59

Figure 3: Syntegration .........................................................................59
Integrating the Arts and Judaic Studies:
Benefits and Challenges of Theme-Based Arts Integration

Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

…The goals of Jewish education…include not only the transmission of knowledge and the implanting of values, but also the joy of Jewish living. In modern educational terms, there must be a confluence of the intellectual and the emotional areas. Also, from modern educational practice we have learned that all of the arts—dance, drama, music, and the visual arts—constitute the very foundation of the emotional area. (Neuman, 1978, p. 44)

Introduction to the Research Study

A large number of Jewish students attend Jewish day schools, which provide both their Jewish and general studies curricula. Many students leave these programs feeling uninspired by and disconnected to their Jewish studies, despite the multiple hours each day devoted to the subject (Holtz, 1980). These same students will also likely have had limited exposure to any of the arts in their school environment, due to the extreme time pressure that the dual curriculum imposes (Brovender, 2003).

The religious curriculum at many Jewish schools usually focuses approximately half of the learning day on religious studies. Yet students often struggle to find relevancy from their Jewish learning and have trouble connecting their Jewish studies with the rest of their curricular learning (Holtz, 1980). Many teachers find it challenging to incorporate the creative and emotional realms into the Judaic studies. The Jewish learning can consequently remain a purely informative endeavour for some students (Backenroth, Epstein, & Miller, 2006), limiting some students from building personal connections with Judaism and Jewish learning (Brovender, 2003).

One approach to tackle these challenges is to integrate the arts and Judaic studies curricula. Such a tactic could offer students better learning opportunities within the
Judaic studies curriculum, as Backenroth (2004a & 2004b) demonstrates through her research of several such programs. Backenroth observed individual teachers and an entire school that utilize the arts to teach challenging Judaic texts, and found the expressive nature of the arts to enhance students’ understanding of these texts. Arts and Judaic studies integration could also enable Jewish schools to include arts education in an otherwise tight time schedule (Davis, 2008; Neuman, 1978).

**Purpose of the Study**

Integrating the arts with Judaic studies is a concept that is slowly gaining more recognition and adoption at Jewish schools across North America (Backenroth, 2008). It is important, when considering such a program, to understand the potential benefits and challenges that it could present to teachers of Judaic studies and the arts, as well as to the students’ experiences within these curricular areas.

This research study aims to explore one model of Judaic studies and arts integration, at the Hadas Jewish Day School (pseudonym) in the Greater Toronto Area, in which an entire school offers arts and Judaic studies integrated units through a common linking theme. The study sheds light on the potential benefits and challenges of such an integrated model, as well as insight on how to implement such a program in classroom contexts.

The findings from this study should be considered for the specific integration of the arts and Judaic studies, but are also beneficial for a general understanding of arts integration with any curricular subject.

**Research Questions**

The main question that will guide this research is:
In what ways do Junior/Intermediate (J/I) teachers practicing at a Jewish day school integrate the arts with Judaic studies?

I will also consider the following sub-questions:

1. Why do J/I teachers choose to integrate the arts with Judaic studies?
2. What are some strategies for planning an arts and Judaic studies integrated curriculum?
3. What are the benefits facing teachers who integrate the arts and Judaic studies?
4. What are the challenges facing teachers who integrate the arts and Judaic studies?
5. What are some of the resources utilized by teachers implementing an arts and Judaic studies integrated curriculum?

**Background of the Researcher**

As a child, I attended Jewish schools throughout my elementary and high school education. The Judaic studies were always important to me, despite them feeling dry and dogmatic at times. I always felt that there was something lacking in the manner in which these studies were taught to me, but I did not have enough experience or knowledge to understand my dissatisfaction. I have begun to believe that one of the major components missing from my own school-based Judaic studies education was the opportunity for interpretation, questioning and discussion. The main focus of my Judaic studies at that time was limited to learning to translate texts from Hebrew, understanding the traditional interpretations of those texts, and studying the laws of religious observance.

From grades 3-12 I did not receive any arts education through my school curriculum. I was always aware of and frustrated by the lack of arts in my school education, because I have consistently had a strong interest in the arts, particularly visual art and dance. I was fortunate to take extracurricular dance lessons throughout my school
years, but I was not able to start developing my deep interest in visual art until university. I resented this gap in my education, mainly because I knew that these were classes that I would enjoy. I cannot honestly claim that as a child I understood the import of these subjects on the whole learner. This absence in my education has had a large impact on my personal aspiration to become an art teacher, or at the very least, infuse art throughout my lessons across the curriculum.

Combining Judaic studies and art is a natural concept and topic for me, as they have become two of my foremost passions. After high school, I took one year to study Judaic texts full-time at a seminary in Israel before beginning university the following year. When I arrived at my liberal arts university, it was not long before I chose two majors: Hebrew and Fine Arts.

My interests in art and Judaic studies education have led me to several jobs that have combined the two fields. The most significant of these is my ongoing summer job. I have led the visual art program at an overnight Jewish summer camp for several years, which is the same camp that I attended each summer as a camper. The camp chooses a different Judaic theme each summer to teach informally throughout the camp program and activities (including the art program), as well as during designated discussion periods wherein the content is approached more formally. This informal educational approach and integrated curriculum has greatly influenced my thinking on the adaptable possibilities for a formal school environment.

In the spring of my first year of the Master of Teaching program, I volunteered at an arts integrated Jewish school. In the time that I spent at the school and the lessons that I witnessed, I was incredibly impressed by the highly developed arts integration
program throughout the school, in particular the integration of the Judaic studies with the arts curriculum.

My experience at the arts integrated Jewish school helped finalize my decision to study the integration of the arts and Judaic studies. The Hadas Jewish Day School’s integration model, which this research study explores, offers an incredible opportunity to learn from their teachers regarding techniques for incorporating the two subjects, as well as to hear some of the teachers’ concerns regarding the concept. It is likely that at some point in my career I will teach in a Jewish school. Even if not, the information that I gain from this research will inform my understanding of arts integration across different curricular subjects.

Overview

This research paper is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 provides an introduction to the topic, and outlines the purpose for the study, the research questions, and the background of the researcher. Chapter 2 offers a review of some of the existing literature on this topic. Chapter 3 explains the methods that I employed to conduct the research for this project. This chapter also includes background information about the research participants and the instruments for data collection – namely interviews. Chapter 4 analyses the data and explains the key findings. Lastly, chapter 5 explores the limitations to the study and proposes recommendations for further research.
Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The Judaic studies curriculum poses many challenges to teachers, particularly in the areas of helping students comprehend difficult texts (Backenroth, 2004a) and helping students connect emotionally with the texts and the religion (Tomsky & Weinholtz, 2007; Holtz, 1980). The integration of the arts and Judaic studies may seem like an unlikely combination, but there is promising research that the arts can greatly benefit Judaic studies instruction (Backenroth, 2004; Brovender, 2003; Epstein, 2004). Jewish schools often struggle to find the time for arts instruction, and arts integration could assist this problem as well (Davis, 2008; Neuman, 1978). Moreover, the advocates for an arts integrated curriculum (Russell-Bowie, 2009; Krug & Cohen-Evron, 2000) find that integrating the arts with other curricular subjects, such as Judaic studies, could benefit the arts by making art instruction more meaningful.

Definitions

It is imperative to understand the definitions and background of Judaic studies and arts integration before tackling the question of how the integration of the arts and Judaic studies affects teachers’ experiences in both subjects.

Jewish day school

*Jewish day schools* refer to schools in which the students attend the school for both their Jewish and secular education (i.e. all day). This style of school has slowly become a popular choice over the last fifty years for North American families who wish for their children to receive an education in Jewish subject matter (Pomson, 2002). There are Jewish day schools throughout the world, but in this paper I will limit the reference to schools in the United States and Canada.
The content of the Jewish education, or *Judaic studies*, varies greatly from school to school, mainly dependent upon the Jewish denomination of the school and the particular ideology of its founders, administration or community. Some schools may focus on religious observance, Torah study (the Jewish Biblical canon, along with the oral and written commentaries that accompany it), and Hebrew language; some may include Jewish history and Zionism; and some may focus on secular Jewish culture. The term covers a vast array of curricular content with numerous varieties.

This study focuses on Jewish schools in general, and not on any particular Jewish denomination. It does not, however, consider Jewish day schools that are theologically opposed to arts instruction. In my own personal experience, I have found that “community,” or nondenominational Jewish day schools, often ensure that at least some of the arts are represented in the school’s curriculum, whereas Orthodox (more traditional) Jewish day schools are more likely to cut the arts after the early primary grades, presumably to allow more time for Judaic studies.

Scheduling of the Jewish and secular components of the day school education, or the *dual curriculum*, similarly varies greatly amongst the different schools. A common method is to schedule the Judaic studies during half of the day and the secular, or general, studies during the other half of the day. Often there are different teachers for the Jewish and secular studies, so most students throughout elementary school have at least two homeroom teachers. Some schools devote less time to the Judaic studies, and some schools devote more. Some schools intersperse the Jewish and general courses throughout the day, or have one teacher instruct both curricula.

**Arts integrated curriculum**
**Arts integrated curriculum** is a term used widely to refer to different styles of teaching and curriculum development (Dean, 2001). In an integrated curriculum, links are built between content areas. For an arts integrated curriculum, art is linked throughout the other subjects. Sometimes there is a separate art class as well; sometimes there is not. There are various approaches to the implementation of an arts integrated curriculum. The concept can mean anything from utilizing art as a tool for teaching another curricular subject, creating links between content areas, or using the arts to explore a central theme (Backenroth, 2004a; Russell-Bowie, 2009, Krug & Cohen-Evron, 2000). For instance, at one arts integrated Jewish school that Backenroth studied, the arts are framed as “basic to teaching,” for “they provide a lens through which one looks at other disciplines. At the same time, the arts are disciplines in their own right and as such [they] teach the skills associated with each art form” (Backenroth, 2004b, p. 53). It is important to note that several different terms are used to describe this type of learning, “including cross-disciplinary, interdisciplinary, infused, thematic, trans-disciplinary, multidisciplinary, holistic and blended” (Russell-Bowie, 2009, p. 3). These terms are often used interchangeably, but sometimes they are intended to indicate the specific style of integration.

**Models of Arts Integration**

As previously mentioned, the various models of arts integration, or the arts integration continuum, as Backenroth (2004b) and Krug & Cohen-Evron (2000) refer to it, can range from using an art tool to teach another subject, to connecting art and the other subjects around a central theme. Deirdre Russell-Bowie (2009) describes three models of arts integration in detail, which will help shed light on some of the varieties of the phrase.
Russell-Bowie refers to the first model as *service connections* (Figure 1). In this method, teachers use art materials to teach another subject, such as Judaic studies. The goal of the lesson would be focused on Judaic studies content and skills, without any measurable art outcomes (2009). For instance, using a song to remember the Jewish holidays, but without teaching any content relating to the musical components of the song.

The second model is called *symmetric correlations* (Figure 2). Here, two subjects use the same tools or techniques, but achieving learning goals in both subjects is equally important (Russell-Bowie, 2009). In this scenario, that same holiday song would be used, but the teacher would also spend time on music instruction, such as the element of rhythm.

Russell-Bowie (2009) introduces and recommends a third model of arts integration, which she coins, *syntegration* (Figure 3). Syntegration refers to curricular subjects “working together synergistically to explore a theme, concept or focus question while achieving their own subject-specific outcomes as well as generic outcomes.” The lessons in each of the curricular subjects that are employed would contribute to a deeper understanding of the theme (p. 5). For instance, the concept of slavery could be explored in a Judaic studies class using the Jewish holiday of Passover and the Jewish laws pertaining to slaves. In arts classes, students could study and experience artworks, songs, dances, and theatre that address the issue of slavery. Students could then create their own artworks relating to questions of modern-day slavery. The theme could be explored in social studies by having students study the history of slavery in the United States and current events regarding slavery around the world. The theme could also be further
extended through literacy instruction, with students reading and writing poems about slavery.

**Integration of the Arts and Judaic Studies**

The integration of the arts and Judaic studies curricula is a concept that is slowly gaining popularity in some Jewish day schools (Davis, 2008). The actual method or style of this integration varies greatly from program to program, as is true generally with arts integrated curricula. In some cases, an entire Jewish school is arts integrated, and the arts contribute to the learning in all subjects, including the Judaic studies. In other cases, one or more Judaic studies teachers who have an interest in the arts will incorporate artistic techniques into the Jewish lessons to help meet the goals of the Judaic studies curriculum. These teachers may or may not work in collaboration with the art teacher, if there even is an art teacher and separate art class. The multitude of possibilities is vast. The important consideration is that the connection between art and Judaic studies poses unique challenges and benefits based on the specific needs of the Jewish curriculum, but many aspects of the integration are general to arts integration with any curricular subject.

**Challenges of the Judaic Studies Curriculum**

**Negotiating a dual curriculum: Time constraints**

Jewish day schools feature the dual curricula of Jewish and general studies. The length of the school day is often only slightly longer than at public schools, which creates a scheduling challenge for how to include all subjects. These time constraints often lead to a philosophical deliberation over which studies should receive more class time, and even which studies to cut altogether. The amount of time that the Judaic studies encompass each day varies based on the particular philosophies of the school, but the arts are often considered a “luxury,” and not included in the curricula (Neuman, 1978;
Brovender, 2003). As Barbara Davis (2008) explains, “the arts have historically received shorter shrift in Jewish pedagogy than other subjects” (p. 2). The absence of arts education in many Jewish schools leads students, such as myself, to seek extracurricular arts experiences, but leaves some students without such extracurricular opportunities, and many students with an absence of creative endeavours in their school learning (Brovender, 2003).

Separation of Judaic and secular studies: An intellectual split

In most Jewish schools, students at all age levels have at least two main teachers, one to teach the Judaic studies content, and one to teach the secular studies. Sometimes the faculty are in different departments, and at times even the classrooms are separate. This separation creates for several challenges in a student’s education, including an intellectual distinction in the students’ minds of their Jewish studies and their secular studies, and therefore an intellectual split between their Jewish selves and their secular selves (Tomsky & Weinholtz, 2007; Holtz, 1980). As Barry Holtz (1980) observes: “young Jews…tend to compartmentalize their Jewish and secular existences into distinct and unconnectable parts” (p. 548).

Negotiating this separation of knowledge is a challenge for any subject taught at school, but Holtz (1980), Tomsky and Weinholtz (2007) exert that it is even more pertinent to Judaic studies. Holtz focuses on two major factors: One, students who wish to apply to secular schools or universities after attending a Jewish school are less concerned over their marks in Judaic studies. Two, students often internalize that the general studies are something that everyone in the western world must learn, but that the Judaic studies are extra, and therefore less necessary.

Emphasis on informational knowledge
Judaic texts are often complicated to teach, particularly because they are written in Hebrew or Aramaic. As Backenroth (2004a) explains, “mastering the reading, understanding, and interpretation of texts is the core of Jewish education. However, due to the difficulties of these texts, getting students to master these skills is also one of the most challenging tasks of Jewish education” (p. 151).

It is easy to view the texts as something to be handed from teacher to students, as a certain body of knowledge that the students must remember, but Jewish learning and text learning is much more than that. The goal of Jewish education is to build thinking, active, reflective Jewish beings (Backenroth, 2004b). Studying texts is not just about learning the content of the text, but it is about grappling with the theological issues that they present. Many teachers stop at the basic understanding of the texts (Tomsky & Weinholtz, 2007), because the skills that are required to learn the texts are so challenging; they do not encourage students to open the discussion to bigger ideas and concepts. These lessons are often lacking creativity and emotion, thereby limiting the full potential of the learning experience (Backenroth, Epstein, & Miller, 2006). To fully internalize and be moved by the texts and Jewish learning, there must be a combination of the intellectual and emotional realms (Neuman, 1978), which is a great challenge for many educators.

**Benefits of Arts and Judaic Studies Integration**

The benefits of integrating the arts and Judaic studies are many, with perhaps more of an emphasis in the research on the advantages to the Judaic studies program than to the arts program. The benefits of this integration include making time for art, building connections between the secular and religious components, and adding an emotional and creative component to the Judaic studies.

**Making time for the arts**
Many Jewish schools do not include the arts in their curriculum. The dual curricula of Judaic and secular studies create intense time constraints, and the arts are often viewed as a dispensable luxury. Many secular schools also struggle with finding time for the arts (Russell-Bowie, 2009), even without the added weight of the Jewish curriculum. In many Jewish schools, arts integration might be the only way to create time for the arts (Neuman, 1978). Through a choice of arts integrated models, the arts could, at the very least, have a presence in the curriculum if they are used as a teaching tool during Judaic studies classes.

**Building connections**

Proponents of integrated curricula explain that students gain more from activities that integrate across at least two subjects (Dean, 2001). Russell-Bowie (2009) argues that an integrated curriculum helps students experience their learning as “authentic and meaningful,” instead of fragmented and isolated (p. 8). An integration of art and Judaic studies would benefit both subjects, by helping students draw connections between the two curricula. If students can make connections between Judaic studies and at least one secular subject, the barriers between their secular and Jewish selves could begin to (Holtz, 1980).

Moreover, a common problem in art education is the lack of a meaningful framework from which to produce artwork. For this reason, there has been a movement in art education towards creating artworks based on a theme or “big idea,” in place of producing art that focuses on technique and media (Walker, 2006). The connection of Judaism to the arts curriculum would provide a basis for exploring themes that connect art-making with deeper existential issues. As Backenroth, Epstein, and Miller (2006) illuminate, the Judaic studies curriculum is a perfect match for enhancing the big ideas
model of the arts curriculum, for “both arts-based learning and religious education facilitate consideration of existential questions.”

**The arts as a tool for holistic Jewish learning**

As previously explained, the emphasis on interpreting and mastering Jewish texts poses a challenge to many students in Jewish day schools. The integration of arts with Judaic studies can help broaden the skills and discourse that are employed in teaching Judaic content. As Backenroth (2004b) concludes, “arts integration can help improve Jewish education since [it] can transform the mere transmission of knowledge into a transformative and spiritual teaching and learning” (p. 53). According to James A. Beane (1990), as cited in Backenroth, Epstein, and Miller (2006), the two hemispheres of the brain – the cognitive domain, which controls intellectual experiences, and the affective domain, which controls emotional and creative experiences – are not as separate as once believed. The cognitive domain often takes precedence in Jewish (and most school) learning, but Beane claims that it is critical for the affective domain to work with the cognitive domain for complete learning. Thus, a deep understanding of the Judaic content could be achieved through the integration of cognitive and affective learning experiences. The integration of art and Judaic studies would infuse the Judaic studies with the creative and emotional realm that it is often lacking.

The synthesis of the creative and intellectual domains should be an important aspect of the Jewish day school curriculum, for religious education is more than just textual reading skills and knowledge. Jewish education is also about “transformation of the spirit” (Backenroth, 2008) and the “joy of Jewish living” (Neuman, 1978). For certain students, the arts, with its basis in the expressive and creative realm, could provide an appealing entryway into the Judaic content. Solmsen and Happel (2011) suggest that “the
arts can endow students with the creativity, confidence and flexibility to engage with Judaism with their hearts and souls.” Arts education offers students a pathway to craft a relationship with religious learning and religious life (Brovender, 2003).

The traditional Jewish concept of textual interpretation through creative analyses and debate is another aspect of the Jewish learning style that would benefit from arts integration. Judaic studies are often taught as the transmission of established knowledge that students should accept and internalize. The traditional commentaries that are often studied alongside the Jewish Biblical texts are imaginative and creative interpretations themselves; arguing and debating these ideas have been equally essential components to the learning of Jewish texts for centuries (Backenroth, Epstein, & Miller, 2006). Passing this information to students today as stagnant knowledge contradicts the traditional Jewish mode of learning and thinking.

Using the arts to facilitate Jewish learning can help infuse the Jewish learning with the creative thinking that it employed for centuries. The arts can help students create their own interpretations of the text and serve as a vehicle to discuss personal assumptions, beliefs, understandings, and more. For example, one teacher that Backenroth (2004a) interviewed would encourage her students to create a “visual midrash” (interpretation) of the text in the form of a drawing. Shira Epstein (2004) similarly helped her students create textual interpretations through the dramatic techniques of tableau and “hotseating” (role-playing). Epstein explains that the combination of these techniques enabled her students to move beyond their assumption that Bible stories should be learned and not questioned or discussed. The students began to consider possible back-stories and reasons for the events of the Bible, and opened their
conversations to discourse and debate. They began to find their own voice in the
narratives and create personal and emotional meanings from the texts.

**Differentiated instruction**

The arts can provide an opportunity for differentiated instruction in Judaic studies, which is a subject that is generally challenging to teach, due to its foreign language component (Backenroth, 2004a). Arts integration encourages the use of a variety of Howard Gardner’s (1999) nine intelligences to teach these difficult concepts, which would enable more students to access the content of the texts through lessons that cater to their preferred intelligences (Backenroth, 2008).

Backenroth (2004a) cites a teacher, for instance, who utilizes students’ visual interpretations of the Judaic texts as a way to access students who struggle with verbal expression. The creative nature of the arts, Backenroth further explains, encourages inclusivity for a diversity of learners, through inspiring students to bring their own background and outlooks into their interpretations and understanding. Not all students will connect with all modes of arts integration, but by offering a variety of artistic avenues through which to learn and express their understandings, the arts “help [students] find the ways of connecting that work best for them” (Solmsen & Happel, 2011).

**Concerns About Integrating the Arts with Judaic Studies**

There are some potential concerns with integrating the arts and Judaic studies, namely the potential for weakening one or both curricular subjects and the logistical challenge of maintaining the integration.

There is fear that integrated curricula will jeopardize the integrity of at least one of the curricular subjects (Eisner, 2002). It is not unusual, for example, for an attempt at arts integration to instead be a lesson in the other subject, which uses some tools from the
INTEGRATING THE ARTS AND JUDAIC STUDIES

arts, but does not enhance the students’ understanding of the art form (Backenroth, 2004b). This model of arts integration could marginalize high quality arts education (Eisner, 2002). Even if genuine integration is achieved, opponents (Best, 1995; Eisner, 2002; Smith, 1995, as cited in Russell-Bowie, 2009) claim that it is at the loss of high-level subject-specific content. It is more effective, Veblen and Elliott (2000) argue, to raise the achievement level in each subject through teaching the subjects separately.

A potentially halting concern to an integrated arts and Judaic studies program is the hurdles it could take to put such a program into place. As Deborah Dean (2001), a junior high school teacher, explains, she and her coworkers began an experimental integrated curriculum for a couple of years, with extremely positive results. They soon gave it up, however, due to the great challenges they faced when the infrastructure in the school did not encourage it. For example, finding meeting times to coordinate with other teachers, short class periods, and students who were not always together in the same classes. As Dean laments,

for a while, a very little while, we saw what exciting possibilities education can hold for both students and teachers. It was energizing. The benefits were evident. Yet the costs were more than our school wanted to pay, and so we were left with a sense of what could have been – and what can be if participants are willing to commit the resources necessary for effective integration (p. 5).

**Conclusion**

The literature makes a strong case for integrating the arts and Judaic studies as beneficial to the Judaic studies curriculum. It appears that the models of arts integration at the far end of the integration continuum, which practice complete subject integration around a unified theme, such as Russell-Bowie’s (2009) syntegration model, offer the most beneficial outcomes, but are also the most challenging to implement. A school with a wholly integrated arts and Judaic studies program offers students a space to connect
with Judaic texts, Judaism, and the arts (Backenroth, 2004b). This research looks at data from one such Jewish school in the Greater Toronto Area, to discover how and why complete integration of the arts and Judaic studies can and should be achieved.
Chapter 3: METHODOLOGY

Procedure

This qualitative research study considers effective classroom strategies for integrating the arts and Judaic studies. I completed the research through an examination of relevant literature and semi-structured interviews with two Junior/Intermediate (J/I) teachers working in a Jewish day school. For the purposes of this study, J/I teachers are those individual teachers qualified to teach students in grades four through ten. The interviews were intended to investigate the teachers’ backgrounds, practices and beliefs in relation to the subject of arts and Judaic studies integration, in order to provide me with insight into how I can best incorporate these methods into my own future classroom teaching. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed to reveal consistent themes and connections to the literature on this topic.

Participants

Two teachers were selected as research participants, based on the criteria that they are practicing Junior/Intermediate arts or Judaic studies teachers, and that they place an emphasis in their teaching methodology on integrating the arts with Judaic studies. In order to gain perspective from both curricular sides of this research topic, I interviewed one visual arts teacher who teaches senior-kindergarten through grade 8 and one Judaic studies teacher who teaches grades 5 and 6.

Both of the teacher participants teach at the same arts-integrated Jewish day school. Part of the school’s founding mission is to integrate the arts with Judaic studies, and therefore the teachers at this school were excellent candidates for this research. I chose the two specific teachers from this school based on their teaching subject (arts

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1 Parts of this chapter were co-written with my research group.
and/or Judaic studies), grade level taught, and their commitment to the integrated arts and Judaic studies teaching philosophy. My identification of teachers who fit the inclusion criteria was based on my observation of their teaching methods and the recommendation of an administrator at the school.

**Instruments of Data Collection:**

I collected the data for this study by conducting informal, semi-structured qualitative interviews with the two participating teachers. I prepared the interview questions in advance, to ensure that they directly related to my research questions, and that they provide a comprehensive, open-ended approach to the subject matter (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Both interviews were conducted in a school classroom at the request of the interviewees. The interviews were relaxed in atmosphere and tone, so that the interviewees would feel comfortable speaking freely (Lichtman, 2010). The interviews were audio-recorded and lasted approximately thirty minutes. The full list of 17 interview questions are provided in Appendix B.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

The purpose of the interviews was to collect data on how and why teachers practicing at a Jewish day school implement an integrated approach to arts and Judaic studies education. The goal of this research was to examine specific connections to the teachers’ personal background and their overall philosophy and experiences relating to the implementation of an arts and Judaic studies integrated curriculum, in an effort to understand how to best incorporate this approach into my own teaching practice.

Once the two interviews were conducted, I coded the transcriptions to unearth significant key words, themes, quotes, and links to the literature. I noted similarities and differences between the two transcripts as well as to the literature. The specific themes
and implications derived from the interviews are discussed in chapters four and five of this research paper.

**Ethical Review Procedures**

Research participants were given letters of informed consent, which they read and signed before the interviews began (see Appendix A). The participants signed two copies of the letter: one copy for the participating teachers to keep, and one copy for the researcher. The interview process followed the framework outlined in the consent form, and the information gained from the interviews has been used only in accordance with this agreement.

Before beginning each interview, I ensured that my participants understood the research process, my goals for this study, and the specific topic of my research. The participants were advised that they could refrain from participating in the project at any point in the research process. I also informed them that they could abstain from answering any question, and that they could review the transcript to check for accuracy.

Pseudonyms for individuals and institutions are used to protect the anonymity of all participants. Any potentially identifiable information, such as a participant’s leadership role, has been omitted or protected by a pseudonym. My research supervisor is aware of the participants’ identities and has reviewed this research paper, as stipulated in the signed consent form.

**Limitations**

There are several limitations to the data collection and literature reviewed for this research study. This research is intended to help shape my own personal practice as a new teacher in the field, and is not meant to be an exhaustive study on the topic of integrating the arts with Judaic studies.
One major limitation of the study is that I only interviewed two teachers, and both of the research participants teach at the same arts-integrated Jewish school. The participants, therefore, do not represent a large cross-section of the field. This particular school also provides a lot of support to its teachers to develop their skills in arts integration, as well as creates schedules that enable teacher collaboration and cross-curricular integration, to ensure the success of the arts integrated mission. While these components create an exemplary program at this particular school, the data collected from their experiences may not be easily applied in a school less focused on integrating the arts with Judaic studies.

The literature reviewed for this research is also selective; it does not provide a broad reflection of the field of cross-curricular arts integration or Judaic studies practices. It focuses mainly on the points of their convergence. The work of scholar Ofra Backenroth significantly informs my work; Backenroth has written many of the articles that guide this research, as she is one of the few researchers who writes about this specific field of study.
Chapter 4: FINDINGS

The research findings draw upon the experiences of two teachers working at a Jewish school who actively integrate the arts with Judaic studies in their teaching. The research is guided by the following question: In what ways do Junior/Intermediate (J/I) teachers practicing at a Jewish day school integrate the arts with Judaic studies?

The research also considered the following sub-questions:

1. Why do J/I teachers choose to integrate the arts with Judaic studies?
2. What are some strategies for planning an arts and Judaic studies integrated curriculum?
3. What are the benefits facing teachers who integrate the arts and Judaic studies?
4. What are the challenges facing teachers who integrate the arts and Judaic studies?
5. What are some of the resources utilized by teachers implementing an arts and Judaic studies integrated curriculum?

Pseudonyms for the teachers, the school and any other individual-specific indicators are used to protect the anonymity of the research participants. This chapter will provide an overview of the key findings that have emerged from the participant interviews.

Background Information on Research Participants

Both research participants teach at the Hadas Jewish Day School (pseudonym) in the Greater Toronto Area. They each have strong personal beliefs in the benefits of an integrated arts and Judaic studies program, and both come from a background with significant experience in both art and Judaic studies.

Deborah (pseudonym) is an experienced teacher who has been teaching at Hadas for over 15 years. She teaches visual art to students in senior-kindergarten through grade
8, and has done extensive research in the field of arts integration. She helps coordinate many aspects of the arts integration program throughout the school. She has a degree in visual art, which also incorporated some aspects of Judaic history, and has spent time studying in Israel. In her own words, Deborah has been “making art for as long as [she] can remember. And also always teaching it… A lot of these influences come into [her] work.”

Tali (pseudonym) has only taught at Hadas for three years, and it is her first full-time teaching job. She currently teaches Judaic studies courses to the grade 5 and 6 students, after previously teaching grade 7, and she has quickly fallen in love with the arts integration ethos of the school. She has trouble understanding why all Jewish schools do not integrate the arts with Judaic studies, because to her, “it comes very naturally…this is the way kids learn best.” Tali has a degree in Jewish education. While she does not have any formal training in the arts, Tali was involved in drama during high school and university. She helps create an end-of-the-year play with the junior students at Hadas based on the Biblical text that she teaches them.

**Background Information on the Hadas Jewish Day School**

The Hadas Jewish Day School was founded as an arts-based interdenominational Jewish day school, serving students in junior-kindergarten through grade 8. Cross-curricular integration is practiced throughout the school program, with a particular emphasis on incorporating the arts with the Judaic studies. The arts are taught within the Judaic studies classes, and Judaic studies content is taught within the arts classes. The school believes that Jewish education should foster critical and creative thinking, and that the arts enable this mission (Hadas school website, 2011). The arts integration model at Hadas fits Russell-Bowie’s (2009) description of *syntegration*, in which curricular
subjects “work together synergistically to explore a theme, concept or focus question while achieving their own subject-specific outcomes as well as generic outcomes” (p. 5). Professional development and support are offered to help the teachers grow in their ability to incorporate the arts with Judaic studies, and integrated Judaic studies units are planned and implemented by a team of teachers.

**Key Findings**

Close analysis of the interview transcripts revealed nine recurring themes. From these nine themes, I have identified five key findings pertaining to arts and Judaic studies integration, which I will elaborate upon further in this chapter:

1. Arts integration enhances students’ understanding of difficult Judaic texts.
2. Arts integration provides opportunities for differentiated instruction and assessment.
3. Arts integration enhances the Judaic studies program through student engagement.
4. Collaboration and coordination are fundamental to successful integration.
5. Choosing meaningful components for integration is essential for successfully integrating curricula.

**Finding #1: Arts integration enhances students’ understanding of difficult Judaic texts.**

Deborah and Tali both spoke repeatedly about how the use of the arts assists students in understanding the difficult Judaic texts that are at the core of the Judaic studies program at Hadas. Deborah explains that the idea of integrating the arts with Judaic studies, or what she calls “Judaic arts,” is to “make the texts come alive.” More precisely, she clarifies that,

there [are] so many aspects to our texts…that have question marks, or some which are unanswerables, that we find that by expressing understanding, or question[ing]
the text through the arts – be it visual arts, dance, music, drama, storytelling – students have opportunities to get inside the stories, and think about the text, and the complexities of the text, and then express their understanding, their interpretation of it through an art form.

Tali echoes this sentiment, for as a Judaic studies teacher, she comments that the text that she is responsible for “is a really difficult text…[and] very difficult to teach,” but by the “end of the process [of creating the text-inspired play], the kids understand everything.”

The understanding of the texts is accomplished by making the texts come alive, as Epstein (2004) demonstrated through her students’ dramatic interpretations of Biblical stories. As Backenroth (2004a) elucidates, the arts can help students include personal assumptions, beliefs and understandings into their study of the texts, which ultimately enhances the overall understanding of the literature and content. Tali mentioned throughout her interview that through the process of creating a play from the Biblical text, every student gains a personal and visceral understanding of the text by the end of the process, regardless of their Hebrew or cognitive abilities. Tali explained that the process of creating the play includes writing lyrics and scripts, developing choreography about the text, as well as practicing and performing the production.

Integration also aids students’ understanding of the text through the connections that students create between the linking concepts that they learn in each of their curricular studies. Dean (2001) argues that “making direct connections enhance[s] students' learning and interest” (p. 3). Tali and Deborah both emphasized a similar benefit from the integrated courses at Hadas: by learning overlapping ideas in art, Judaic studies and other subjects, the students gain an incredibly rich understanding of the concept that the Judaic texts elicit. Tali summarizes this sentiment by saying, “when you have integration…it
really helps [the students] understand and gain knowledge, when they’re receiving it in so many different areas of the curriculum.”

These connections, and specifically the arts integration, also help bridge the gap between students’ secular and Jewish identities (Holtz, 1980). As Deborah proclaims, “we’re making Judaism come alive [through arts integration].” She explains that through the creative questioning process that art elicits, the students learn to think about, question and interpret the texts. This process reinforces the relevancy of the texts to the students’ lives, particularly as similar questions arise across curricular subjects. Integrated curricula help students experience their learning as “authentic and meaningful,” instead of fragmented and isolated (Russell-Bowie, 2009, p. 8)

Arts integration can also pose some challenges for teaching and understanding of Judaic texts. Deborah mentions that sometimes the creative and limitless nature of arts education can lead to misunderstandings of the text and interpretations too far removed from the intention of the text:

there’s a general impression that because we’re expressing understanding through the arts, that the text isn’t that important, or that it’s more important to have free expression…[The students] move beyond what the text is really saying, so their base knowledge, their springboard knowledge of text gets lost in this freedom of expression. (Deborah)

Moreover, a loss of understanding can sometimes result from the multiple layers of the concept being taught in so many different pieces across the curricula. Tali alluded to this, and Deborah specifically cautioned that occasionally the interconnecting parts of an integrated unit are just too much and they can be too overwhelming for the students. Sometimes there are too many parts, and the students lose sight of the central focus, and ultimately do not come out with a fully developed understanding of the concept by the end of the unit. Deborah stipulates though that this is the minority of the cases of
integrated units, and if this does occur, the teacher should regroup and adapt to help the students regain focus and find clarity.

It is interesting to note that Deborah and Tali both provided strong examples for how the arts assist students’ Judaic studies comprehension and relevancy, but neither mentioned similar benefits to the arts program.

**Finding #2: Arts integration provides opportunities for differentiated instruction and assessment.**

Both participants mentioned differentiated instruction repeatedly throughout their interviews, equally in terms of providing various methods for students to learn the content, as well as for multiple modes of assessment.

Cross-curricular integration creates opportunities for students to learn the same concept in multiple settings and manners. Howard Gardner (1999) posits that through learning a concept in many different formats, or as he describes as accessing students’ multiple intelligences, there is a much higher chance of more students successfully receiving the information. Students additionally can understand the concepts at a deeper level through these multi-modal experiences (Backenroth, 2008). Particularly with arts integration, through dance, music, visual art and theatre, students can explore a topic using several of Gardner’s nine intelligences. Consequently, most, if not all, students should have the opportunity to access the concept through a preferred method of learning (Solmsen & Happel, 2011). As Tali emphasizes,

students who learn in different ways are able to get [the concept] through [the] different various media that we have in the school...integration provides the opportunity for differentiated instruction and our ability to engage multiple intelligences. When the [students are] getting it through different areas in the curriculum, each learner is able to get engaged through that process.
The differentiation of teaching modes also encourages students, according to Tali, to explore subject matter in ways that are ordinarily “beyond their comfort zone.” Concepts are taught in so many different manners across the curriculum, and so many of the different arts media are utilized, that students have the opportunity to try new things and build on their weaker intelligences.

Deborah further elaborates that through arts integration, the specific needs of the learners can be addressed through the choice of the art medium that is employed to teach a concept. As the teachers craft the integrated units, they look “first and foremost [at the] learners’ needs.” For example, in her visual arts lessons, Deborah thinks about “what kind of art this particular group of students can be very successful at.” The visual art medium that she chooses to teach must make sense with the concept that she is teaching, but it also must match with the learners. Each one of the arts offers so many varied media within their curricula, that the teacher truly has the opportunity with integrated, concept-focused units, to choose the art media that suits the particular students’ needs.

At the Hadas Jewish Day School, teachers collaborate in teams to create integrated units. This collaborative element also benefits differentiated instruction, as the various staff members bring their own personalities, intelligences, teaching skills and approaches, as well as their subject-specific expertise. Through this combined effort, the team of teachers can focus on how to best address the needs of their learners. Deborah proudly imparts that at team meetings, the staff is able to collaboratively “design programs that really work well to [each] specific group of children’s ways of learning.” The collaborative aspect of integrated curricula greatly benefits the diversity of learners, as the students experience the concept through the combined styles and expertise of the multiple creators of the unit.
Integration also provides opportunities for differentiated assessment. As students study a Judaic concept through various curricular subjects, they are also assessed on that concept in each of the subjects. Both Tali and Deborah agreed that when they assess their students, they look for understanding of both the Judaic concept as well as the specific art focus. Each teacher places a greater emphasis, however, on the specific subject that she/he teaches (i.e. Deborah with art and Tali with Bible). This cross-curricular assessment enables students to display their understanding of the Judaic concept through various subject matters and in multiple modes. Each student should potentially have the opportunity to successfully highlight their understanding of the concept through at least one of these opportunities. In addition, the aforementioned team meetings also focus on assessment of the units, and therefore the collaborative efforts of the staff enable the teachers to craft rubrics and assessment strategies that address multiple students’ needs.

Arts integration provides a specific benefit to differentiated assessment, in which the creative element of the arts enables students to display their understanding of the concept through their own creations. Deborah refers to this mode of assessment as “performance of understanding.” She rejoices that through the arts, the teacher “can literally watch [the students] perform their understanding…whether they get [the concept] or not.” Tali concurs that there are benefits to the teacher, for through the preparations for the culminating play, she has a “great opportunity to assess [the students’] understanding…I don’t have to test them. I don’t have to give them a question-and-answer type of assessment.”

For the students, performance of understanding provides an alternative the to paper-and-pencil types of assessments that they ordinarily might be required to complete. While some students might prefer the ordinary test or written statement, others thrive
INTEGRATING THE ARTS AND JUDAIC STUDIES

with the opportunity for creative expression. In Tali’s experience, “kids who struggle in school love the arts, because it provides them with a different medium to reflect their understanding.” The beauty of the integrated curriculum is that students who prefer the tests and students who prefer the artworks will each have the opportunity to display their understanding through their preferred method.

Finding #3: Arts integration enhances the Judaic studies program through student engagement.

Throughout her interview, Tali repeatedly credits arts integration for student engagement in her Judaic studies classes. She admits that Judaic studies in general, and particularly the type of Bible course she teaches (The Prophets), is often dreaded by students in other schools, but at Hadas, “a course that tends to be very difficult to teach, and not as engaging for the kids, is like the highlight of their year.” She attributes the students’ enjoyment of this Bible course to the arts integration at the school. Tali suggests that the arts “transform this discipline – from a discipline that [the students] find boring, into something that they truly enjoy.”

Moreover, this engagement can further help students find relevancy in the Judaic component of their studies. As Holtz (1980) explains, students at Jewish schools often resent the Judaic studies as unnecessary for their future educational endeavours, and therefore a nuisance, or at best, interesting but irrelevant. Whereas Judaic studies could be, as Tali states, merely “something that [the students] have to learn because they’re in a Jewish school,” the students’ engagement with the topic through an arts integration approach prompts them to think about their Judaic learning beyond the walls of the classroom. Tali describes the students’ passion for their own expressive creations relating to the text to at times consume all of their waking hours as they prepare for the play.
These once dreaded courses become enjoyable, meaningful, and lasting, according to Tali.

Interestingly though, Deborah did not mention student engagement as a benefit of integration. Likely this omission is due to the fact that she is a visual art specialist and not specifically responsible for teaching a Judaic studies course. The arts at Hadas might not require an outside boost to generate engagement, as a result of their creative nature and the fact that the students at Hadas have specifically chosen an arts-integrated school, and therefore likely have a deep interest in the arts. In fact, Deborah did admit that occasionally integration decreases her students’ enjoyment of the art lessons. She explains that, “there are classes where the kids just don’t want to integrate. They want to make art, they want to dance, they want to sing – without a connection.” Deborah is currently trying to find more opportunities for students to “just come in and play” with the art.

**Finding #4: Collaboration & coordination are fundamental to successful integration.**

From Deborah and Tali’s reports, the benefits of arts and Judaic studies integration seem tremendous. The question remains how best to plan and implement integrated units.

Deborah and Tali both emphasized the collaborative aspect of integration as a significant factor to its successful implementation. They each recognize their fellow teachers, the administration, and the students as partners and resources in the planning and execution of an integrated unit. Deborah explains,

for integration to work…you cannot work in isolation. [It] only makes your program richer, when you have the input of all the people around you, who are telling you how rich this is, or where there are gaps, and what needs to be adjusted.
At Hadas, integrated units are planned with a group of teachers at team meetings, which include Judaic studies teachers, an arts representative, a child’s study specialist, as well as other staff members as appropriate. As previously mentioned, these teachers work together to plan lessons and assessment strategies. Deborah claims that, “the fundamental basis of integrative curricula is team meetings.” The framework in place at Hadas is so collaborative, that throughout Tali’s interview she referred to most aspects of the program and her planning by using the term “we”: “we put the play together,” “we assess,” “we group the students,” etc. She explains that, “we have a lot of support [at Hadas] in terms of integration…it’s definitely not a one-man show. There’s always a few people involved here.”

Along with the benefits of teacher collaboration, and ultimately the benefits of a strong integrated unit, come many logistical challenges. Scheduling and organization are tremendous undertakings to create successful integration amongst the teachers. For example, the play that Tali and her students create requires ongoing collaboration between other Judaic studies teachers, the music, dance and visual art teachers, and a curriculum director. Each teacher becomes involved in the show at different stages of the planning process, and must coordinate their time and ideas.

The support of the administration, then, cannot be underplayed. For someone like Tali, who has fully bought into the benefits of integration based on her experience at Hadas, she is not sure if she could successfully accomplish what she does at Hadas if she taught at another school. She admits that, it’s more like a gift that we’re able to [integrate art and Judaics] here. That we have the acceptance to do that here. Because for sure in other schools, if you said that, ‘I’m gonna put on a play, we’re studying whatever from the Tanach (Bible), and at the end of the year I’m just gonna put on a big play’, I’m not sure that you
would receive the support or the resources to put something like that on. But when you have that here, I mean, it’s great.

The work of Dean (2001) echoes this insight. Dean reports that despite all of the successes that she and her fellow teachers experienced from their experiment with integration, they soon gave it up due to the great challenges they faced when the infrastructure in the school did not encourage it.

The students themselves are also crucial players in successful integration, as both Tali and Deborah mentioned. As Deborah explains, “integration is a team collaboration between everybody who is learning, and as teachers, we’re as much learners as [the students] are. As we’re watching them, they’re teaching us how to do this right.” If the students are not involved in the creative process, or have not accepted the premise, the teachers’ plans are useless. Neither teacher participant, however, elaborated upon the details regarding student involvement.

All of this collaboration and coordination can be challenging to organize, and can become extremely time consuming, but as Tali adamantly declares, “it’s definitely worth the work at the end.”

**Finding #5: Choosing meaningful components for integration is essential for successfully integrating curricula.**

Another factor for successful implementation of integrated units is carefully planning the multiple pieces of the unit. Integrated units are comprised of numerous components, and the decision for which parts to incorporate, which subjects and art media to draw upon, and how to sequence the unit all require careful consideration.

Deborah and Tali both mentioned the complexity of choosing and piecing together the different parts of an integrated unit. They emphasized that the components of the integrated unit must be meaningful for constructing the concept that is being taught.
As Tali cautioned, “you need to find meaningful ways to integrate the curriculum, but not force it, because I think if you force it, it loses its meaning and its…legitimacy with the students.” Russell-Bowie (2009) echoes this warning and suggests that choice of which subjects to integrate and the selection of specific content within each subject should be “authentic and have integrity” (p. 8). The choices pertaining to which curricular areas to incorporate, such as math or science, are especially important when addressing the specifics of arts integration. For instance, the type of art to focus on, whether it be music, dance, drama or visual art, and the specific medium, style, or element of art, are all integral to making meaningful connections that can help students forge a deeper understanding of the concept being taught. Otherwise, as previously warned, the students can get lost in the specific parts, and never reach that moment of clarity which Tali describes so clearly when she suggests that “you want [the students] to kind of bring it all together, and say, oh my God, everything we’ve been learning, these different subjects, is all coming together, and it’s all the same idea!”

Deborah provides a specific example for how she chooses meaningful arts integration. For Hanukah, she taught a combined science, Judaic studies and visual art unit relating to the science of light, the festival of Hanukah (where light is a central component), and when choosing the art component, she thought carefully about how best to highlight the concept and science of light through art. She chose wavy paper and other wavy materials to emphasize rays of light, continued the wavy theme through a study of wavy lines, and then developed the project further from there. These types of meaningful choices are, according to Tali and Deborah, what can make or break an integrated program. For as Deborah acknowledges, “sometimes the theme is just too difficult to
transfer into a visual arts piece,” and when she has attempted to integrate the visual arts anyway, her students have left the lessons confused.

In addition to choosing the specific parts for integration, the teachers must decide how to sequence the unit. Again, this aspect of unit planning must be meaningful. Deborah explains that this part of the process “all comes back to [student] understanding.” Integrated units are almost like building blocks, where each of the pieces must come together to create the full tower of understanding by the end of the unit.

Choosing which blocks to place at the foundational level is crucial. For example, as Deborah explains, the arts can introduce the concept and then the students can continue to explore further layers of the concept in other courses, or the students can learn the concept in other classes, and then take it further in the art room. The specific choices are dependent upon the most meaningful way to teach each specific concept.

In terms of finding resources for choosing which parts to incorporate, the human resource was the most important element that Deborah and Tali discussed for successfully integrating a unit, as highlighted above in the collaboration discussion. Beyond the team-planning component, Deborah wants to encourage teachers to build on their own personal expertise and expand their thinking of what is appropriate material for integration. To her, everything in life is a potential learning and teaching opportunity. Deborah advises,

draw on everything you know. The sky’s the limit in integration and using arts. Be mindful, be aware, use your life experiences. Don’t be afraid to try different art, sort of unexpected kinds of art forms to express simple themes or straightforward themes… And trust your artistic and creative instincts.

Tali, who is newer than Deborah to the field of arts integration, emphasizes that despite the great effort of coordinating team planning, choosing the best components for
an integrated unit, and putting all of the pieces together, the payback in student learning and engagement is worth it. Ultimately, she says, the best advice for attempting an integrated unit, beyond the process of putting the pieces together meaningfully, is, “just go for it!”

**Summary of Findings**

Integrating the arts and Judaic studies around themed units requires a lot of time and organization for the teachers involved in the planning process. In light of these challenges, though, both research participants unwaveringly favour this type of teaching method. The participants find that the results of such complete integration benefit the Judaic studies program unquestionably by offering better comprehension of difficult texts, differentiated instruction and assessment opportunities, and student engagement.
Chapter 5: DISCUSSION

This research study has been a rewarding and enlightening experience for me as a researcher and future teacher. I have gained a lot of practical ideas from the research participants, as well as helpful insight on a topic that is very close to my heart and that I hope to utilize in my future endeavours. This chapter presents reflections on the findings and limitations of this study, as well as provides recommendations for educators and further research studies.

Reflections and Implications

Personal experiences and goals with arts integration

Arts integration is an area of study to which I have become increasingly more connected and committed over the two years of the Master of Teaching program at OISE/UT. In my first year of the program I had the opportunity to volunteer at an arts integrated Jewish day school, where I witnessed firsthand the incredibly rich and creative learning that it inspires. During each of my four practical teaching placements over the two years of the program, I attempted arts integration to varying degrees, based on the location and curricular subjects that I was teaching. These experiences left me with numerous successes as well as a lot of questions, some of which I have attempted to answer through this study. Overall though, this study, as well my personal experiences relating to this topic, leave me inspired and motivated to pursue this practice even further, particularly in light of the student benefits that are outlined in chapter four of this paper.

The model of arts integration at the Hadas Jewish Day School, which aligns with what Russell-Bowie (2009) refers to as syntegration, presents itself as an ideal model of arts integration, based on the research participants’ testimonies. A model I hope to integrate in my future classrooms. The benefits that the research participants outlined
would most likely not be fully achieved without such a completely integrated program. The collaboration and planning that are involved in such a model are tremendous, and in many ways could become a hindrance, but full arts integration is a goal of mine, perhaps even for one unit per year as a starting point. Achieving such a well-organized and complete integration may not be possible at schools in which such a program is not imbedded in the infrastructure, but it should not rule out the possibility. Particularly for teachers in settings where they are personally responsible for teaching a large portion of the curriculum, arts integration would require less collaboration with other teachers. It would still be beneficial, however, to utilize the human resources/expertise in the school and community to help build a richer, more diverse program, as the research participants highlighted.

For rotary arts teachers in particular, and if I personally become a visual arts specialist at a school, the findings of this study are perhaps not as concrete in terms of the benefits to the arts program, but extremely helpful in terms of thinking about the holistic goals of the students’ education. Whether it would be for Judaic studies or other complex subject matters, the arts can play a vital role in student understanding and interest in those topics. At a school like Hadas, where the teachers plan units together, the arts teachers are seen as vital to the program and student learning. In non-integrated schools, however, these teachers are often viewed as less critically essential. The findings from this study are encouraging for arts teachers to seek out opportunities for integration, even if arts integration is not already in place in the school. This could be accomplished both through the arts lessons themselves, as well as through offering integrated ideas to the other curricular teachers. Perhaps even simply finding one teacher at the school, with whom an integrated unit could be collaboratively planned, would be a realistic starting point.
**Teacher backgrounds**

It was interesting, but not surprising, to discover that both of the teacher participants have a background in Judaic studies and the arts, which is most likely why they are passionate and successful at integrating these two subjects. I too have a background in both of these areas, which is why I was drawn to this research topic. The benefits of the collaborative nature of arts integration, however, are that not every teacher has to be an expert in each of the fields of study that are being integrated. Even if there are not subject-specific teachers at the school, and one teacher is responsible for most of the teaching, there are other teachers who can contribute their expertise through advice or even guest lectures.

The Hadas Jewish Day School does offer professional development and support in the area of arts integration and Judaic studies, which is beneficial to those with less background experience in these subject areas. Professional development is an important issue to be considered for the advancement of arts integration, and I personally am interested to learn more about the other curricular arts, namely music, dance, and drama. One would expect that the same would be true for those teachers at a Jewish school who do not have a strong background in Judaic studies. Advancing their knowledge on the Judaic topics and themes that their students are learning would greatly benefit their ability to integrate, and consequently their students’ deeper connection to and understanding of the Judaic content.

**Implication for arts programs**

The data analysis and findings that arose from the teacher interviews suggest that arts integration greatly benefits the Judaic studies program at Hadas. Neither teacher participant, however, discussed the benefits to the arts program. This oversight leads to
many questions pertaining specifically to the effects of arts integration on the arts program, which will be further discussed in the future study section of this chapter. It is important to consider here, though, that neither participant mentioned the importance of big-idea art creation that Walker (2006) advises to support meaningful arts creation. This omission might, in fact, speak highly of the benefits of arts integration to the arts program. Perhaps this oversight is due to the fact that lack of meaningful art production has not been a problem that Hadas teachers or students have grappled with; the Hadas art program has always utilized Judaic-based big ideas, as part of its foundational mission. The successes of the Hadas school’s examples of theme-based arts integration could encourage arts teachers to at least occasionally imbue their arts lessons with meaningfully chosen concepts from other curricula.

Further, in Jewish or other schools who struggle to find time for the arts and generally consider artistic pursuits to be a luxury, the focus of the two teacher participants on the benefits of arts integration for the Judaic studies program speaks highly of the necessity for the arts. Inclusion of an arts integrated program at Jewish day schools has the potential to greatly increase student learning and engagement in their other, more highly valued, educational pursuits. A utilitarian view of the arts might not be ideal, but it is at least a starting point for incorporating arts education into Jewish schools.

Limitations

The limitations of this study, as mentioned in chapter three, do affect the impact and analysis of the findings. The main limitation of the data collection is the small sample size from which the data were gathered: Only two participants were interviewed, both of whom teach at the same school. Moreover, the school in which they teach has a highly advanced arts and Judaic studies integrated program, which may not be replicable at other
schools. The collaborative nature of the integrated program at Hadas shows incredible potential for what an integrated program can look like and achieve through this collaboration. However, the organization, buy-in, and time constraints of such an endeavour could pose many challenges for those at other schools who are attempting to introduce or advance their integrated programs. This consideration should not become an insurmountable hurdle, however, such as Dean (2001) experienced. Teachers working in isolation can start small, perhaps choosing one arts subject and one other subject to integrate, even for just one unit. A teacher could choose one other teacher to team up with, in an attempt to begin the process of collaboration. As Backenroth (2004b) advises to those interested in beginning an arts integrated program at an existing school, it is recommended to choose a less intense model of integration than the one highlighted here by the Hadas school.

Recommendations

**Expand arts integration programs**

The benefits of arts integration based on the findings of this research study, as well as the literature that supports it, are incredibly compelling. As such, teachers and schools should consider expanding their arts integrated programs. Jewish or other schools who are struggling with finding time for the arts, grappling with the subject-specific compartmentalization of knowledge, or with student engagement, could greatly increase their successes with the help of arts integration.

Arts teachers, as well as general or other subject-specific teachers, should also consider ways that they can personally incorporate arts integration into their lessons. Arts teachers should take their potential role in holistic student education seriously, and seek out integrative opportunities. Especially in schools that do not highly value the arts, arts
teachers, or teachers with an interest in the arts, should showcase the potential of the arts, through arts integration, to benefit students in the aforementioned manners detailed in chapter four of this study. Non-arts teachers should consider increasing their arts integrated instruction within their own lessons or perhaps collaborate with the arts teachers, to help students better comprehend and enjoy the lessons for which that teacher is responsible.

Increase professional development

Professional development in the arts, and potentially in other integrated subjects, such as Judaic studies, is important for helping teachers gain interest, knowledge, and confidence that can facilitate integration. All teachers, beginning in pre-service programs, and continuing at the schools in which they teach, should gain experience in arts education. Even if those teachers are not responsible for teaching the arts, understanding the basics of the disciplines could help with their motivation and ability to successfully integrate the arts. At Jewish schools, those teachers who do not have a background in Judaic studies should also enlist and be offered professional development in the basics of the Judaic studies that are taught at the school. A general understanding of the concepts would increase their ability to successfully integrate their curriculum with the Judaic studies.

Create opportunities for collaboration

School administrators, as well as teachers themselves, should find time and methods for teachers to collaborate on unit planning and implementation. Creating teaching teams and team meetings would be ideal, but even a less formalized sharing of ideas and expertise could greatly benefit teachers' programs and student learning.
Future Research

The findings of this research study have answered many of my questions regarding the integration of arts and Judaic studies, and have created a compelling argument for the implementation of such a program. The findings have also revealed several other areas for future research related to this topic:

1. An exploration of the effects of arts integration on the arts programs: its potential benefits and challenges to student understanding of arts concepts and engagement in the arts.

2. The consideration of arts integration models at schools where there is not a high level of support for this teaching model: What are the challenges and successes that these teachers face in their endeavours to integrate curricula?

3. How do issues of time (planning time and instructional time) impact teachers’ efforts to integrate curricula?

4. What resources, beyond the human expertise/resources, are most beneficial for successfully integrating curricula?

Conclusion

This research study set out to explore the area of arts integration with Judaic studies. It aimed to discover how and why teachers integrate these curricula, and the specific benefits and challenges that arise from this endeavour. The two teacher participants involved in this study both discussed the tremendous benefits that arts integration can provide for student learning in Judaic studies, but did not mention any clear benefits to the arts program. They also, however, did not mention any disadvantages to the Judaic studies programs. Both participants discussed the challenges of collaboration and planning the multiple layers of integrated units, but constantly
reiterated how worthwhile these efforts are, due to the overwhelming benefits of arts integrated Judaic studies units. The insights from this study are inspiring to me as a future educator interested in the arts, Judaic studies, and integration in general, and will hopefully motivate other teachers to consider arts integration.
REFERENCES


Appendix A: Letter of Consent for Interview

Date: __________________

Dear ___________________,

I am a graduate student at OISE, University of Toronto, and am currently enrolled as a Master of Teaching candidate. I am studying the integration of the arts and Judaic studies for the purposes of investigating an educational topic as a major assignment for our program. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

I am writing a report on this study as a requirement of the Master of Teaching Program. My course instructor who is providing support for the process this year is Dr. Susan Schwartz. My research supervisor is Lydia Menna. The purpose of this requirement is to allow us to become familiar with a variety of ways to do research. My data collection consists of an approximately 30-minute interview that will be tape-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient to you. I can conduct the interview at your office or workplace, in a public place, or anywhere else that you might prefer.

The contents of this interview will be used for my assignment, which will include a final paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates and/or potentially at a conference or publication. I will not use your name or anything else that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information remains confidential. The only people who will have access to my assignment work will be my research supervisor and my course instructor. You are free to change your mind at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may decline to answer any specific questions. I will destroy the tape recording after the paper has been presented and/or published which may take up to five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks or benefits to you for assisting in the project, and I will share with you a copy of my notes to ensure accuracy.

Please sign the attached form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. Thank you very much for your help.

Yours sincerely,

Shira Cantor

Phone:
Email:
Instructor’s Name: Susan Schwartz
Email address:

Research Supervisor’s Name: Lydia Menna
Phone:
Email address:

Consent Form

I acknowledge that the topic of this interview has been explained to me and that any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw at any time without penalty.

I have read the letter provided to me by Shira Cantor and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described.

Signature: ______________________________________

Name (printed): __________________________________

Date: ______________________
Appendix B: Interview Questions

Section A: Background Information

1. What is your name and what subject and grades do you currently teach?
2. How long have you been teaching in this school and why did you choose to teach here?
3. What are your prior teaching experiences (in this school or elsewhere)?
4. Please tell me about any type of arts background or training that you might have. (Can include P.D.)

Section B: Teacher Practices (What/How?)

5. I know that arts integration with Judaic studies is a focus at this school. Please tell me about your experiences with this integration.
6. Please tell me about a specific unit or lesson you have done which focuses on integrating art and Judaic studies, which you felt was successful.
7. Do you have an example of an integrated arts and Judaic studies lesson that you felt was less successful or challenging? Can you tell me about why you think it did not work as well?
8. How do you go about planning a lesson/unit that integrates art with Judaic studies?
9. What types of resources do you find most helpful for integrating the arts with Judaic studies?
10. How do you assess an integrated art and Judaic lesson? (Do you focus on expectations from both of the curricula?)
11. (Possible follow-up question: Is there any kind of/how helpful is team planning?)

Section C: Teacher Beliefs/Values (Why?)

12. What do you believe are the underlying goals or benefits from this integrative approach? (Do you see benefits to student learning?)
13. Do you believe there are any drawbacks to integrating art with Judaic studies? (Possible: Any perceived negatives for student learning?)

Section D: Barriers
14. What types of challenges do you face in your attempts to integrate art with Judaic studies?
15. What advice would you have for a beginning teacher who is interested in integrating the arts and Judaic studies?

Section E: Next Steps
16. What are your future goals for integrating the arts and Judaic studies? How do you intend to achieve these goals?

17. Do you have anything that you would like to add that has not been discussed?
FIGURES

Three Models of Arts Integration (Russell-Bowie, 2009):

**Figure 1:** Service Connections (p. 5)

**Figure 2:** Symmetric Correlations (p. 6)

**Figure 3:** Syntegration (p. 7)