TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF A SUCCESSFUL JEWISH COMMUNITY DAY SCHOOL GRADUATE: AN INTERPRETIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Today’s community Jewish day schools face the unique challenge of establishing their own goals and measures of success, free from denominational directives. Previous research has focused on the perspectives of parents and/or administrators with a gap in the literature related to the perspective of teachers, important stakeholders and those mainly responsible for the actual classroom education of the students. A better understanding of the teacher’s perspective can help schools align their vision with teacher goals in order to ensure student success. As such, this qualitative, Interpretive Phenomenological study used Social Identity Theory as a lens and sought to describe the understandings and perceptions of community day school Jewish Studies teachers as to what constitutes a successful Jewish day school graduate, how those perceptions related to success affect teacher classroom goals, and how teachers assess their own success pertaining to these goals. Data analysis revealed the connection between the teachers’ own sense of Jewish identity and their desire to instill a strong sense of identity into their students, aiming to enable them to make educated decisions in the greater world. Teachers use close student connections as a way to make traditional texts relevant to student lives, describing the immeasurability of student success and placing an emphasis on long-term measures of success. Implications for future study include suggesting the continuation of study and comparison of the perspectives of different groups of teachers and different stakeholders in order to have a clearer understanding of success. Recommendations for practice address inclusion of interdisciplinary and experiential elements related to Jewish studies, revision of measures of assessment of success, and alignment of teacher goals and school mission.

Key words: Jewish day school, Jewish identity, student success, teacher goals and perspectives, Social Identity Theory
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Dedication

For my family for inspiring me towards making an impact on the world and without whose support and patience I would never have been able to do any of this.
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Chapter One: Introduction

Overview

When the last full census of students attending Jewish day schools in North America was completed, there were 103,194 students attending either a Jewish elementary or secondary school outside of the Yeshiva or Chassidic sectors in the 2008-2009 school year (Schick, 2009), representing a steady increase from previous years. A few years later, the 2011 enrollment for these same groups was 83,519 (The Avi Chai Foundation, 2011), indicating a significant decrease from the last census date, and a modest decrease from the year 2010. The 2012 enrollment was 83,008, indicating relative stability (The Avi Chai Foundation, 2013). Within the Jewish day school world, studies often separate the Yeshiva and Chassidic sectors, two of the most conservative and traditional denominations, from the other denominations because of their near 100% enrollment of possible students due to cultural norms (Schick, 2009). Most studies regarding school choice, then, focus on other denominations that face a more compelling choice in schooling as the subjects of research.

As day school tuition continues to rise, more and more families struggle to justify the costs, and schools scramble to distinguish themselves from among the other educational options facing families (Kardos, 2010). As such, the original mission of the school is sometimes forgotten in favor or catering to the needs of a specific group or stakeholder. Of the 83,519 students enrolled in Jewish day schools in 2011, 19,417 were enrolled in community day school (The Avi Chai Foundation, 2011). Lacking a mandate from a specific denomination and established to serve the needs of various constituents of the community, the community day school has a unique obligation and challenge in determining its goals and measures of success (Pomson, 2008), free from the directives of the specific denomination. Without this direction, the
school can look toward the parents, students, teachers, and administration for opinions as to the achievements of the school. Within Jewish community day schools, however, the definition of success of a graduate may vary, depending on the specific perspective of the stakeholder, with virtually no research as of yet focusing on that of the teacher. Because of the lack of research exploring the experiences and perspectives of the teacher, this phenomenological study aims to more concretely describe that idea of success from the teacher’s perspective.

**Statement of the Problem**

In Judaism, education is not a separate sphere of Jewish life, but, rather, it is integral to how Jews live (Wertheimer, 2005). Jewish education, and especially youth education, has always been an important part of the culture as many of the ancient traditions and rituals are focused on teaching the children (Sacks, 2012). Originally founded to prevent assimilation (Graetz, 1971), the Jewish day school has also served as one possible venue for enhancing that education (Bloomberg, 2007). This study focuses on the understandings and perspectives of Jewish Studies teachers in a community Jewish day school as to what constitutes the success of that day school education, manifested in a graduate.

**Justification for the Research Problem**

Over the last few decades research has shown that the specific goals of the Jewish day school have grown to be ambiguous, especially when discussing the community (or non-denominational) school. For example, while Bock (1977) focuses on cultural continuity, Chertok et al. (2007) emphasize Jewish involvement in college, and Cohen, Milyavskaya, and Koestner study the impact on Jewish practice (2009) while Cooper and Kramer (2002) consider continuing Jewish studies, each with their own measures of success. Additionally, among this research,
there is a clear gap in the area of the perspectives of those in the field, especially in asking teachers for their perceptions as to what constitutes contemporary Jewish educational success in a day school graduate.

**Deficiencies in Evidence**

Although the research in the field of Jewish education has grown significantly in recent decades (Bloomberg, 2007), gaps still exist in a variety of areas pertaining to goals and the definition of success. One area that has received minimal attention is what success looks like according to different constituents of the Jewish day school world and how it is measured. Wertheimer (1999, 2009), Bryfman (2011), and Pekarsky (2008) all discuss the lack of clear goals and definition of success in Jewish education, stating that in order to move forward in Jewish education, action is needed in this area.

By exploring the different definitions of success among stakeholders, Jewish day schools can maintain a vision and work towards achieving success according to that vision. Additionally, with parents, teachers, students, and administrators all aware of the envisioned results, they can more easily form a partnership, aimed at reaching those goals. Finally, with this understanding, researchers can better evaluate the success of day school programs according to the outlined goals.

The experiences and perceptions of Jewish Studies teachers are especially important as many are inspired by their own religious beliefs and hope to instill that inspiration into the students (Salomon, 2010). By examining the definition of a successful day school graduate from the Jewish Studies teacher’s perspective and based on their experiences, day schools may be able to strengthen their visions and work towards achieving their version of success according to that vision.
Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences and perceptions of Jewish Studies teachers in a community day school regarding what constitutes success of a graduate who has spent the majority of his kindergarten through 12th grade educational experience in Jewish day school.

Research Questions

How do Jewish Studies teachers describe their understandings and perceptions as to what constitutes a successful graduate of a community Jewish day school?

Sub-questions:
- How do these understandings and perceptions affect the teachers’ goals in the classroom?
- How do teachers measure their own success in reference to these goals?

Theoretical Framework

In order to guide the research in providing a lens through which to view the data and results of the study, a theoretical framework has been adopted for this study. This theoretical framework will be used to guide the study, including data collection and research, resulting in focused, aligned work. For this study, Social Identity Theory has been adopted.

Social Identity Theory. Social Identity Theory holds that self-verification and social structures are closely related (Stryker & Burke, 2000), and social identification leads to activities that are in-line with that identity, reinforcing the identity (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Trepte (2006) adds that Social Identity Theory focuses on how the group affects the individual and “assumes that one part of the self-concept is defined by our belonging to social groups” (p. 255). As such,
Social Identity Theory “does not begin with assumptions considering the individual, but rather with assumptions referring to a social group” (Trepte, 2006, p. 256). This classification according to social group is an important component of identity, allowing the individual to classify himself or herself in the larger social environment (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Trepte (2006) continues that membership to different social groups is defined as the social identity, and in order to enhance their self-esteem, people want to develop positive social identity. In order to do so, they exhibit behavior that is in-line with the given social group.

Social Identity Theory also includes parts of Self-Complexity Theory, which says that identity is a multidimensional construct that coexists with other identities (Rosenberg & Gara, 1985), and Ecological Theory, which highlights the reciprocal relationship between individuals and the environment in which the individual functions (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Through the integration of these elements, Social Identity Theory emphasizes the idea that in order to fully appreciate the development of an individual, the systems in which that individual operates, as well as the roles the individual plays in each of these systems and those with whom the individual interacts, must be examined and understood.

Use of theoretical framework. The use of Social Identity Theory helped to guide the research in developing and answering the stated research questions. Through Social Identity Theory, the identity of the student is the focus, showing that identification leads to activities that are in-line with that identification. The Jewish Studies teachers play an important role in developing the Jewish identity of the students, helping them to locate themselves within the social group of being Jewish, and educating them as to how to be a part of the Jewish community. Additionally, the teachers guide the students into finding a balance between
identifying as a Jew and also operating within the greater secular community while still being true to that identity.

**Significance of Research Problem**

Although the research in the field of Jewish education has grown significantly in recent decades, gaps still exist in a variety of areas (Bloomberg, 2007), including those pertaining to goals and the definition of success. Many in the field of Jewish education point to the lack of clarity and consistency of goals as a weakness in the field. Wertheimer (1999) states that the various goals within the field "inevitably create much confusion" (p. 114), and Bryfman (2011) states that the field of education in general struggles to "address adequately the question of what success in Jewish education should and could look like" (p. 777). Pekarsky (2008) adds that in order to move forward in Jewish education, defining its purposes and improving the system, there is a need to establish clear visions that can act as a guide through the challenges that are encountered and to provide the needed resources to achieve those visions. Wertheimer (2009) echoes the need by adding that all educational efforts would be more successful if they clearly establish their goals and evaluate themselves honestly in relation to attaining those established goals.

One area that has received minimal attention is what success looks like, and what the definition of success is for different constituents of the Jewish day school world. The need exists for clear delineation of goals and a definition of success that is common among administrators, teachers, parents, and students in order to best achieve that success and work together towards common goals.

In many Jewish day schools, the teachers, especially the Jewish Studies teachers are not consulted in considering the goals of the school. Yet, in a Jewish day school, these teachers play
an integral role in the education and culture of the school. Without knowing what these teachers consider to be a successful graduate, it is difficult to know the role they are playing in educating their students and how that fits into the greater goals of the school.

Exploring the definition of success among Jewish Studies teachers can be a step towards eventually considering teacher perceptions in relation to their other stakeholders, allowing Jewish day schools to maintain a vision and work towards achieving success according to that vision. Additionally, as various stakeholders become aware of the envisioned results, they can more easily form a partnership aimed at reaching those goals. Finally, with this understanding, researchers can better evaluate the success of Jewish day school programs according to the outlined goals.

**Positionality Statement**

Briscoe (2005) states that “most current scholars agree that positionality affects one’s perceptions” regarding research (p. 25). Briscoe’s two major concerns include participants’ not speaking openly if the researcher is not part of their group and the researcher’s potential inability to avoid misinterpretation when attempting to remain unbiased and without preconceptions, explaining that someone outside of the participants’ position may not be able to accurately interpret and add meaning to the participants’ words. Put another way, Machi and McEvoy (2009) state that “researchers have opinions about the problems in their field” (p. 19), and this bias should not only be controlled, but it should also be confronted.

A researcher’s biases, presuppositions, and experiences come into play in each step of the research process. Being aware of the different elements of positionality and factoring them into the study is, therefore, essential, especially in qualitative research where the researcher’s position can have great effect on the collection and interpretation of data. Additionally, though the
approach for this study, Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), does not require insider status (Styles, 1979), there is a tradition within the approach of using insider researchers due to the need to understand the phenomenon and have access to the population, so positionality plays an important role in the research. Briscoe (2005) states that “dimensions of positionality include one’s demographic positioning within society, one’s ideological positioning, and how one discursively positions the other and oneself” (pp. 31-32), and each of these dimensions comes into play when conducting research.

**Demographic positioning.** Although it may seem as if the researcher shares many of the demographics of those who will be participating in the study, the researcher’s demographic positioning does differ from the participants in ways that are important to acknowledge. The researcher is a 30 year-old woman who is also a mother and a wife. The researcher considers herself to be relatively well educated and affiliates herself with the Modern Orthodox movement of Judaism. Among those the researcher interviewed are both men and women of various ages and varying educational levels. Some are married, and others are not married. Some are parents, and some are not. While all of them would consider themselves “Jewish,” each participant defines Judaism in a different way and either affiliates with a specific denomination (Modern Orthodox or other) or specifically chooses not to affiliate. Among those who participated in the study, there is not a single person who matches the researcher in all demographic areas. While the researcher believes that she shares enough with the participants in order for them to feel comfortable sharing with her, and to not think of themselves as the “other,” the researcher was aware of the demographic differences when constructing interview questions, conducting interviews, and analyzing data.
**Ideological positioning.** Creswell (2007) identifies five different philosophical assumptions with implications for practice that include ontological, epistemological, axiological, rhetorical, and methodological. Each of these five assumptions addresses a different aspect of the researcher’s perspective on a specific part of the research process that can have major ramifications on the study.

**Ontological assumptions.** One of these assumptions that is especially relevant to my study and to the researcher’s own assumptions is the ontological assumptions. Creswell (2007) lists the characteristics as "reality is subjective and multiple, as seen by participants in this study" (p. 17). This assumption goes straight to the researcher’s study in that she believes success to be totally subjective, as defined by each individual. As the researcher conducted the qualitative interviews, the subjectivity of the data and the variance from participant to participant was evident. Personally, all of the researcher’s knowledge on this area came from subjective experiences and experiences with other people's subjective experiences. In the field of education, the researcher believes that very little is objective, and that belief contributes to the researcher's position in this study.

**Axiological assumptions.** Another assumption that Creswell (2007) discusses is axiological. Creswell (2007) lists the characteristics as "researcher acknowledges that research is value-laden and that biases are present" (p. 17). The researcher chose this specific topic for research because of her connection and interest in the field. Therefore, although she followed the protocol of IPA and “bracketed” any personal knowledge and perceptions during interviews (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2012), refraining from projecting personal values and biases when thinking about the work, designing the study, and interpreting the data was not totally possible.
Researcher’s previous experience. Beyond Creswell’s assumptions, the researcher’s experience at her school and ideas that led to my choosing this specific area of research certainly play a role in her positioning. During the three years preceding the study, as a teacher at the school, the researcher came to believe that teachers, administration, parents, and students have vastly different opinions of the purpose of day school education, specifically at the specified school. As a mother, the researcher believes that if she were to send her children to a Jewish day school, she would do so because of the emphasis on Jewish Studies, instruction towards text skills and religious practice, integration of Hebrew, and infusion of Jewish values. Yet, at the parent open house events that are used for recruitment purposes of the specified school, the two aspects of the school that were highlighted are the college counseling program and the senior trip to Poland and Israel. Additionally, the final faculty meeting of the year, set aside to celebrate successes as a faculty, was dedicated to a report of which students went to which college and how many top-tier schools admitted the school’s students. The researcher knows that she instinctively places a higher value on the priorities that she specified as reasons to send her children to a Jewish day school and, at least subconsciously, judges all of the other reasons as being not as valuable. Although this difference in values is the reason she chose this particular study, the researcher needs to be aware that just because the participants of the study will be other teachers, they may not share the same values as far as what constitutes success of a graduate of a Jewish day school.

Positioning of the other and oneself. The researcher’s role in specified school was that of teacher at the time of the study. While she was involved in many of the programs that happen outside of the classroom, the researcher did not have any administrative responsibilities at all and had absolutely no role in supervision and evaluation of any other teachers. The participants of the
proposed study were also teachers at the specified school, putting the researcher and participants at relatively equal positioning. Additionally, most of the teachers who were participants had been at the school for much longer than the researcher and had academic credentials beyond the researcher, contributing to the idea that the researcher’s position is no higher than theirs. Regardless of the researcher’s seemingly-equal status with the participants of the study, however, Briscoe (2005) emphasizes that “no matter how carefully we match the researcher’s social group to the group to be represented, the researcher must perforce act from a privileged position” (p. 32). The researcher, then, needed to be aware that the study participants might not view the researcher’s position as being equal to theirs, and this may have an effect on their behavior and answers during an interview.

**Avoiding bias.** Being clear about the researcher’s own assumptions and bias is one step towards avoiding the researcher’s personal position’s playing any major role in the work that would prevent the results from being sound. To continue to control the researcher’s bias, the researcher used open-ended questions for the interviews and asked a peer to read the interview questions prior to conducting the study in order to control for any biased wording or unintended references. Additionally, through someone else’s reading of the questions, the researcher could help to ensure that any demographic positioning did not affect the validity for participants who differ from the researcher in specific areas. The open-ended questions of the interview then allowed for the data to reflect the attitudes, impressions, and priorities of the participants, rather than of the researcher, preventing the researcher’s own biases from coloring the data collected. Additionally, asking the participants to review the findings in light of their own perceptions and understandings ensured that the researcher’s biases did not affect the findings. Finally, once all data had been collected and analyzed, a peer reviewer was asked to review the analysis and
findings to again ensure that the researcher’s bias and assumed knowledge did not influence the findings.

Definition of Terms

Aliyah means moving to Israel.

Beit Midrash refers to the traditional house of study.

B’tzelem Elokim refers to the concept that every person being created in the image of God.

Chevruta refers to a study partner.

Chumash refers to the first five books of the Torah/Bible.

Ivrit is the Hebrew word for “Hebrew.”

Ivrit b’Ivrit refers to a curriculum of teaching Jewish Studies, using Hebrew as the language of instruction.

Jewish day school is a private educational institution affiliated with Judaism that students attend full-time. Jewish day schools are different from boarding schools in that students attend them during the day, returning home at night instead of boarding on campus. Most Jewish day schools are smaller than public schools, averaging about 280 students per campus (Schick, 2009).

Jewish community day schools are transdenominational institutions that “generally have a lesser emphasis on Judaics” than do many of the other types of Jewish day schools (Schick, 2009, p. 10), finding favor among philanthropic sources and attracting Jews who consider themselves nondenominational or post-denominational (Schick, 2009).

Judaics refers to the study of Judaism and is often used as a synonym for Jewish Studies.

Kashrut refers to the set of Jewish dietary laws.
Post-denominational institutions reject conventional denominational labeling, sharing both similarities and differences with the established denominations.

Rashi is a traditional commentator of Biblical and Rabbinic texts.

Responsa refers to a series of Rabbinic discussions of questions and answers

Seder is a traditional Passover ritual and dinner.

Shiva house refers to the house of a mourning family.

Talmud refers to part of the Oral Torah/Bible that was later written down and commented upon.

Tanach is the full Bible or Old Testament.

Torah sh’b’al’Peh refers to the body of Oral Torah/Bible that was later put into written form.

Tosefta refers to additional commentaries on traditional texts.

Transdenominational institutions go across denominational boundaries in order to be inclusive of all denominations.

Yeshiva system of schooling is a traditional form of Jewish schooling based on intensive study of traditional Jewish texts.

Zionism refers to support for Israel.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

Overview of Proposed Study

This study aims to explore the perceptions of Jewish Studies teachers in a community Jewish day school regarding what constitutes success of a graduate, including the following research questions:

How do Jewish Studies teachers describe their understandings and perceptions as to what constitutes a successful graduate of a community Jewish day school?

Sub-questions:
- How do these understandings and perceptions affect the teachers’ goals in the classroom?
- How do teachers measure their own success in reference to these goals?

This literature review explores scholarly works from the last several decades related to the field of Jewish education and specifically to the field of Jewish day school education.

Introduction

Education has traditionally played an important role in Jewish life. Wertheimer (2005) says that education is not just a part of Jewish life, but is an essential element to modern Jewish living. Beginning of the 18th century and expanding rapidly in recent decades, Jewish day schools have played an integral role in that education for many. Bloomberg (2007) states that Jewish education occurs within the context of the Jewish world, and the Jewish day school is one of these educational venues. She explains that “it is important too that we understand how and in what ways learning is occurring not just within but across contexts, and that we remain aware of the subtle underlying nuances that operate there” (p. 283). She also adds that what students
require “are the skills and knowledge that will enable success in a world that is increasingly global and constantly evolving” (p. 284), allowing students to articulate the following:

- the relationship of Jewish education to a broader base of Jewish social and cultural issues, including Jewish Peoplehood, Israel engagement in the larger society, social justice, spirituality, faith development, philanthropy and other such matters that lie at the heart of Judaism in all its complexity and diversity. (p. 285)

Additionally, she states that “a commonly held assumption is that an overriding goal of Jewish Education is to impact values, beliefs, and practices in significant and enduring ways. It is generally accepted that Jewish educational experiences enhance a sense of Jewish identity” (p. 285). Bloomberg’s broad definition, including reference to Jewish identity, is only one of the many possible goals of Jewish education, however.

Chertok et al. (2007) provide a different list of goals for Jewish day schools. They see succeeding in the world of secular studies, having a social life on campus (in a post-day school institution), remaining involved in Jewish life, and experiencing a values-added education as the important outcomes of a day school education. Cooper and Kramer (2002) offer yet another different view, refocusing on the dual-identity aspect of Jewish education, stating that:

All Jewish schools work to offer students skills, concepts, specific content, and dispositions to live meaningful Jewish lives and to share in the best of American society. All schools work to define a place in the lives of children that is uniquely Jewish and special in a fast-paced, multi-purpose technological world where children are bombarded by conflicting values and forces for assimilation. Day schools serve to provide settings where being Jewish and being American are not seen as conflicting value statements but rather as mutually reinforcing. (pp. 498-499)
Bock (1977) succinctly states, “The purposes of Jewish schooling in America have always reflected a compromise between secular and sectarian goals” (p. 7), showing that the day school’s place, somewhere in between the Jewish world and the American secular world, provides challenges in determining goals.

Much has been written about these different possible goals and about how Jewish day schools can be successful in accomplishing these goals, giving very specific definitions of priorities such as Jewish continuity and Jewish identity. What is less clear, however, is what success in each of these areas looks like and what the definition of success is for different constituents of the Jewish day school world. In order to be as successful as possible, having a collective understanding of what success looks like in a graduate of a Jewish day school among all Jewish day school stakeholders, namely parents, teachers, students, and administrators, is important. Only then can they partner together to bring students to that level of success.

This literature review will begin by surveying the history and development of the Jewish day school, providing the context for the analysis of the various purposes and goals that have been associated with Jewish day schools such as promoting Jewish continuity, educating toward practice and identity, balancing secular academics, teaching Hebrew, and instilling values. Additionally, the role of the teacher and challenges to Jewish education will be addressed with the review ending with an examination of the additional research needed and the need for clear definition of success.

**History and Development of Jewish Day Schools**

The history and development of the Jewish day school movement is not well-documented, beginning sometime around the 18th century in England during the time of the aristocracy’s move to public schooling (JFS, 2002) and in Germany, connected to a shift to
assimilate Jewish and non-Jewish students together (Graetz, 1971). The movement later expanded in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Europe as families began to look for an option other than yeshivot (the traditional form of Jewish schooling where men learn Jewish text for the majority of the day) that would help them to maintain their Judaism and also to integrate them into secular life. Other factors such as required schooling also played a role in the growth of the movement. As the schools became more successful, they spread to other areas including the United States (The Jewish Museum, 2011). In the nineteenth century, a small network of Jewish day schools was in place prior to the popularity and widespread access of public schools (Schiff, 1966), but the schools had not yet achieved much success and acceptance among their target populations. Soloveitchik (1994) adds that until the middle of the twentieth century, it was assumed that "Jewishness was something almost innate, and no school was needed to inculcate it" (p. 91); during this time, most children learned about their Judaism from relatives at home and within their own neighborhoods. According to Soloveitchik, it was the inability of these families to play their traditional roles and the disintegration of these neighborhoods that necessitated the rise of the day school movement.

In the late twentieth century, Jewish day schools became more attractive to potential families due to the reasons suggested by Soloveitchik and also due to the following additional reasons:

(a) a rise in Jewish affluence, (b) the impact of the Holocaust on world Jewry in general and the American Jewish psyche in particular, (c) the birth of the modern State of Israel and its emergence on the international scene, (d) a heightened sense of cultural pride and identification, and (e) widespread, growing dissatisfaction with public education, once a near sacred icon of U.S. Jewish life (Cooper & Kramer, 2002, p. 499)
All of these factors led to growth in the Jewish day school world. At this time, Jewish educators did not think of the aims of Jewish education as simply being “to impart the ways and dictates of Judaism. Rather, Jewish education was conceptualized as a total program of socialization designed to prepare children for active and intelligent participation in American Jewish life” (Jacobs, 2009, p. 149). Maimonides School in Boston, founded in 1937 for many of these reasons, was the first modern Jewish day school (Maimonides School, 2012), with the first community Jewish day school opening in Philadelphia in 1946 (Kasoff, 1993). Today, Jewish day schools serve a variety of purposes, including preparing students to both celebrate their heritage and be productive members of American society; “the task of Jewish schools to make explicit the ways in which the prerogatives of American citizenship and the responsibilities of Jewish survival [can] be balanced effectively” (Jacobs, 2009, p. 150). A tension exists, however, among these various purposes of day schools as no clear goals seem to be consistent within the system today.

**Jewish Continuity and Peoplehood**

Since the Jews first immigrated to the United States, day schools have fluctuated between being a place for the many who made the choice to try to assimilate in order to best acclimate to their new home and those who wanted to remain true to their heritage. Pomson (2003) explains that most research dealing with schools focuses on students and teacher experiences, showing that schools “originally were devised to prepare children for life within particular religious, social or occupational communities, and, in more recent times, to ready them as productive citizens in the broader, industrialized society” (p. 104). Ackerman (1969) simply states that “the broad purpose of the Jewish school is to contribute to the continued existence of the Jews as an identifiable group” (p. 26). More recently, however, there has been a shift as “cultural continuity
rather than cultural adjustment is now the central problem of American Jewish life” (Bock, 1977, p. 8). Pomson adds that educational research has reflected this shift, being concerned with “core elements in the educational process that socialize young people to the values and wisdom of earlier generations and that help youths fulfill their potential” (Pomson, 2003, p. 104). Wolfson (2013) adds onto this idea, emphasizing the significance of peoplehood and stressing the value of communal relationships and prioritizing Jews’ feeling connected to other Jews as a way to maintain peoplehood, saying that peoplehood is a “worldwide phenomenon” (p. 69) that “all about relationships” (p. 2). The idea of Jewish continuity and educating students in the ways of Judaism in order to maintain the Jewish people is not a new concept, but it has experienced resurgence of late.

Bock (1977) explains that American Jewish parents expect Jewish day schools to teach their children about their cultural heritage, one that is no longer the heritage that is demonstrated at home or in their social groups. Only relatively recently has this task been put upon Jewish educators as, prior to the 1950’s, “Jewish educators and parents alike assumed that Jewish schooling simply enriched an indigenous cultural heritage. Jewish educators never claimed that their efforts would ensure cultural continuity” (p. 8). The bulk of Jewish education was occurring at home and only supplemented through schools. Today, schools have taken more of a lead in this area, and Bock adds that “Jewish schooling is often as important as Jewish home background, but both of these factors are only part of more complicated social processes” (p. 11) including competing goals.

Berkson (1920) remarked almost a century ago that the main function of Jewish schooling is to “transmit the culture of the ethnic group and thus enrich the life of the individual Jew and through him that of the total group” (p. 103), and his words are still relevant today. Even
schools that take on a non-traditional role within Jewish schooling share similar goals. Beit Rabban, for example, lists within its mission statement that it is committed to “intellectual openness regarding the diversity of belief and practice found within Judaism,” basing their studies on classical Jewish texts (Beit Rabban Day School, 2007). Ort schools, similarly, aims for the “advancement of Jewish and other people through training and education” (World ORT, 2012). Although ORT does not explicitly focus on only Jewish students, the idea of “Educating for Life” (World ORT, 2012) is consistent with other Jewish schools. Kardos (2010) expands, giving a description of the ideal Jewish day school setting:

At their best, Jewish schools celebrate Jewish peoplehood and the modern state of Israel, teaching students and instilling in graduates a connection to and love for Jews in North America, Israel, and around the world…Jewish day schools present the promise of bringing this intensive and immersive educational experience to Jews of all types and ideologies so that a literate and committed core can exist within all Jewish denominations. (p. 85)

Kardos’s emphasis on creating a committed core population requires the instillation of Jewish identity and maintaining Jewish practice.

**Jewish Practice, Learning, and Identity**

One of the main and leading reasons that families have been attracted to Jewish day school is that “there is evidence that attending Jewish day school is associated with greater likelihood of maintaining Jewish practices” such as marrying another Jew and preserving some form of Jewish life (Cohen, Milyavskaya, & Koestner, 2009, p. 351), though Himmelfarb (1980) shows that schooling has an interaction effect, having its greatest impact on those from highly religious homes. Others such as Kelman (1975), Bock (1976, 1984), Himmelfarb (1977, 1984),
Cohen (1988), Dashefsky and Lebson (2002), and Cohen and Kotler-Berkowitz (2004) have, indeed, shown that time spent dedicated to Jewish education can have tremendous effect on Jewish religious practice and identity, further cementing this notion. Bock (1977) adds that Jewish schooling fulfills a very specific role in the identification process, promoting “Jewish self-esteem” in the hopes that “those people who feel more Jewish – those who are more Jewishly self-identified – are also more likely to act in identifiably Jewish ways” (p. 12). Additionally, Hofman (1962) states that the goal of Jewish education is thought of as “a means to an end rather than as an end-in-itself. The end is a life lived in obedience to the divine will as expressed in the Torah. Education is the indispensable means to the realization of this goal” (p. 72). Although the exact impact Jewish schooling has on Jewish identity is debated, most scholars agree that it plays a significant role.

In previous generations, many Jews have relied on the observances and customs of the home and local community to encourage children to develop and maintain a Jewish identity, but in recent years, that has been determined to be not sufficient in order to accomplish the goal of instilling a strong Jewish identity in students (Cohen, Milyavskaya, & Koestner, 2009, p. 352). This desire to maintain the Jewish people and bring about a form of continuity has driven families to invest in the day school movement. While not the only goal of most day schools, some schools include Jewish identity building and textual skill development as priorities, making the choice to place significant emphasis on traditional Jewish studies such as the study of Torah and Talmud, “often at the expense of secular pursuits,” assuming that most of their graduates will continue on in other learning settings where secular studies are less important (Cooper & Kramer, 2002, p. 492). Beiler (1986) has even argued that there is evidence of the compartmentalization of Jewish subjects from general or worldly matters at all levels of the
curriculum in the modern Orthodox day school, placing a strong emphasis on Jewish skills and keeping the students from fully integrating into American society in order to more successfully accomplish the development and strengthening of Jewish identity.

However, even after establishing Jewish identity as a priority, not all agree on the specifics of measuring success in this area. Dushkin and Engelman (1959), Schiff (1966), Ackerman (1969), and Weinberger (1971) have all focused on achievement in Jewish studies on tests, noting that those who attend Jewish day schools score higher than those who do not. These studies attest to the “independent effects of Jewish schooling on religious behavior and attitudes or ‘Jewish identification’” (Himmelfarb, 1977, p. 117). Though, within these studies and in relation to other scholars, different elements and factors are considered in determining religious behavior.

Himmelfarb (1977) also studied students’ religious involvement, measuring different factors including:

a) **Devotional**—ritual observance

b) **Doctrinal-Experiential**—belief in basic tenets of the faith, and experience of a supernatural presence

c) **Associational**—participation in Jewish organizations

d) **Fraternal**—residence in a Jewish neighborhood and having mostly Jewish friends

e) **Parental**—child-rearing practices which encourage children to be involved in Jewish life

f) **Ideological**—attitudes in favor of support for the state of Israel

g) **Intellectual-Esthetic**—reading, studying, and accumulating books, art work, and music on Jewish topics
h) *Ethical-Moral*—charitable attitudes and behavior (p. 119)

Himmelfarb created definitions within each of these categories and felt that he could use these eight facets to measure the Jewish identity of students and determine the success of various educational programs.

Alternatively, Herman (1977) pointed out that "most studies of Jewish communities in the Diaspora ... are at best studies of Jewish *identification*" (p. 28) instead of studies pertaining to Jewish identity, as they are usually called. Himmelfarb (1977) adds that “very few studies deal with what being Jewish means to an individual in terms of self-definition” (p. 50). He adds the following:

There have been problems of definition, such as measuring identity rather than identification, or measuring the motivations behind, and the consequences of, religious acts and beliefs. And there have been problems of classification, which display (a) a lack of mutual exclusiveness, (b) a mixture of temporally unrelated phenomena, and (c) the inclusion of phenomena at different levels of abstraction. (Himmelfarb, 1975, p. 52)

His own criteria to be used when determining and measuring Jewish identity include:

a) Ritual behavior

b) Formal organizational participation

c) Informal social ties with other Jews (friends, neighbors, mates)

d) Attitudes toward Israel

e) Doctrinal belief

f) Some intellectual dimension (having, or seeking, knowledge)

g) Some measure of charity-giving. (Himmelfarb, 1977, p. 51)
He continues by saying that most researchers agree that “Jewish identification is a multi-dimensional phenomenon. Yet, there is little agreement as to how many dimensions there really are. Debate in the sociology of religion over the number of dimensions of religiosity stems more from conceptual than empirical ambiguities” (p. 51). There is not much consensus between scholars in determining the number of dimensions and defining each dimension in an attempt to measure Jewish identity.

Chertok et al. (2007) tracked Jewish involvement in college as a way to determine the impact of Jewish day school education. They determined the following:

In many ways college-age day school alumni look indistinguishable from their peers… Day school alumni also show no greater likelihood of running into social network problems in college than their peers from public or private schools… Regardless of what facet of Jewish campus life is considered, day school students stand out in their strong engagement with Judaism. (p. 45)

This study does not, however, list the specific elements used to determine Jewish engagement in determining the effect of day school education.

Others include an element of Jewish learning in their definitions of Jewish identity. Kardos (2010) states that, in the best cases, Jewish schools “provide a Jewish education that is intensive and immersive” (p. 84) and “teach sacred texts and modern thought in a way that reveres the past, informs the present, and guides the future” (p. 85), focusing on specific aspects of Jewish content or skill-related studies. Paley (1998) adds that learning has always been a priority for the Jewish community, nurtured through the Beit Midrash (traditional house of study). “The student who achieved stature for intellectual competence in the Beit Midrash commanded more respect than did his more athletic or financially secure counterparts” (p. 308),
showing the value placed on traditional Jewish study. Paley continues, however, by adding the question of “what constitutes ‘Jewish learning?’” (p. 308), showing that just as Jewish identity is an ambiguous term, so, too is the notion of Jewish learning. Paley (1998) outlines his vision for Jewish learning, stating that it should be based upon the following criteria:

a) *Talmud Torah*: school is a place for the business of learning
b) *Vahavta Ureacha Kamocha*: love and respect for the rights and feelings of others
c) *Al Tifrosh min Hatzibur*: do not separate yourself from the community
d) *Harachak Meshachene Rah*: keep far from a bad neighbor
e) *Bal Tash-Chit*: respect and responsibility for the environment and property
f) *Im Ein Ani Li Mi Li*: if I am not for myself, who am I?
g) *Derech Eretz*: consideration and respectful behavior toward others
h) *Aseh Lecha Rav*: make yourself a teacher
i) *Kneh Lecha Haver*: acquire for yourself a friend
j) *Dan et Kol Ha-ad Am Ukaf Z’Chut*: give people the benefit of the doubt (p. 309-314)

Additionally, he establishes the following best practices through which to accomplish Jewish learning:

a) Beit Midrash and collaborative learning
b) Hevruta study, essays, lectures, and collaborative learning
c) Tutors and mentors
d) Town meetings
e) Integrated curriculum
f) Mishna as a metaphor - giving students a specific intellectual approach to the world

Through using these set practices, Paley argues, in order to work towards the establishment of these specific learning criteria, Jewish schools will accomplish Jewish learning as a way to establish Jewish identity.

Charmé and Zelkowicz (2011) reflect on the lack of consensus, saying “such evaluations will always be relative to one set of prescriptive criteria or another. Whose blueprints for normative Jewish identity should be accepted and on what is their authority based?” (p. 164). They continue, however, by adding that since the late 1990’s a shift has occurred from the “pre-ordained inventories” to a “more fluid investigation into the diverse constructions of Jewishness that have emerged among American Jews” (p. 166). Jewish identity, they say, now “also includes the formation of a Jewish ethnic identity, which defines one’s relationship to a larger group, the Jewish people” (p. 173), adding that in order to best understand the formation and role of Jewish identity within the context of formal Jewish education, these tensions and contradictions need to be explored.

The lack of consensus among educators and scholars as to what constitutes Jewish identity adds to the challenge of those within a day school in how to teach in a way to encourage and foster this identity. Charmé and Zelkowicz (2011) state the following:

If teachers acknowledge that contemporary Jewish identity formation processes are contingent, provisional, variable, tentative, shifting, and changing, then what could possibly be the appropriate content to teach, and how should one teach it? What exactly constitutes an adequate understanding and experience of Jewish tradition? (p. 168)

Without a more specific definition, teachers will continue to struggle in this area.

Though many schools report them as goals and values, Jewish identity, Jewish practice, and Jewish learning are not easily defined or measured. Lukinsky (1978) noted that even though
Jewish day school provides a unique setting for “the development of a Jewishly integrated personality and community, it has not developed an authentic and qualitatively different theory of Jewish education, though it has repeated the same rhetoric about such theory for decades” (p. 10–11). Even within the field of Jewish identity, there is no consensus as to how to best attain this goal or to measure this aspect and gauge success of educational programs in relation to that goal.

**Secular Academics**

Due to a variety of factors such as the changing ethnic mix in public schools and the Jewish people’s communal pride following the Six-Day War, Jewish day schools have experienced an influx of students in recent decades (Mendelsson, 2009). Mendelsson continues that “the major concern of Jewish parents was [secular] academic achievement…Upon the introduction of the nonselective comprehensive schools, parents fled the non-denominational state system, preferring voluntary aided Jewish day schools” (p. 545). Secular academic studies have, thus, become an important factor and measure for some of success for Jewish day schools.

Kelman (1979) found that secular goals usually prevailed, and in their 2007 study, Chertok et al. included secular education as an important element of the Jewish day school, listing it a draw, a priority, and a cause for concern for parents and schools. They stated that “parents who consider day school for their children want to know that they are not shortchanging their children or restricting their options for higher education” (p. 47), showing that a strong secular studies program is important to the success of a Jewish day school in order for students to obtain admission to college after day school. Cooper and Kramer (2002) add that students are “expected to go on to various prestigious colleges” (p. 493) after day school, not remaining in a traditional Jewish learning situation. This represents a change in the thinking of Jewish education
as in previous decades, secular academic achievement was not always a priority due to the large numbers of students who continued their Jewish studies post-high school.

In general, Chertok et al. (2007) determined that students from Jewish day schools adjust to secular universities and colleges “with very little discernible difference in academic performance or social networking and a world of difference in Jewish living; undergraduates with a history of day school are evidence of the value of the day school choice” (p. 47). Additionally, they add that “there is much to celebrate in the successes of day school students, both in terms of the ways they are similar to and the ways they do better than their public and private school peers” (p. 46). Pomson (2001) adds that “curriculum integration continues to be at the center of the public literature that promotes Jewish day schools of every denominational variety” (p. 530), showing how academic achievement is a goal for these schools.

Chertok et al. (2007) note, however, that secular studies are not necessarily a strength of Jewish day schools, pointing out specific areas of weakness in secular academics and adding that “day schools may need to do more to address parental and student concerns that are supported by the current data” (p. 46) regarding the weak secular programs at many day schools. Gamoran (2008) suggests that Jewish day schools be held to the same academic standards of public schools, working to improve teaching, curriculum, and other aspects of student achievement. Gamoran adds, “if public schools are improving due to a new accountability regime, perhaps private schools must respond accordingly, even though they are not subject to the same regulations” (p. 61).

Secular academic studies continue to be a struggle for Jewish day schools. While many Jewish day schools place themselves to compete with other secular private schools in a given area though college counseling, personal attention, and other services, they are not always able to
compete academically. With less time devoted to secular studies in the school day and dueling priorities with Jewish Studies, day school students often receive a weaker secular education from Jewish day schools than from public schools or secular private schools. In many cases, however, these studies are a priority for parents and, therefore, a factor when determining the success of the institution.

**Hebrew**

Among the factors involved in a decision to send a student to a Jewish day school, Hebrew language and instruction in Hebrew language play a role. Parents, especially those of Israeli decent, enroll their children in the Jewish day schools in order to promote familiarity and literacy in Hebrew in an attempt to connect them with Israel culture, to traditional Jewish texts, or to other sources of Jewish identity. “Jewish education traditionally includes the study of *Ivrit* (the Hebrew word for “Hebrew”)” (Coates, 2001, p. 23). Avni (2012) adds that both students and teachers agree that Hebrew education is important to the instilling Jewish identity, though the study of Hebrew provides a variety of challenges due to the variance of fluency among students and the scarcity of the language in the modern world.

An added challenge is the lack of agreement as to the goals of a Hebrew program in school. Schachter (2010) raises questions such as what are the best ways to teach Hebrew, what are reasonable goals for a Hebrew program, and what really constitutes literacy for a student. Additionally, Hebrew Charter Schools that focus on Hebrew as a language and not on Hebrew as a gateway to Jewish text and Jewish identity, have begun to attract attention of parents and funders who would otherwise be drawn to the Jewish day school (Elkin, 2010). Regardless of denomination, most Jewish day schools include Hebrew studies in the curriculum either as a stand-alone subject or integrated in with other Judaic courses. Additionally, some schools offer
an *Ivrit b’Ivrit* curriculum, fully integrating Hebrew language in with students’ studies. Although the degree to which Hebrew language plays a role and purpose in the school varies from school to school, almost every day school features some sort of program, aimed at bringing the language to the students.

**Values and Autonomy**

Beyond fostering Jewish identity and facilitating academic achievement, Jewish day schools are faced with many other roles, providing a variety of different measures of success. Jewish day schools are often tasked with instilling global values and morals into students. Principles such as “care for the environment, self-sufficiency, independence, and justice” (Coates, 2001, p. 22) are often encouraged. According to Reeve (2002), schools and teachers play a vital role in the successful internalization of important values in youth. Teachers see students for a significant part of the day and often have great influence.

Finally, Jewish day schools are responsible for encouraging and promoting the autonomy of their students, allowing them to make decisions regarding their Judaism and other issues independently. According to Deci and Ryan (1985, 2000), self-determination gives insight as to how students choose different aspects of their self-identity, and this is especially relevant when thinking about Jewish identity and other choices made during school years. According to Cohen, Milyavskaya, and Koestner (2009), a day school needs to provide the students with the following needs:

- need for autonomy (the sense that one controls one’s own choices and fully endorses one’s actions in life);
- the need for competence (the sense that one can affect one’s own life through one’s actions);
- and the need for relatedness (the desire to feel connected to other human beings) (p. 352)
They add that this it is especially important that students receive “perceived parental autonomy support” during adolescence as it is strongly related to “the integration of Jewish identity” (Cohen, Milyavskaya, & Koestner, 2009, p. 360), emphasizing the role of the school and the teacher in helping to facilitate identity and especially in connection to Judaism during a time when parents should be more remote in their role.

Grolnick, Deci, and Ryan (1997) add that while parents, teachers, and schools can teach values and principles to students, it is very important that these students “‘own’ those values and attitudes. . . . Socializing agents such as parents and teachers face the important challenge of how to. . . . support a child’s natural tendency to internalize cultural values, attitudes, and behaviors” (p. 135). Additionally, previous research based on self-determination theory indicates that the way one internalizes religious beliefs and values can greatly impact how religious practice influences one’s well-being (Ryan, Rigby, & King, 1993). Schools, therefore, include fostering a child’s autonomy and decision making skills among their priorities, especially in relation to Jewish identity.

**The Role of the Teacher**

While parents have a variety of reasons for sending their children to Jewish day schools, teachers, especially Jewish Studies teachers, have a variety of reasons for choosing to teach as Jewish day schools, often affecting their goals in the classroom. Salomon (2010) found that teachers’ religion plays an important role in their decision to become teachers in a Jewish day school, with those more closely connected to Judaism choosing to enter the profession. Serow, Eaker, and Forrest (1994) determined that due to the emphasis on teacher's obligation to affect observable change in pupils, teachers were more likely to be those who wanted to engage with students in playing an active role in promoting standards for both academic and personal
development. Younger, Brindley, Pedder, and Hagger (2004), found that potential teachers construct their career in terms of intellectual challenge and commitment to transforming opportunities for children.

Additionally, the teachers bring a unique content knowledge that continues to develop. Coll (2007) shows that religious teachers’ identities are deeply ingrained in their content knowledge and comfort level regarding the religious subjects they are expected to teach, with identity and self-awareness being related. Friedman (1984) expresses that Jewish Studies teachers continue to develop their own content knowledge while teaching, stating that “Jewish content is usually learned in the act of teaching, a kind of continuing education effect” (pp. 32-33).

Furthermore, they each bring their own goals for the students and have a lasting impact on the students. Butler (2012) shared that teaching is an interpersonal endeavor, not just personal endeavor, and that teachers’ goals are closely related to teachers’ roles in the classroom and their approach to instruction. Charmé and Zelkowicz (2011) add that “new educational approaches might explore the educational value of these tensions and contradictions as a central and creative task of being a Jew in the midst of a broader cultural world” (p. 167). With so many possible goals for which to aim, teachers are in a unique position as they are, in the end, the ones actually teaching towards the selected goals.

Kash (2012) also explains that teachers play an important role in Jewish education because a student’s satisfaction with his Jewish education and the experience he receives while obtaining that education will shape the future with respect to his identity; the more positive experience he has, the more likely he is to have a strong Jewish identity. Wolfson (2013) adds that, in the field of Jewish education and involvement, “it’s all about relationships” (p. 2),
stressing the impact that connections between two individuals, such as a student and teacher, can have on their connection to Judaism.

**Challenges to Jewish Day Schools**

**The need for clear definition.** Bloomberg (2007) states that “the challenge for our time is to embrace change and stimulate creative Jewish engagement with the contemporary world” (p. 284). While various Jewish educational institutions have posited the best way to do that, there is no consistency in defining success or how to accurately measure success. Bloomberg continues, adding “many hard questions remain about the purposes and scope of Jewish education, and the potential impact of learning on Jewish identity and engagement in Jewish communal life” (p. 284), again stating the challenges faced by Jewish education today.

Wertheimer (1999) states that the various goals within the field cause confusion, and Bryfman (2011) points to a similar need regarding addressing what success looks like in Jewish education. Pekarsky (2008) says that there is a need to establish clear visions to guide institutions through the challenges that are encountered, providing the needed resources to move forward in Jewish education. Wertheimer (2009) echoes the need in adding that clearly establishing goals and evaluating along those goals are essential for educational efforts to be successful. Bloomberg (2007) adds that “we must also consider that there are vast differences in what we understand as the desired outcomes of Jewish education, and acknowledge that there are often conflicting forces involved” (p. 285). These conflicts include the role of assimilation and preparing students for the secular world versus Jewish continuity and Jewish identity. Additionally, even within the fields of Jewish continuity and Jewish identity, there is little agreement as to what these terms mean and how they can best be attained. By recognizing and embracing these differences and tensions, Jewish education can move forward.
Various scholars have presented their opinions based on different findings as to the purpose of a Jewish education. Ruskay (1999) identified the greatest challenge of today’s Jewish community as living as unengaged Jews, naming Jewish education as a key player in the prevention of this situation. Cohen, Milyavskaya, and Koestner (2009) believe that “Jewish schools should strive to provide students with autonomy supportive environments to encourage greater internalization of Jewish values” (p. 361). Kardos (2010) adds onto this idea, stating that today’s youth need Jewish education that:

- enables them to think about themselves, their people, and their G-d in a way that is uniquely and beautifully Jewish. They need an education that enables them to live the simple rhythms of their day and their year in a way that is, again, inimitably and magnificently Jewish. They need a Jewish education that is substantive and relevant to their modern lives. (p. 84)

Kardos explains that students should be guided by the ancient, traditional texts and illuminated by the history of the Jewish people, working towards securing “the continuity of our people so that we may continue to create our story and tell it to the world, and so that we can enrich the world through our participation” (p. 84). The aim of Jewish education, Kardos states, is to strive for the ideal of being connected to Jews all over the world, regardless of differences. Dershowitz (1997), meanwhile, believes that since "Jewish learning must compete with other learning in the marketplace of ideas...We must take advantage of every Jewish talent, experience, successes, and resource to ensure Jewish continuity and growth" (p. 34). Regardless of the definition of Jewish education and the determination of its priorities, some specific, definable, and consistent measure of success is needed.
**Additional research needed.** Although research in the field of Jewish education has grown significantly in recent decades, gaps still exist in a variety of areas including goals and the definition of success in each of these areas, leaving a need for additional research. As Bloomberg (2007) states the following:

The quantity and quality of substantive research in all aspects of Jewish education has increased significantly, with every arena and domain capturing the attention of serious academics and practitioners…While a body of knowledge has certainly developed…many critical questions still exist, and ongoing systematic research and evaluation efforts are necessary. (p. 281)

Bloomberg adds that in addition to needing more research in order to “provide deeper insights into the different types of Jewish learning activities that are currently available, there is a lack of information regarding the instructional philosophies and curricula that support these activities and the long-term impacts on learners and communities” (p. 281). In order to accurately determine success of programs, this type of research is needed in the field of Jewish education, specifically related to day schools.

Another suggestion made by Bloomberg (2007) is to make use of and incorporate research and theory from “secular education as a means to inform Jewish educational research and practice” (p. 282). As the research concerning secular education is much vaster and more comprehensive, Jewish day schools could benefit from familiarizing themselves with this research and incorporating it into the field of Jewish education. Additionally, looking at research that has been undertaken in parochial and denominational schools of other faiths could be beneficial to the study of Jewish day schools. Bloomberg (2007) adds that “many of those who are researching issues in Jewish education acknowledge the value of incorporating theoretical
and conceptual models that have been developed in other arenas” (p. 282), further emphasizing the relevance of this research to the field. According to Bloomberg (2007), however, just like it currently would be beneficial to apply the best lessons from educational research to Jewish education, “it is possible to imagine a time when the relationship would become reciprocal, with practices from the Jewish education world informing other fields within general education” (p. 283). Chevruta (partner) study, traditional to Jewish learning, has already made its way into secular learning to do proven results from the collaboration (Moskowitz, 2003). There is a chance that this will continue, and the field of Jewish education will be comprehensive enough to enhance the work done in secular fields.

As more and more programs are developed, serious evaluation efforts should be undertaken to determine the effectiveness and success of the various programs. Fisher (2010) describes several different parameters by which to evaluate programs:

1. the relevance index, referring to an evaluation of predefined objectives;
2. the efficiency index, referring to the fiscal efficiency of the program;
3. the effectiveness index evaluating the attainment of the program’s objectives;
4. the impact index gauging the effect on the consumers, for whom the program is undertaken;
5. the final parameter is the program’s sustainability index (p. 1).

By defining goals and means of determining success and then following a specific protocol, such as Fisher’s, for evaluating success, additional research can continue to shed light on the effects of various Jewish educational programs, including Jewish day schools, related to success.

Conclusion

For Jewish day schools, like most other organizations, working towards a clear, defined goal is an important element of achieving success. After reviewing the current literature on the
definition and determination of success in the Jewish day school, however, it is clear that this is an area in need of additional research. Although much has been written about how to make Jewish education more successful and what types of education are most successful, the definition of success and the measures of success are largely inconsistent and unexplored. Woocher (1992) explains:

If Jewish education is vague, unfocused and often over-ambitious in its goals, it is primarily because those concerned – parents, professionals, institutional leaders, religious authorities – can rarely agree on what is important to achieve. What do we want our educational efforts to produce?...Without consensually validated goals education becomes a medium of mixed messages, and nothing gets accomplished. (p. 65)

Bloomberg (2007) states that there needs to be more thought in general about:

the broader purposes of education and the relevance of such purposes vis-à-vis educational planning and practice. Unlike public education where student outcomes are legislated, Jewish education does not have clear-cut student outcomes. But every Jewish educator does need to be aware of what she or he is aspiring to, and what success will look like. (p. 285)

Having a clear idea of what success will be helps to guide Jewish education in day schools and elsewhere.

Additionally, while the parent’s perspective is addressed in research, exploring the motives and goals for sending children to a Jewish day school, the research pertaining to the teacher perspective is lacking, leaving a gap in relation to a vital stakeholder, the person most directly responsible for the education in the classroom. Furthermore, the research does not reflect a comparison between the student’s, teacher’s, parent’s, and administrator’s view of success.
Ben-Avie and Kress (2008) show the importance of interconnected systems of developmental ecologies with the experience of teachers, students, and administrators being intertwined, not parallel, making research into the different perspectives that much more important. Gaining admission to college, enhancing moral values and character traits, developing a strong Jewish identity, fostering a connection to Israel, obtaining text skills, encouraging marriage within the faith, acquiring Hebrew language skills, contribution to Jewish peoplehood, and achieving fluency in prayer are a few of the reasons for students’ attending Jewish day schools, but Jewish day schools as a whole have yet to determine which are the most important priorities when measuring the success of a Jewish day school and what exactly success may look like. Only through having a clear understanding of how the stakeholders, namely teachers, view success in the Jewish day school can that success actually be achieved.
Chapter Three: Methods

Overview

The specific goals of the Jewish day school, especially the community Jewish day school, today have grown to be ambiguous (Woocher, 1992). Among the research, a clear gap exists in exploring the perspectives of the teacher as to what constitutes a successful day school graduate. Jewish Studies teachers play a unique role in the Jewish day school as many are inspired by their own religious beliefs, and they enter the field hoping to instill that inspiration into the students (Salomon, 2010). By examining the definition of a successful day school graduate from the Jewish Studies teacher’s perspective, day schools may be able to strengthen their visions and work towards achieving success according to that vision. The purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions of Jewish Studies teachers regarding what constitutes success of a graduate, using the following research questions:

How do Jewish Studies teachers describe their understandings and perceptions as to what constitutes a successful graduate of a community Jewish day school?

Sub-questions:

- How do these understandings and perceptions affect the teachers’ goals in the classroom?
- How do teachers measure their own success in reference to these goals?

The research was completed using the Interpretive Paradigm. As Burrell and Morgan (1979) state:

The interpretive paradigm is informed by a concern to understand the world as it is, to understand the fundamental nature of the social world at the level of subjective experience. It seeks explanation within the realm of individual consciousness and
subjectivity, within the frame of reference of the participant as opposed to the observer of action. (p. 28)

They go on to explain that “Social reality, insofar as it is recognised [sic] to have any existence outside the consciousness of any single individual, is regarded as being little more than a network of assumptions” (p. 28). This paradigm relates to the completed study as it intended to explore the subjective perceptions of teachers and their assumptions as to what constitutes success. It is the opinion of the researcher that the views regarding Jewish education are subjective, varying from person to person, so obtaining objective truth in the field is not possible.

Additionally, in-line with the Interpretative Paradigm, the researcher acknowledges her own, personal attachment to the topic and bias that she brings to the research. By recognizing and valuing truth as subjective, the researcher understands that her own positionality factors into her role as researcher and the interactions that she has with participants. As such, the role of researcher was considered throughout the methodology.

The purpose of this chapter is to give an overview of the completed study, including the research design, research tradition, and research procedures.

Research Design

Aligned with the Interpretive Paradigm, the research follows a qualitative methodology, seeking to explore the spectrum of perspectives of the participants, rather than to reach a consensus on ultimate truth (Creswell, 2012). Through the use of qualitative design, the participants were able to express their own opinions regarding what constitutes success in a Jewish day school graduate, permitting for diverse data that is reflective of the variety of views held in the field.
Research Tradition

The research study follows the Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach, aimed at exploring and describing the “meaning for several individuals of the lived experiences” (Creswell, 2007, p. 57) of being Jewish day school teachers. By using IPA, the researcher employed phenomenology that is “concerned with exploring experience in its own terms” (Smith et al., 2012, p. 1), focusing on the experiences and perceptions regarding success of a Jewish day school graduate.

IPA, as a research approach, was established initially by Jonathan Smith in 1996 in order to create a qualitative approach for psychology and for those in other fields who are interested in psychological questions (Smith et al., 2012), and it integrates elements from phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography.

Phenomenology. Smith et al. (2012) describe phenomenology as a “philosophical approach to the study of experience,” focusing on that which is important and which constitutes “our lived world” (p. 11). Based on the writings of Edmund Husserl, IPA suggests that experiences should be examined as they occur, on their own terms, rather than attempting to fit them into any pre-existing system (Smith et al., 2012). In order to do so, Husserl (1982) advises stepping outside of everyday experiences and disengaging from them in order to fully examine those experiences. Additionally, Husserl (1982) states that, in order to fully and fairly analyze any experience, all fore-knowledge must be “bracketed” in order to focus on the perceptions; additionally, Husserl emphasizes the process of reflection as a means of processing experiences. Also related to phenomenology, Heidegger (1962) says that people are “thrown into” a world of objects and people, and that perspective is always relational. Sartre (1956), echoes this idea and expands upon it, stressing the developmental process of human beings. Finally, Merleau-Ponty
(1962) adds to phenomenology that the physical body, imbedded in a world of objects, shapes how one knows and experiences the world.

**Hermeneutics.** Smith et al. (2012) define hermeneutics as “the theory of interpretation” (p. 21) which was originally established in reference to interpretation on Biblical texts and later expanded to a wider range. Hermeneutics is an essential element of IPA because the approach “is an interpretive endeavor and is therefore informed by hermeneutics” (Smith et al., 2012, p. 3). Concerned with the methods and purposes of interpretation and focusing on context, hermeneutics describes the accounts of participants as reflecting their attempts “to make sense of their experience” (Smith et al., 2012, p. 3). Additionally, Schleiermacher (1998) explains that, through hermeneutics, an analyst can offer perspective that the author is not able to offer. Heidegger (1962) adds that hermeneutics and phenomenology work together as meanings can be either visible or hidden, and phenomenology is involved with examining the hidden as it is uncovered, shifting data according to a hermeneutical circle. According to hermeneutics, then, the researcher is in a unique perspective in terms of understanding and analyzing the experiences of others in a way that those who actually undergo the experiences cannot.

**Idiography.** Smith et al. (2012) describe idiography as being “concerned with the particular” (p. 29). Using IPA, research focuses on detail and depth, using small samples as the approach, really focusing on how particular phenomena are understood from the perspective “of particular people, in a particular context” (Smith et al., 2012, p. 29). As such, “participants are selected on the basis that they can grant us access to a particular perspective on the phenomena under study. That is, they ‘represent’ a perspective, rather than a population” (Smith et al., 2012, p. 49). As such, studies using IPA use a relatively small sample size in order to really focus on the details of the perspectives and experiences.
Through the use of IPA, this study focuses on the experiences and perceptions of a small number of participants, intensely focusing on their individual accounts of their shared phenomenon as a way to explore their views as they relate to success of a Jewish day school graduate. IPA allowed for the researcher to employ hermeneutics in a way that the participants could not in order to draw themes and conclusions, allowing for deeper meaning to be attained.

**Research Procedures**

**Participants.** Interpretive Phenomenological Analyses are conducted “on relatively small sample sizes, and the aim is to find a reasonably homogenous sample, so that, within the sample, we can examine convergence and divergence in some detail” (Smith et al., 2012, p. 3). As such, the population that was studied during the course of this research was middle school and high school Jewish Studies teachers at a large east-coast community Jewish day school who had completed at least two full years of teaching at that community Jewish day school, henceforth referred to as East-Coast Jewish Day School (ECJDS). Participants were specified to be past their second year of teaching in order to allow them time to become familiar with a community Jewish day school and to consider their goals as teachers. Additionally, participants were specified to be middle school and high school teachers as part of the IPA approach detailing that all of the participants share a unique experience. At ECJDS, the middle school and high school is housed in one building with teachers usually teaching a mixture of age groups, but the elementary school is on a separate campus, leading to the teachers at the two campuses having different experiences. The sampling consisted of purposive sampling, inviting specific teachers who met the required criteria of being middle and high school Jewish Studies teachers at ECJDS in at least their third year of teaching at the community day school and then included snowball sampling, which “identifies cases of interest from people who know what cases are information
rich” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 28), inviting others for whom the research questions will be meaningful to participate (Smith et al., 2012). In line with IPA, the sample included four participants as IPA focuses on a small sample size.

**Recruitment and access.** Recruitment of research participants occurred through approaching individuals at the researcher’s place of employment, a large east-coast community Jewish day school (ECJDS) and locating additional participants at the school throw a snowball strategy. In order to access teachers at the researcher’s place of employment, permission was sought from the Head of School and Assistant Head of School (see Appendix A). A letter was sent directly to potential participants (Appendix B), and an incentive was offered in the form of disclosure of findings to participants and a $15 gift card to Target. All middle or high school teachers of Judaic Studies in at least their third year of teaching who taught at the community Jewish day school at the time the study was conducted were considered as possible participants, as long as they were available for interviews with the researcher at a mutually convenient time and place. Informed consent was required from all participants before their participation (see Appendix C).

In order to obtain IRB approval, the researcher successfully completed the NIH’s online course on Protecting Human Research Participants, and all relevant precautions were taken. The researcher then submitted a proposal for IRB approval prior to conducting any research or recruitment.

**Data collection.** Aligned with Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), the primary source of data collection was in-depth, semi-structured interviews of participants. “A qualitative interview is often described as ‘a conversation with a purpose’” (Smith et al., p. 57), and the semi-structured interviews focused on the participant’s talking while the researcher
listened, allowing for participants to tell “their own stories, in their own words” (Smith et al., 2012, p. 57) while still gathering information pertinent to the research questions. These interviews were conducted at a mutually convenient time and location, generally within the school building. When it was not possible to physically interview a participant, follow-ups were conducted using Skype or Google Hangout as the participants were comfortable with this technology. Regardless, the location of any interview was private in order to allow for the participants to express themselves without hesitation. Prior to the interview itself, the researcher made contact with the participants in order to answer any preliminary questions and to help build rapport with the participants. The researcher explained the study to participants when recruiting participants and again prior to the interview, allowing for sufficient time and opportunity for questions.

Each interview consisted of roughly four background questions in order to continue to build rapport and eight open-ended questions designed to allow the participants to express themselves fully, in an unobstructed manner. The questions followed the suggestions of Smith et al. (2012) who describe IPA interviews as “in-depth,” and the questions for this study were developed in order to trigger the participants’ own understandings and perceptions related to the research questions and to help them verbalize them. The interview questions were aimed at approaching the research questions in a “sideways” manner instead of directly (Smith et al., 2012, p. 58). Additionally, probes and follow-up questions were added as needed. In-line with IPA, however, once the researcher set the tone for the interview and introduced the subject, the researcher was prepared to let the participants take control of the interviews, allowing them to comfortably tell their own stories. As such, in order to ensure that the interviews remained participant-driven, although the researcher planned specific follow-up probes if participants
mentioned specific terms or subjects, the researcher did not specifically ask the participants about these specific terms or subjects unless the teacher participant mentioned them first. Each interview was planned to last approximately 60-75 minutes (see Appendix D), but the researcher was flexible with this timing, allowing for sufficient time for the participants’ perspectives to be expressed and explained, even going into a second interview or follow-up interview when needed.

All data was collected by the researcher, and data was collected during the interview through notes and audio recording of the interview. The recordings were completed on computer and saved to hard drive for transcription.

Data storage. All data was stored in a password-protected computer, and all references to individual participants made use of pseudonyms in the place of true names. Confidentiality was ensured through the use of pseudonyms and the withholding of identifying demographic information. When the data was printed into hard copy, that data was stored in a locked drawer in the researcher’s home office. Following the defense of the dissertation, all hard copies of data will be shredded and destroyed, and the encrypted digital data will also be destroyed. The participant informed consent forms will be kept, as required, for three years and then destroyed.

Data Analysis

After the collection of data was complete, the interviews were transcribed by the researcher for analysis. As per Smith et al. (2012), IPA does not dictate one specific methodology for analysis, but the researcher used several of the suggested methodologies. As a first step, “transcripts of interviews are analyzed case by case through systematic, qualitative analysis” (p. 4), so the data analysis was carried out by conducting multiple unstructured readings and interpretations of the raw data, with each transcript being analyzed individually. As
a next step, the primary mode of analysis was coding in order to determine key themes and then to cluster the themes. Tables were then created for each participant, showing the themes, and then an additional table was created in order to show the themes of the participants as a group. First Cycle coding methods In Vivo Coding and Process Coding were used in order to look closely at the data and begin to determine themes. Through the use of In Vivo Coding, the researcher used exact words from the participant to determine codes, and through Process Coding, the researcher focused on the actions and thoughts of the participant. By using these two coding methods, the researcher was able to directly and thoroughly analyze the participants’ words for themes. Second Cycle Coding method Axial Coding was then used to break down the data and fully analyze for themes. Saldaña (2009) states that the goal of Second Cycle Coding is “to develop a sense of categorical, thematic, conceptual, and/or theoretical organization” (p. 149) based on First Cycle Codes. By using Axial Coding, the researcher was able to “strategically reassemble data that were ‘split’ or ‘fractured’ during the Initial Coding process” (Saldaña, 2009, p. 159) in order to determine overarching themes. Coding and analysis were completed by hand, using Microsoft Office Suite products for organization.

Throughout the data analysis process, the researcher kept a “reflexive journal,” (Guba & Lincoln, 1982, p. 248), enhancing the analysis process through analytic memos and notes of clarification. The researcher recorded any relevant observations, concerns, or reflections as well as any notes for further investigation or other follow-up.

**Trustworthiness**

In order to maintain trustworthiness of the study, several steps were taken. The first step taken was clarifying researcher bias. Through the Positionality Statement (see Chapter 1 – Positionality Statement), the researcher stated and acknowledged her bias and the role that it
would play in the research. Member checking was another step taken to maintain trustworthiness (Creswell, 2012). After the researcher transcribed the interviews, the transcripts were each sent to the participants to review and for any feedback, and once the analysis was completed, the participants were asked to review the data and analysis to ensure that it was aligned with the opinions they hold and were trying to express. Additionally, prolonged engagement was in effect as the researcher had spent three years working in this community Jewish day school, sufficient time to come to an understanding of the culture and phenomenon and to become familiar with the participants. However, in order to ensure that the researcher’s assumed knowledge did not affect the findings and analysis, the researcher employed a peer reviewer in order to ensure that bias was avoided and the findings were based in the data.

**External validity.** Considering external validity, firstly, interaction of selection and treatment were not an issue for this study as the researcher followed the strategy to “make participation in the experiment as convenient as possible” (Creswell, 2012, p. 306) by scheduling the interviews at a convenient time and location. Secondly, interaction of setting and treatment was taken into consideration by realizing that community Jewish day schools are unique settings, and the findings may not be transferable to other denominational schools or secular schools or even community schools outside of the one at which the participants are employed. Because of the focus on Jewish Studies teachers, this may limit the ability to apply findings beyond this group of teachers. Additionally, due to the focus on teachers at community day schools, the findings may not be applicable to other educational institutions. Finally, considering interaction of history and treatment, the researcher was cognizant of the time of the study relative to the history of Jewish day schools and the changes that occur over time that relate to the goals and needs of the schools.
**Internal validity.** Because the study did not involve treatment, but rather a single interview with possibility of follow up questions and member checks, threats to internal validity were limited. Creswell (2012) lists possible threats to internal validity. One of the possible threats related to participants is that of selection or “people factors” (p. 304). Although some participants may have been more receptive to the study questions, the means of sampling helped to address this threat.

**Interview questions.** In order to ensure that the interview questions were easily understandable and were not prone to misinterpretation, the researcher tested the questions on a peer before using them for the actual study. Additionally, as the interviews were in-person, the researcher was able to clarify any points when the questions still needed additional explanation.

**Protection of Human Subjects**

As per the guidelines of the Protecting Human Research Participants (NIH, 2011), the completed research study reflected the necessary ethical considerations. Respect for persons, beneficence, and justice were all essential for the research.

The need to protect human subjects was considered throughout the research design and execution. Throughout the research process, various means were taken in order to ensure confidentiality. During the process of gathering data, only the researcher was privy to the original data, and the names of the participants were changed prior to sharing the findings in order to assure that the identities of the participants remained confidential during the process of data collection and analysis. All data was stored in encrypted files in a password-protected computer and was destroyed at the conclusion of the study. There were no known significant risks involved in the study, limiting the need for additional measures.
Voluntariness, comprehension, and disclosure were all considered when seeking informed consent in order for the participants to participate in the research. In order to ensure that participation was fully voluntary, as described in the Participant Informed Consent Form (Appendix C), participants were given the option to remove themselves from the study at any time, without repercussions. All information presented to the participants prior to and during the study was written in a clear, concise manner in order to ensure a desired level of comprehension. Additionally, the participants had the opportunity to ask any clarifying questions at any point. Participants were also provided with full disclosure regarding information about the purpose of the study, potential benefits and risks, and a discussion of the confidentiality procedures, as reflected in the Informed Consent Form (Appendix C) and the Interview Protocol (Appendix D). Finally, the participants signed a consent form (Appendix C).

In order to obtain IRB approval, the researcher completed the required steps as outlined by Northeastern University, including the completion of the NIH’s Protecting Human Research Participants course and submission of all materials. The researcher made no contact with participants, and no data was collected until IRB approval was obtained in written form.

Chapter Summary

This study explored the perceptions of Jewish Studies teachers as to what constitutes success and how that success is manifested in community Jewish day school graduates. Through the use of the qualitative method of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis, a small number of participants were asked to share their perceptions and experiences in semi-structured interviews, allowing for the themes to naturally emerge from the data. Recognizing the subjective nature of truth, through the Interpretive Paradigm, as well as the positionality of the researcher, this study did not aim to find an absolute answer to the research questions, seeking, rather, to explore
teacher perceptions in order better align the goals of various stakeholders, resulting in more consistent, effective education for students.
Chapter Four: Summary of Findings

Introduction

Community Jewish day schools find themselves in a unique position as they are not tied to a specific denomination, and, therefore, have the opportunity and challenge to establish their own vision, goals, and measures of success (Pomson, 2008). Because of this situation, community day schools are sometimes left without specific direction, looking to their various stakeholders for input and guidance. While multiple studies have been conducted in order to explore the perspective of administration and parents (Cohen & Kelner, 2007; Kapel, 1971; Kelman, 1979; Pomson, 2003; Pomson & Schnoor, 2008), studies related to the teacher’s perspective are lacking. Because of this dearth of research, this qualitative Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) study was conducted in order to better understand the experiences and perceptions of Jewish Studies teachers at community Jewish day schools as they relate to what constitutes a successful Jewish day school graduate. Through purposive sampling, a small group of teachers from East Coast Jewish Day School (ECJDS) participated in the interview process, sharing their perspectives with the researcher. Smith et al. (2012) state, ““It is possible to move to more general claims with IPA but this should only be after the potential of the case has been realized” (p. 3). As such although each teacher in any day school is unique, and this study focuses upon the perceptions and understandings of specific participants who all have a shared experience in common, the information gained from the participants’ perceptions can lead to greater understanding of other similar community Jewish day school teachers’ perceptions of a successful graduate and help schools towards achieving that success for their graduates. The purpose of this chapter is to give an overview of the data collection procedures and results related to the participants.
Research Questions

The following research questions guided this qualitative Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis study:

How do Jewish Studies teachers describe their understandings and perceptions as to what constitutes a successful graduate of a community Jewish day school?

Sub-questions:
- How do these understandings and perceptions affect the teachers’ goals in the classroom?
- How do teachers measure their own success in reference to these goals?

Data Collection and Results

Recruitment of participants and interview protocol. East Coast Jewish Day School (ECJDS) is one of the larger Jewish day schools in North America, employing roughly 10 teachers in its middle and high school Jewish Studies department with another five teachers in the Jewish History department, seven teachers in the Hebrew department, and around 65 additional employees who teach in the secular subjects or work as guidance counselors or administrators. At the time that this study was conducted, these teachers had been teaching for ECJDS for anywhere between one and 42 school years. For this study, through purposive sampling, specific teachers in the Jewish Studies department at ECJDS were approached by the researcher and introduced to the study. The selected teachers were chosen based on the researcher’s desire to have a mix of experience, both in terms of number of years at the school and actual experiences, and background, both in terms of Judaic affiliation and nationality. Additionally, the researcher included a mixture of male and female participants.
During the introduction to the study, both in person and through an introductory letter (Appendix B), the researcher explained the background and purpose of the study, answering any questions the potential participants had. Each of the four participants initially approached by the researcher expressed interest in participating in the study, so the researcher scheduled individual interviews with each participant at mutually convenient times, based on the participants’ schedules. The researcher conducted these interviews at the end of the school year and into early summer (June and July, 2013). As convenient for the participants, three of the four interviews were conducted in empty classrooms at ECJDS, and the fourth interview took place at the participant’s house. Brief follow-up interviews took place, as needed with two of the participants, using Skype and/or Google Hangout. Because of the researcher’s success in recruiting participants through purposive sampling, snowball sampling was not required.

The study involved a total of four participants. Each interview began with an overview and description of the study. Participants understood all of the relevant details of the study, and they each read and signed the Participant Informed Consent form (Appendix C). Participants were assigned pseudonyms (Daniel, Joseph, Orit, and Rebecca), corresponding to their genders, in order to protect anonymity during the study. Each interview was informal and lasted between 45 and 65 minutes. After receiving permission from the participant, the audio was recorded using the researcher’s computer.

**Description of participants.** The study participants included Orit, Rebecca, Daniel, and Joseph, and each shared information about their personal beliefs and backgrounds that have affected who they are as people and as teachers.

*Daniel.* Daniel focuses much of his own personal education on the study of traditional Jewish texts in their original Hebrew or Aramaic and is deeply connected to the modern State of
Israel, including its language and culture. In the classroom, he aims to connect Israel and the traditional texts to the students’ interests as a way of making the material interesting and relevant for them. Additionally, Daniel views student success as an individualized measure, believing in the value of personal success and different goals for different students.

Joseph. Joseph concerns himself with the development of the student as a whole, emphasizing values such as patriotism, citizenship, and strong self-identity. He also encourages his students to think for themselves, regardless of the subject material, and he aims to help the students to develop in such a way that they thrive in the greater world, infusing their Judaism in with the rest of their lives. He makes an effort to integrate his own life into the lives of the students and the school, organizing and attending many extra-curricular activities, and spending time with students and their families outside of the classroom. Additionally, Joseph’s desire to foster lifelong learners among his students is modeled in his own ongoing learning.

Orit. Orit views teaching as a very personal endeavor, focusing on her own connections and relationships with students and measuring her own success through these connections. For Orit, the students are the focus of the classroom, and her connections with them are essential for engaging them in the material, using these connections and relationships as a mechanism to overcome the challenges of making the text relevant. Orit strongly objects to having to give students grades in Judaic Studies classes, viewing the classes as identity and soul shaping, rather than academic.

Rebecca. Rebecca is a reflective practitioner, making very purposeful and intentional decisions about her teaching. Looking at the students’ education as both a teacher and a mother, she emphasizes the need for students to make decisions from a knowledge-base and place of understanding. She places a high value on community and formal affiliation to communal
organizations, aiming for her students to recognize the value of the Jewish community and taking the values and needs of the community into consideration when designing curriculum for her students.

*General demographics.* As a group, the participants represented a demographic range. Two of the participants were male, and two of the participants were female; they ranged in age from mid-30’s to late-60’s. Each of the participants was a full-time teacher at ECJDS for the 2012-2013 school year, and the participants’ experience at ECJDS ranged from three to 41 years. All of the participants had experience working in Jewish education prior to working for ECJDS. Educationally, all of the participants had earned at least a master’s degree with most of them having completed at least some additional graduate coursework, including two participants with Rabbinical ordination. Religiously, the participants identified themselves denominationally across the spectrum from unaffiliated to modern-Orthodox, and two of the participants identified themselves as American while the other two identified as Israeli. A summary of the demographics of the participants can be found below in Table 4.1.

**Table 4.1**

*Demographics of Study Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Total</th>
<th>Male/Female</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Years at ECJDS</th>
<th>Years in Jewish Education</th>
<th>Highest Level of Education</th>
<th>Religious Denomination</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4 teachers at ECJDS</td>
<td>2 male 2 female</td>
<td>Mid-30’s to late-60’s</td>
<td>3-41 years</td>
<td>11 – 45 years</td>
<td>All participants had at least a Masters, some with additional graduate work and/or Rabbinical ordination</td>
<td>1 modern-Orthodox 1 Orthodox/Conservative 1 Conservative 1 Unaffiliated</td>
<td>2 American 2 Israeli</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Participant confidentiality.* The data collected included interview notes taken by the researcher during the interview, recordings of interviews, and entries into the researcher’s
reflexive journal including initial observations and notes for follow-up. After the data was collected, the researcher transcribed the audio recordings of the interviews for each participant, continuing to make use of a reflexive journal. As per the protocol established by the researcher to ensure confidentiality, all notes and recordings collected by the researcher were kept strictly anonymous and were stored in a secure location. Pseudonyms were used through the data collection process in order to further ensure confidentiality. The written summary of this research study will refrain from using participants’ actual names, identity, or specific demographic information that could be used to identify the participants. All digital recordings of data were destroyed following transcription and the completion of data analysis.

**Interview Techniques**

The interviews were informal and comfortable for both the researcher and the participant as the researcher had established a friendly rapport with each of the participants prior to the interview through both working together over three years and preliminary introduction of the study. Additionally, each of the participants was committed to helping the researcher and to the study itself, willing to assist the researcher in any way possible, and making the interviews seem much more like a friendly conversation. Because of this high comfort level, the interviews flowed naturally with limited discomfort, and most of the time was focused on the topic of the study.

Participants all arrived at the pre-determined location ready to participate. As the interviews were all set at mutually convenient times and mutually convenient locations, all participants were punctual and comfortable in the setting. The interview environments selected, both the empty classrooms and the participant’s home, provided for a quiet, private, and relaxed setting for the interviews to take place. This environment allowed for the goals of the interviews
to be easily achieved as the participants felt the desired level of comfort and confidentiality had been achieved. As previously mentioned, the interviews were digitally recorded, but, for the most part, this did not seem to inhibit the participants. In a couple of situations, the participants made reference to perhaps not wanting a specific line or mention of a name to be included in the recording, so pseudonyms were used during the transcription process, and all participants had a chance to approve the transcripts before coding occurred.

The interview itself consisted of two main sections. The first section consisted of warm-up background questions in order to establish context, continue building rapport, and gain demographic information. The second section focused more specifically on the research questions and purpose of the study through open-ended questions that were designed to trigger the participants to tell their stories and discuss their understandings and perceptions (Appendix D). The correlation between the research questions and interview questions can be found below in Tables 4.2 and 4.3

Table 4.2

Research Questions and Correlation to Interview Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Correlating Interview Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B - Background, rapport, and demographics</td>
<td>II-1, II-2, II-3, II-4, III-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RQ1 - How do Jewish Studies teachers describe their understandings and perceptions as to what constitutes a successful graduate of a community Jewish day school?</td>
<td>III-1, III-2, III-3, III-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S1 - How do these understandings and perceptions affect the teachers' goals in the classroom?</td>
<td>II-3, II-4, III-5, III-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S2 - How do teachers measure their own success in reference to these goals?</td>
<td>II-4, III-2, III-3, III-7, III-8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: B refers to background questions with RQ1, S1, and S2 referring to the first research question and the two sub-questions. II and III refer to the second and third sections of the interview protocol with the specific question number following the section designation.
Table 4.3

*Interview Questions and Correlation to Research Questions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Question</th>
<th>Correlating to Research Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>II – 1 How long have you been a Jewish Studies teacher at this school? In general?</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II – 2 What classes/subjects do you teach?</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II – 3 What made you decide to become a teacher? Jewish Studies teacher?</td>
<td>B, S1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II – 4 What is your favorite part about being a Jewish Studies teacher?</td>
<td>B, S2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III – 1 Please tell me what “success” means to you. What about in the context of a</td>
<td>RQ1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish day school?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III – 2 Please describe one of your teaching successes.</td>
<td>RQ1, S2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III – 3 How would you define a successful graduate of a Jewish day school? What</td>
<td>RQ1, S2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>constitutes success?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III – 4 What factors have affected your understandings and perceptions of success?</td>
<td>RQ1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III – 5 What are your personal goals as a teacher at a community Jewish day school?</td>
<td>S1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III – 6 How did you determine these to be your goals?</td>
<td>B, S1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III – 7 How do you measure success as pertains to these goals?</td>
<td>S2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III – 8 How do your understandings and perceptions of success affect the students?</td>
<td>S2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* B refers to background questions with RQ1, S1, and S2 referring to the first research question and the two sub-questions. II and III refer to the second and third sections of the interview protocol with the specific question number following the section designation.

In general, the researcher followed the predetermined open-ended interview protocol, making use of probing questions and follow-up questions as needed. Additionally, in-line with IPA, which focuses on the participant’s experiences (Smith et al., 2012), the researcher allowed and encouraged the participants to take ownership of the interview and to tell their stories, with the researcher taking on the role of “active listener” (Smith et al., 2012, p. 64). The interviews followed a rhythm suggested by Smith et al., (2012):

At the beginning of the interview, there will be condensed meanings, narratives, and understandings. As the interview progresses, and the participant warms to the exercise
and relaxes into it, there is likely to be a move from the descriptive to the affective, from the general to the specific, from the superficial to the disclosing. (p. 68)

As this rhythm developed, the participants were more likely to go into detail and disclose information that allowed for the researcher to better understand their perceptions, experiences, and understandings.

Prior to the start of each interview, the researcher established that the participant was free to end his or her participation at any time, and the researcher continually monitored the participants’ comfort level during the interview through body language and responding appropriately when a participant indicated an interest in changing subjects. In each case, participants seemed comfortable, and many commented on how they enjoyed the process of being encouraged to reflect on their craft. Although the researcher carefully worded the interview questions in order to be easily understood and asked a peer to review them to ensure clarity before any interviews were conducted, in some situations, the participants asked the researcher to reword or rephrase the questions in order to more easily answer them. At times, the participants also needed probing through the use of examples or follow-up questions in order to formulate their own answers. Additionally, at times, the participants answered several of the protocol questions with one answer or, through their taking ownership of the interview, answered some of the questions without being asked. In these cases, the researcher adjusted the interview protocol in order for the questions to not seem repetitive, while still allowing the participant sufficient opportunity to fully answer the questions.

Participants were generally thoughtful and enthusiastic in their answers, offering extra information, examples, and anecdotes to emphasize their points. At the end of the interview, participants were asked if there was anything else they would like to share or any questions that
they wish they had been asked, and many of the participants offered additional information that they felt was relevant to the topic. Through the use of these semi-structured, open-ended interviews, the researcher was able to collect valuable data pertaining to the teachers’ experiences and perceptions related to success of a day school graduate.

Coding

Overview of coding process. After all data was gathered, the researcher transcribed the audio of the interviews and began coding and analyzing the data in order to determine themes within the data. Smith et al. (2012) discuss that there is no one, single prescribed method for data analysis in the IPA approach, stating the following:

As a result, IPA can be characterized by a set of common processes (e.g. moving from the particular to the shared, and from the descriptive to the interpretive) and principles (e.g. a commitment to an understanding of the participant’s point of view, and a psychological focus on personal meaning-making in particular contexts) which are applied flexibly, according to the analytic task. (p. 79)

As such, the researcher used the guidelines described by Smith et al. (2012) which include close analysis, identification of emergent patterns, development of a dialogue between the researcher and the data, development of a structure that shows the relationship between themes, organization of the material, and reflection in order to develop a system of data analysis. As a first step, the researcher employed a system of closely reading the data, word by word, in order to check for accuracy in transcription and to begin to get a sense of the data. Once this step was completed, each participant had a chance to review his or her interview transcript in order to ensure that the participant’s words were captured accurately before coding. Once this process was complete, the researcher used both First and Second Cycle Coding in order to continue to
familiarize herself with the data and to begin to analyze the data for themes. Through this careful reading and coding process, the researcher truly engaged with the data, immersing herself in the words of the participants, and allowing the themes to emerge organically.

As recommended by Smith et al. (2012), and keeping with IPA’s idiographic commitment, the process of coding and analysis was completed for each interview transcript individually before moving onto the next participant’s interview transcript in order for the researcher to be fully immersed in each participant’s story, “bracketing the ideas emerging from the analysis” (Smith et al., 2012, p. 100) as much as possible when considering the data from the next participant. Therefore, although the researcher transcribed data as it became available, once the process of coding and analysis began, the researcher focused entirely on the data from one participant at a time. The complete process of data collection and analysis can be seen in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Participants were interviewed by researcher with audio recording of interview.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Audio recordings of interviews were transcribed by researcher as available.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Initial reading and rereading of interview transcripts occurred in order to check for typos and gain a sense of the data as a whole (after this stage, the transcripts were sent to participants for member checks before coding began).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>First Cycle Coding methods of In Vivo Coding and Process Coding were used to take note of participant’s specific words and actions as well as the details of the data.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Second Cycle Coding method of Axial Coding was used in order to identify themes and sub-categories within the data (list of Axial Coding categories maintained in reflexive journal).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Each transcript was reviewed again in light of categories that emerged from Second Cycle coding of other transcripts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Patterns and themes across cases were determined</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Steps 3-5 were conducted for each individual interview separately, and the researcher wrote entries in her reflexive journal throughout the process.*
The researcher conducted coding and analysis through the use of a table in Microsoft Office. Each interview transcript was placed in a table with columns. The first column numbered the lines of the transcript. The second column contained the words of the transcript itself. The third column was used for In Vivo Coding. The fourth column was used for Process Coding, and the fifth column was reserved for Axial Coding. A sample coding template as described above can be found in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5

Sample Coding Template

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>In Vivo</th>
<th>Process</th>
<th>Axial</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of transcript text</td>
<td>Text of interview transcript</td>
<td>In Vivo codes</td>
<td>Process codes</td>
<td>Axial codes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Through the process of First Cycle Coding methods of In Vivo and Process Coding and the Second Cycle Coding method of Axial Coding, data analysis consisted of the researcher’s familiarizing herself with the data through fracturing and pulling apart the data and then “strategically” reassembling it (Saldaña, 2009). In Vivo Coding, which consists of turning actual words from the participant into codes, was used throughout the transcripts as a way for the researcher to familiarize herself with the exact words that the participants used to describe their experiences and perceptions. Process Coding, which consists of using gerunds to explore the actions described in the data, was also used throughout the transcripts as a way for the researcher to examine the actions and reactions or consequences of the participants. The Second Cycle Coding method of Axial Coding was used to determine categories or themes and sub-categories, reflecting the data as a whole. During Axial Coding, the researcher used each relevant code only once per text passage, resulting in the use of a relatively low number of total Axial Codes used.
Through the use of this coding procedure, the themes and findings emerged naturally from the process.

Throughout this process, in addition to inputting entries into the third through fifth columns during the coding process, the researcher underlined the words from the interview transcript that correlated to the In Vivo Coding, italicized the words from the interview transcript that correlated to the Process Coding, and later color-coded selections from the interview transcript to correspond to specific interview questions, bolding words and lines that the researcher felt were especially relevant. The color coding that was used can be seen in Table 4.6, and a sample of coding can be found in Table 4.7.

Table 4.6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Color</th>
<th>Research Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Background - orange</td>
<td>Background material (not pertaining to research questions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RQ1 - red</td>
<td>How do Jewish Studies teachers describe their understandings and perceptions as to what constitutes a successful graduate of a community Jewish day school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S1 - blue</td>
<td>How do these understandings and perceptions affect the teachers’ goals in the classroom?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S2 - green</td>
<td>How do teachers measure their own success in reference to these goals?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.7

Sample Coding of Interview Transcript

| 461 | Q: Every student that came to my class knew that only an idiot fails, and none of them is an idiot, right? I did everything to make sure that they don’t fail, and, you know what? I don’t care about the grades that they get. I care about the people that they become, and they know if. |
| 462 | Only an idiot fails did everything to make sure that they don’t fail don’t care about the grades care about the people that they become, and they know it |
| 463 | Knowing that only an idiot fails Doing everything to make sure that they don’t fail Caring about the people they become Knowing that |
| 464 | ANTI ACADEMIC |
| 465 | PERSON |
| 467 | |
| 468 | S: How do they know it? How do you make that clear to them? |
| 469 | |
**Use of reflexive journal.** Throughout the process of coding, the researcher recorded thoughts, observations, impressions, and notes for follow-up in her reflexive journal. Through the use of recording memos in the journal, the researcher was able to add to the emerging themes and sub-categories and actively engage with the data. Additionally, in the reflexive journal, the researcher maintained a running table of categories used during Axial Coding for each participant with descriptions as to how the category was used in the data and also to which research question(s) the category corresponded. As more and more data was coded, the researcher could then review the table of categories created for each participant and determine which categories were main categories or themes as they were prevalent in the data for all or most of the participants and which were sub-categories to those themes as they were less prevalent and/or closely related to one of the themes. Through this process, the researcher worked to identify the emerging themes that connected the data.

**Iterative analysis.** In-line with the IPA approach and qualitative studies, coding the data and reviewing the list of categories was an iterative process, constantly changing as more data was analyzed, and the coding was refined. Smith et al. (2012) describe the process, saying, “In reality, analysis is an iterative process of fluid description and engagement with the transcript. It involves flexible thinking, processes of reduction, expansion, revision, creativity and innovation” (p. 81). The researcher found that flexible thinking, reduction, revision, and innovation were, indeed, required as the list of categories constantly changed, taking the themes in different directions as the data emerged, ultimately leading to deeper interpretation and meaning from the participants’ experiences and understandings.

While the data for each research question overlapped in some cases, in most cases themes and sub-categories pertained to one research question in particular. Therefore, in coding and
organizing the themes, the researcher organized the categories according to each research question.

**Coding related to main research question.** The main research question (R1) for the study was stated as follows: How do Jewish Studies teachers describe their understandings and perceptions as to what constitutes a successful graduate of a community Jewish day school? For this research question, the coding focused on the participants’ ideas of success and how they would describe a successful graduate. Five main themes emerged from the data related to this research question: *Jewish Identity, Literate, Israel, Community, and Lifelong Learning*. Within many of these themes, sub-categories also emerged, and several of these themes and sub-categories also pertain to and are relevant to other research questions.

Relating to the theme of *Jewish Identity*, the most prevalent theme related to this question, the following sub-categories emerged: *Comfort, Conscious, World*, and *Person*. Within the theme of *Literate*, the following sub-categories emerged: *Prayer, Hebrew, Terms, Customs*, and *Text Skills*. The theme of *Literate* involved the most crossover between research questions, with the participants’ mentioning several of the sub-categories as measures of success pertaining to their goals, relating to the second sub-question (S2). When refining the list of themes, however, the researcher determined these sub-categories to relate directly to the theme of *Literate*. The themes of *Israel, Community, and Lifelong Learning* did not include sub-categories, but the theme of *Lifelong Learning* does also relate to S2. The researcher considered making these themes sub-categories of other themes within R1, but determined them to be unique and distinctive, adding to the findings as themes. Table 4.8 shows themes that emerged pertaining to the first research question along with a description and number of occurrences.
### Table 4.8

*Themes and Sub-Categories with Descriptions and Frequency for Research Question 1*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>RQ1 - How do Jewish Studies teachers describe their understandings and perceptions as to what constitutes a successful graduate of a community Jewish day school?</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>JEWISH IDENTITY (J IDENT)</strong></td>
<td>This code refers to direct mention of Jewish identity related to the students. Sub-categories of this theme include the codes COMFORT, CONSCIOUS, WORLD, and PERSON.</td>
<td>TOTAL 51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMFORT</td>
<td>This code refers to students’ feeling a sense of comfort with who they are and with Judaism itself.</td>
<td>14 (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONSCIOUS</td>
<td>This code refers to the students’ consciously thinking about their involvement and decisions regarding Judaism, making decisions from a knowledge base, rather than through circumstantial or by default actions.</td>
<td>3 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WORLD</td>
<td>This code refers to the students’ abilities to function in the greater world as Jews and also includes ideas such as patriotism, relating to the greater world.</td>
<td>12 (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PERSON</td>
<td>This code refers to who the student is as a person, including values, behavior, and actions.</td>
<td>10 (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>COMMUNITY</strong></td>
<td>This code refers to the need to build a community, feel a part of the community, contribute to the community, recognize the value to community, and want the community to endure. Citizenship and raising a family are also included within this code.</td>
<td>TOTAL 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>17 (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LIFELONG LEARNING (L LEARN)</strong></td>
<td>This code refers to Jewish learning and/or text study beyond the classroom and/or after graduation. This code also pertains to S2.</td>
<td>TOTAL 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6 (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISRAEL</td>
<td>This code refers to the students’ connection to Israel and is related to the code CON JEW (S1).</td>
<td>TOTAL 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5 (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LITERATE</strong></td>
<td>This code refers to the teacher’s desire to educate students to be fluent in Judaism and includes the specific skills listed as sub-categories such as PRAYER, HEBREW, TERMS, CUSTOMS, and TEXT SKILLS as well as Jewish history.</td>
<td>TOTAL 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRAYER</td>
<td>This code refers to the teacher’s prayer-related benchmarks for students.</td>
<td>1 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HEBREW</td>
<td>This code refers to a student’s comfort with, use of, and fluency in Hebrew.</td>
<td>1 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TERMS</td>
<td>This code refers to student’s use of Jewish, Hebrew, and/or Yiddish terms. This terms also goes towards S2.</td>
<td>2 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CUSTOMS</td>
<td>This code refers to student’s comfort and fluency with Jewish customs and traditions, including holiday ritual and lifecycle events. This term also goes towards S2.</td>
<td>4 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEXT SKILLS</td>
<td>This code refers to the student’s having both the confidence and skills to learn text independently.</td>
<td>3 (3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* The bolded frequency numbers indicate totals for the specified themes, including occurrences of sub-categories. The number in parentheses next to the frequency number indicates the number of the four participants’ interview transcripts in which the specified code appears.
Coding related to first sub-question. The first sub-question (S1) for the study was stated as follows: How do these understandings and perceptions affect the teachers’ goals in the classroom? For this research question, the coding focused on how the participants translated their understandings of success into classroom goals. Two main themes emerged from the data related to this research question: Connections with Students and Cognition. Within both of these themes, sub-categories also emerged, with some overlap between sub-categories related to this question and general background about the participant.

Relating to the theme of Connections with Students, the most prevalent theme among all of the data, the following sub-categories emerged: Teacher, Subject, Individual, and Anti-Academics. The sub-category Teacher was the most common category used within Axial Coding, and the data related to this category contained both valuable participant background data as well as data related to the values and goals of the individual participants. Additionally, the sub-category of Anti-Academics also pertains to S2. Within the theme of Cognition, the following sub-category emerged that was also related to S2: Connection to Other Jews. Table 4.9 shows themes that emerged pertaining to the first sub-question along with a description and number of occurrences.
Table 4.9

*Themes and Sub-Categories with Descriptions and Frequency for Sub-Question 1*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S1 - How do these understandings and perceptions affect the teachers’ goals in the classroom?</td>
<td>This code refers to the teacher’s building relationships with students. Sub-categories related to this theme are TEACHER, SUBJECT, INDIVIDUAL, and ANTI-ACADEMICS.</td>
<td>TOTAL 73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONNECTIONS WITH STUDENTS (CON STU)</td>
<td>This code refers to why the participant became a teacher in the first place, and/or how the participant views teaching and the process of teaching. Some of the data related to this code also serves as participant background information.</td>
<td>16 (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEACHER</td>
<td>This code refers to the role of the taught subject material, both from the perspective of the teacher and the student.</td>
<td>38 (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUBJECT</td>
<td>This code refers to differentiation between individual student goals and goals for a full class, emphasizing the value of personal goals for students.</td>
<td>10 (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INDIVIDUAL</td>
<td>This code refers to a de-emphasis of grades, prestigious colleges, or other traditional academic benchmarks.</td>
<td>8 (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANTI-ACADEMICS</td>
<td>This code refers to the general learning experience, and the teacher’s aiming for the students to be able to think, ask questions, and apply the classroom material to their own lives while in the class. This code also includes the student’s going beyond the course material and teacher expectations to make it their own. This theme includes CONNECTION TO OTHER JEWS as a sub-category.</td>
<td>TOTAL 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COGNITION</td>
<td>This code refers to the aim for students to understand their connection and obligation to other Jews in the world and in history, thinking of themselves as part of that history. This code also pertains to S2</td>
<td>3 (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONNECTION TO OTHER JEWS (CON JEW)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: The bolded frequency numbers indicate totals for the specified themes, including occurrences of sub-categories. The number in parentheses next to the frequency number indicates the number of the four participants’ interview transcripts in which the specified code appears.*

**Coding related to second sub-question.** The second sub-question (S2) for the study was stated as follows: How do teachers measure their own success in reference to these goals? For
this research question, the coding focused on means of assessment of students and teacher success in reaching goals for the students. Three main themes emerged from the data related to this research question: *Immeasurable*, *Student Impact*, and *Attitude*. Within two of these themes, sub-categories also emerged.

Relating to the theme of *Student Impact*, the most prevalent theme pertaining to this question, the sub-category of *Long* emerged, and within the theme of *Attitude*, the sub-category of *Apply* emerged. The themes related to S2 were the most consistent among the participants with all of the themes appearing in each of the participant’s data. Table 4.9 shows themes that emerged pertaining to the second sub-question with a description and number of occurrences.

Table 4.10

*Themes and Sub-Categories with Descriptions and Frequency for Sub-Question 2*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S2 - How do teachers measure their own success in reference to these goals?</td>
<td>immeasurable measures of success such as stories, narratives, or other examples that demonstrate difficulty in assessing success.</td>
<td>TOTAL 16 16 (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STUDENT IMPACT (STU IMPACT)</td>
<td>This code refers to the teacher’s or subject’s having an impact on the students, engaging and exciting the students. This theme includes LONG as a sub-category.</td>
<td>TOTAL 26 15 (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LONG</td>
<td>This code refers to differentiating short term and long term successes, emphasizing the importance and value of lasting effects on students.</td>
<td>11 (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATTITUDE</td>
<td>This code refers to the student attitude towards the subject and class as a measurement of success. APPLY is a sub-category of this theme, and the codes TERMS and CUSTOMS (R1) and CONNECTIONS WITH OTHER JEWS (S1) also contribute to this theme.</td>
<td>TOTAL 8 5 (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPLY</td>
<td>This code refers to the teacher’s seeing students apply what they are learning to other areas such as other classes and other areas of their lives and hearing stories from the students, parents, or other teachers that such applying is occurring.</td>
<td>3 (3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note*: The bolded frequency numbers indicate totals for the specified themes, including occurrences of sub-categories. The number in parentheses next to the frequency number indicates the number of the four participants’ interview transcripts in which the specified code appears.
**Background.** In addition to the coding related specifically to the research questions, the researcher used the code *Background* to indicate data that served as background information about the individual participants. While coding for themes and sub-categories and, later, color-coding, the researcher found some crossover between *Background* and the other codes, especially *Teacher*. Regardless, this background data was valuable in both providing information pertinent to the demographics, motivations, and values of the participants and also providing insight towards the research questions.

The researcher made use of an analytic memo in her reflexive journal in order to record and track the codes used. Throughout the coding process, the researcher kept this memo updated with the most recent codes used during Axial Coding. Once coding was complete, the researcher then used this memo to review the data once again in light of the codes compiled from all transcripts. Once the coding process was complete, the researcher then refined the list of codes to reflect themes and sub-categories as they pertained to each research question. The researcher then created Tables 4.8-4.10 in order to better organize the themes and provide a visual.

Throughout the process, several copies of data were maintained in order to prevent loss and maintain accuracy of the data. All copies of data were kept in secure locations in order to ensure both the security and the authenticity of the study.

**Data Analysis**

Towards the end of the coding process, the researcher began to identify major themes or categories and sub-categories from the participant data within the codes used for Axial Coding. Data analysis began as the codes were refined, and the data was color-coded to correspond to the research questions. Through this process, themes emerged from the participants’ words, related to each of the research questions.
Review of coding. The themes corresponding to the first research question, which asked participants about their understandings and perceptions as to what constitutes a successful day school graduate, were Jewish Identity, Community, Lifelong Learning, Israel, and Literate. Within the theme Jewish Identity, the sub-categories of Comfort, Conscious, World, and Person emerged. Within the theme Literate, the sub-categories Prayer, Hebrew, Terms, Customs, and Text Skills emerged.

For the first sub-question, which focused on how the teachers’ understandings and perceptions affected their goals in the classroom, the themes that emerged were Connections with Students and Cognition. The sub-categories of Teacher, Subject, Individual, and Anti-Academics emerged within the theme of Connections with Students. The sub-category Connection to Other Jews emerged from the theme of Cognition.

For the second sub-question, focusing on how teachers measure their success according to these goals, the three themes that emerged were Immeasurable, Student Impact, and Attitude. Within Student Impact, Long emerged as a sub-category, and within Attitude, Apply emerged as a sub-category. The categories and sub-categories used for Axial Coding allowed for clarity regarding participant teachers’ understandings and perceptions to materialize from the data, addressing each of the research questions.

Connection to theoretical framework. The researcher was then able to connect those categories to the theoretical framework used for this study, Social Identity Theory. Social Identity Theory connects self-verification and social structures (Stryker & Burke, 2000), explaining that social identification has an effect that leads to activities that are in line with that identity and reinforce that identity (Ashforth & Mael, 1989), and emphasizing the role of the group in individual behavior (Trepte, 2006). Social Identity Theory emphasizes the role of the
group and the behaviors and actions of a group in identity formation and the ability for an individual to classify himself or herself within the greater world (Ashforth & Mael, 1989), adding that identity is multidimensional (Rosenberg & Gara, 1985) and reciprocal with the environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Table 4.11 shows how the themes and sub-categories associated with each research question connect to the theoretical framework with examples from the data itself.

Table 4.11

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Themes or Categories/Sub-Categories</th>
<th>Example from Participant Interview</th>
<th>Connection to Social Identity Theory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RQ1 - How do Jewish Studies teachers describe their understandings and perceptions as to what constitutes a successful graduate of a community Jewish day school?</td>
<td>JEWISH IDENTITY COMFORT CONSCIOUS WORLD PERSON</td>
<td>Rebecca: I want to have students who are comfortably identified as Jews however they grow their Jewish identity. So, whether it's through being a great philanthropist and being a philanthropist because this is what Jews do or whether it's through synagogue or community affiliation or whatever it is...that they are not just, you know, bagels and cream cheese Jews, more than gastronomic Jews. So that they are knowledgeable about why they are identifying as Jews.</td>
<td>Ashforth and Mael (1989) describe the importance of an individual's identity formation within larger social groups. Additionally, in-line with Rosenberg and Gara (1985), students' Jewish identity coexists with other identities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMMUNITY</td>
<td>Rebecca: Where I'd like to see more success is for them to see the importance of affiliating formally with some piece of the Jewish community.</td>
<td>According to Trepte (2006), one part of self-identity involves belonging to a community.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIFELONG LEARNING</td>
<td>Joseph: A lifetime learner, someone who reads and studies texts and engages in some sort of Jewish study even after graduation.</td>
<td>With a strong sense of Jewish identity, students will choose activities that are in-line with that identity and continually reinforcing that identity (Ashforth &amp; Mael, 1989).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISRAEL</td>
<td>Daniel: The other area I think is...Israel. Definitely Israel and everything that comes out of that...Jewish History, and those areas that determine who the Jewish people are.</td>
<td>Israel and its role in Jewish History is an integral part of Jewish identity.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LITERATE PRAYER HEBREW TERMS CUSTOMS TEXT SKILLS</td>
<td>Rebecca: There's all kinds of literacy...some of the more practical forms of literacy I think is that they are familiar with forms of prayer...that they are familiar with traditional forms of life cycle, um, for lack of a better word, scripts... literate is that there are certain terms that they'll hear, and I guess we could come up with a list of, you know, 200 terms where they don't go, “Wait, what's that?” Um, literate is a certain sense of Jewish history...</td>
<td>Ashforth and Mael (1989) emphasize that individuals or students, once they have adopted an identity and associated with a social group, will engage in activities and customs that reinforce that identity and their membership to that group. Trepte (2006) adds that in order to enhance their self-esteem, individual will exhibit behaviors that connect them to the social group.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S1 - How do these understandings and perceptions affect the teachers’ goals in the classroom?</td>
<td>CONNECTIONS WITH STUDENTS TEACHER SUBJECT INDIVIDUAL ANTI-ACADEMICS</td>
<td>Orit: You have to create personal connections with the students in order to grab their attention and in order for them to know that you are important and you are there for them.</td>
<td>The Jewish Studies teacher plays an important role in developing the identity of the student through personal connections.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S2 - How do teachers measure their own success in reference to these goals?</td>
<td>IMMEASURABLE</td>
<td>Rebecca: I think some it's immeasurable...the long term, it, because, you know, it's only by accident that I'll hear...</td>
<td>Self-identity is not an easily measureable concept, often manifesting through stories related to the individual and/or social groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COGNITION CONNECTION TO OTHER JEWS</td>
<td>Daniel: I like to take complicated concepts and just make them simple...find ways to make it a) adaptable and understood in modern day society, and b) to make it relevant to, ah, to students...in a way that they can connect to it and find some way that they will be able to use the text in their own life.</td>
<td>Bronfenbrenner (1979) highlights the relationship between the individual or student and the environment in which that individual operates, emphasizing the integration of one's identity into that environment.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion of Themes and Sub-Categories

Although all four participants of the study were teachers at East Coast Jewish Day School, they share characteristics that can be found among many other Jewish Studies teachers, in that they are all committed and enthusiastic about Jewish education. Through the lens of Social Identity Theory, as discussed below, it was also evident that each of the participants also shared a passion for helping students to develop their own Jewish identities within the context of the greater world. The teacher participants were all willing to share about their experiences and perceptions related to student success at community Jewish day schools, leading to data that allowed for themes or categories and sub-categories to emerge related to the research questions of the study.

Themes and sub-categories connected to first research question. When analyzing the data, the researcher determined the following themes and sub-categories to be related to the first research question which asked about what constitutes a successful Jewish day school graduate.

Jewish Identity. Jewish Identity emerged as one of the main themes of the data with the sub-categories of Comfort, Conscious, World, and Person. This code and its sub-categories were used for any direct or indirect mention of student Jewish identity and was closely connected to
the concept of self-identity. Rebecca included *Jewish Identity* in her definition of success by saying that, for her, success is “when a student’s self-esteem grows from their Jewish identity. Where they have struggled with something, and they feel great about that struggle.” She also elaborated on the area of *Jewish Identity* by stating the following:

I want to push their limit and their boundaries in terms of abstract terms, and I want them to understand the immediacy of their own self-identity because they are so used to having everyone else identify for them, but they are just a few short years away from making their own choices, and I want them to be comfortable with that foundation so that they can make those choices. You know, when they get to college, they, their parents won’t be standing there to see if they take the cheeseburger or not, and I want them to make that decision, not because they are running away from something, but because they are running towards something, so if they are going to eat a cheeseburger, that’s fine with me, as long as they understand why it is that they are reaching for that cheeseburger.

Through this statement, aligned with Social Identity Theory, Rebecca connects *Jewish Identity* to self-identity through the student’s actions and concept of *kashrut* (Jewish dietary laws). For Rebecca, the aim is for students to integrate their Jewish identity in with their self-identity, affecting their daily decisions. Daniel also placed a value on fostering *Jewish Identity*, saying that through students’ Jewish learning, it will lead them towards additional Jewish learning and strengthening of their Jewish identities “and that will affect their lives and their decisions.” For Daniel, *Jewish Identity* stems from Jewish learning and, like Rebecca shared, has an impact on students’ daily lives and identity as a whole. Similarly, Joseph says, “This is how they relate to the world,” again showing the connection between *Jewish Identity* and self-identity. For Orit, Jewish learning is “letting them take it wherever they want…and letting it become part of them.”
For each of the teacher participants, the students’ Jewish Identity and their emerging self-identity are deeply connected to each other and impacted by their Jewish learning.

Comfort. Within the theme of Jewish Identity, the sub-category of Comfort included the student’s feeling a sense of comfort with who they are and with Judaism itself, having confidence in their Jewish Identities to the point where they can express themselves and that identity outside of the walls of the school. Rebecca included this sub-category in the following statement:

I want to have students who are comfortably identified as Jews however they grow their Jewish identity. So, whether it’s through being a great philanthropist and being a philanthropist because this is what Jews do or whether it’s through synagogue or community affiliation or whatever it is...that they are not just, you know, bagels and cream cheese Jews, more than gastronomic Jews.

In her statement, Rebecca emphasizes the value of the students’ being comfortable with their identities and acting in-line with that identity. Joseph also adds to this sub-category, specifying the community day school’s role in promoting this feeling of comfort by saying:

A kid who would otherwise not feel comfortable specifically because he comes from an observant home or a home that, you know, is very insular because of his Judaism, and I think a Jewish day school allows him really to be a kid, you know allows him to express himself in a way where he doesn’t have to feel qualified.

Through his comments, Joseph places value on the student’s feeling of comfort, and the Jewish day school’s obligation and opportunity to provide and foster that feeling for the students in order to prepare the students for the greater world. Daniel, similarly, emphasizes a value of student comfort, saying that his goal is first within the classroom setting to help students reach a
place regarding their learning or practice where they are “able to do it or want to do it” and then extend that comfort beyond the classroom, helping the students to build their Jewish identities and reach a level of comfort where that can maintain and grow their identities even when not in the day school.

**Conscious.** Again within the theme of *Jewish Identity*, the sub-category *Conscious* refers to the student’s conscious thinking about Judaism and his or her decision-making process related to Judaism. Rebecca summarizes this sub-category through her saying, “So it’s being able to practice or not practice Judaism, but whatever choices they make, they’re making them from a certain knowledge base.” In her words, Rebecca emphasizes the student’s level of conscious thinking about Judaism and the related decision-making processes, encouraging thoughtful, knowledge-based decisions. Joseph elaborates on this idea, again connecting conscious awareness about Judaism to the students’ actions and decisions, saying the following:

It [Jewish involvement] just doesn’t happen by default. That he doesn’t just go to services at Yom Kippur because that’s what everybody else is doing. You know, if he is there, he has a reason for being there. He understands the implications of being there. You know, things like that. That he actually thinks about his involvement or noninvolvement in Judaism.

For these teacher participants, practice is not sufficient; Jewish practice and *Jewish Identity* should involve a certain level of conscious awareness regarding the role of *Jewish Identity* and the impact and meaning behind related decisions, leading to those decisions being made based on learning and knowledge.

**World.** Still within the theme of *Jewish Identity* is the sub-category *World* which refers to the student’s functioning as Jews in the greater world. The theme of *World* is closely connected
to Comfort and Conscious within the theme of Jewish Identity, but whereas Comfort relates to personal feelings and comfort level, and Conscious relates to a level of awareness in making decisions, World refers to the student’s ability to function in the greater world in general, involving himself in a variety of activities and interacting with people beyond the day school. For Joseph, the sub-category of World is a major emphasis. He states the following when describing a successful day school graduate:

Somebody whose Judaism is an integral part of him, but is not deterrent from doing anything outside of his Judaism and actually, you know, strengthens what he does outside, gives him some foundation for the world. Just, you know, a well-adjusted, happy person. I also think, you know, that he some have some citizenship and patriotism too. That’s important.

Joseph’s views are in-line with Social Identity Theory in emphasizing the student’s multidimensional identity as both a Jew and an American citizen, recognizing that his Jewish identity should and does interact with the greater world. He commends East Coast Jewish Day School on fostering this value, saying:

I am really amazed at how these kids are part of the greater world, and that has really shaped my views. I think it’s important that they are able to be Jewish and also be American and be out in the world, and the more that I have seen that to be possible, the more I believe it to be true.

For Joseph, and for some of the other participants, the student’s being able to function and thrive outside of the Jewish day school and in the greater world is a real priority related to Jewish identity. Rebecca echoes this sentiment, saying, “Their empathy as they walk out into the world should be through the lens of being a Jew,” also emphasizing the value of the student carrying
his Jewish identity with him in the world. Orit echoed the other participants in stating that through Jewish learning, she helps students, “Be who they are in the world.” For these teacher participants, students’ being able to function and thrive in the secular world and being citizens of that world while still maintaining their sense of Jewish identity is a value and goal.

*Person.* The final sub-category within *Jewish Identity* is that of *Person*, referring to the student’s development as a person with specific values and distinct behaviors, in-line with those of the teachers. Daniel emphasized this theme during his interview, stating the following when asked about what constitutes a successful Jewish day school graduate:

> I would say behavior-wise, respect. I think the concept is number one in my head…I think respect to the surroundings, respect to the environment, respect to elders, respect to teachers, respect to peers, respect to everyone…and when I talk about behavior, I also mean appreciating, knowing to acknowledge something that was done to them. That’s, I think for me, that’s number one, even before knowledge in any area. I think that just being a mensch [i.e. a good person], being able to present yourself to the world in a positive behavior way as opposed to acting out or disrespecting your surroundings, I think that’s number one of a day school, especially a Jewish day school where Judaism is all about manners and all about values. I think, for me, that’s number one before anything else.

When thinking about priorities for a day school and priorities for teaching in his own classroom, Daniel emphasized the value of behavior over knowledge. Both Joseph and Orit vocalized agreement, with Joseph saying, “I care about who you are and what you stand for, and I think the kids know that,” and Orit stating, “I care about the people that they become, and they know it…I care about their growing and learning as a human being and how they show that to the world.”
Each of these teacher participants emphasized the importance of values, actions, and behaviors as they relate to identity and who the students are as people. In line with Social Identity Theory, the students will take actions that are most in-line with their social group, so educating towards Jewish values and behaviors is important for these teachers.

**Community.** Another theme related to the first research question is that of Community, referring to the need to build a community, feel a part of the community, contribute to the community, recognize the value of the community, and want for the community to endure. Some participants also included the ideas of citizenship and raising a family within this category. When discussing how he would describe ideal graduates, Joseph said that they would “take an active role in what goes on in their global communities and, um, you know, caring about the way that the government functions or doesn’t function.” Orit also emphasized the value of participating in community, saying, “We all want to see our students very much involved in the Jewish community.” For Rebecca, community was a major priority. She stated one of the goals of her classroom was moving the students toward “understanding for themselves why they are Jewish and why they want the Jewish community to continue,” showing a connection between Jewish Identity and using that identity to connect themselves and to value the greater Jewish community. Each of these teacher participants saw a value in community and worked towards instilling that value in their students.

**Lifelong Learning.** Also connected to the first research question is the theme of Lifelong Learning, referring to Jewish learning and/or text study beyond the classroom and after graduation. Rebecca defined the concept of Lifelong Learning as pertains to her students by saying, “That they want to pursue their Jewish learning. In other words that they see Jewish learning as an ongoing process; that they didn’t graduate from it.” Joseph shared a similar
sentiment in saying that he pictures a successful graduate as “a lifetime learner, someone who reads and studies texts and engages in some sort of Jewish study even after graduation.” Daniel also described a desire to create lifelong learners among his students, discussing how he structures his classroom and his teaching around this goal:

Because the more positive the experience and the more they are engaged, they will go out of the school, and they will eventually go back to it themselves. I’m a true believer that there is a limit as to how much we can teach in a classroom setting, in any area, not just in English or Judaics, any area. Students who are or have a positive association with an area of interest, they will come back to it eventually, even if they don’t want anything to do with it now, one day, they will wake up and say, ‘Oh, that sounds familiar from somewhere,’ and then they will go and research, and that will lead them to something else, and that will take them somewhere else, and eventually, they will get stronger and excited about Judaism.

For each of these teachers, the learning that takes place beyond and after their classes is just as important as that which occurs during their class as they each wanted to foster a desire within their students to continue learning. As such, this theme also pertains to the second research question as it shows that, for these teacher participants, the Lifelong Learning aspect of a successful graduate is an ongoing process and cannot be assessed upon graduation as it is a component of the long-term and ongoing effects of a Jewish day school education.

**Israel.** Israel, related to the first research question, refers to the student’s connection to the modern State of Israel and is also tied to the theme *Connection to Other Jews* (found listed as connected to S1 and pertaining to S2). The teacher participants differed, however, on the specifics of this connection. For Orit, this connection should manifest in positive feelings and a
desire to visit, as she describes a successful graduate as someone who “feels positive about Israel. Goes, you know, serves in the military, the Israeli army. Um, makes Aliyah [moves to Israel].” For Rebecca, a connection with Israel does not necessarily have to equate to only positive feelings, as she aims for her students to have “a certain sense of identification with Israel, whether that’s for, against, or wherever it is that they understand why they have a relationship with Israel.” For Daniel, that connection to Israel serves as a connection to the Jewish people as a whole through Jewish history and to Jewish identity. He describes the importance of this connection, saying the following:

Definitely Israel and everything that comes out of that - Jewish History, and those areas that determine who the Jewish people are. I think Israel, out of many reasons why the State of Israel was founded, you also get the concept of the Holocaust…The students should know about Jewish History dating back to medieval times and Biblical times. It all fits into the identity of who the Jewish people are and who students who leave Jewish day schools should be a part of the Jewish people, not just, ah, not just know modern State of Israel. Modern State of Israel is great, and it’s important, but modern State of Israel would not have existed if ancient Israel wouldn’t have existed or if the Tanach [the full written Torah/Bible] didn’t exist…the Holocaust had a big impact on modern Israel, and if a student doesn’t know what the Holocaust is or how it made an impact on Israel, then you don’t understand big portion of the Independence War of Israel, and if you don’t understand Biblical Israel, and you don’t understand why Israel is so important then you don’t understand the modern conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. It’s all a part of Jewish identity, and as a graduate of a Jewish day school, I expect someone to be able to...identify the facts and the not facts, and the lies of both sides.
For each of these teacher participants, a connection to Israel is a part of a successful Jewish day school graduate.

*Literate*. The final theme associated with the first research question, *Literate*, includes the following sub-categories: *Prayer, Hebrew, Terms, Customs*, and *Text Skills*. Although three of the four participants included at least one of these subcategories, none of the sub-categories, or the theme of *Literate* itself, was included by all three participants in their descriptions of a successful Jewish day school graduate, and one participant, Orit, made no reference to literacy or any of the sub-categories. It should be noted, however, that, in line with IPA, participants were asked open-ended questions during their interviews, and the researcher used more specific follow-up questions only when relevant and pertinent to the participants’ responses. Therefore, the researcher only probed participants regarding the theme of *Literate* or specific sub-categories within *Literate* if they mentioned the topics. Table 4.12 shows the coding of *Literate* and the related sub-categories according to participant.

Table 4.12

*Literate and Sub-Categories Referenced by Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme/Sub-Category</th>
<th>Number of Participants who Referenced</th>
<th>Participants who Referenced</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LITERATE</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Daniel, Rebecca</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRAYER</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Rebecca</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HEBREW</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Daniel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TERMS</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Joseph, Rebecca</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CUSTOMS</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Joseph, Rebecca</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEXT SKILLS</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Daniel, Joseph, Rebecca</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Participants were asked open-ended questions during their interviews, and the researcher used more specific follow-up questions when relevant.
In this case, the code *Literate* refers to the teacher’s desire to educate students to be fluent in Judaism, and two of the participants make specific reference to literacy. During her interview, Rebecca referred to the idea of literacy by simply saying, “I think our goal is to create Jews who are literate and are comfortable with their literacy.” When asked to define literacy, Rebecca included a familiarity with prayer, life cycle event traditions, certain terms, foundations of Rabbinic Judaism, and Jewish history as well identifying and having a relationship with Israel and understanding their place in the history and evolving traditions of Judaism. Rebecca also emphasized that part of literacy involves “being able to practice or not practice Judaism, but whatever choices they make, they’re making them from a certain knowledge base.”

Daniel, however, equated literacy with knowledge of the traditional sources, stating the following as a priority:

Definitely knowledge. And when I say knowledge, it’s a combination of Jewish texts, or if it’s Tanach [Bible] or if it’s Torah sh’b’al’Peh [Oral Torah/Bible that was later written] concepts...something needs to show after being in day school for 12 years or sometimes even longer, there needs to be some knowledge…so I think there’s something to be said that they have to have knowledge.

Daniel also included exposure to Hebrew, familiarity with Jewish history, and a connection to Israel – both the history of the land and the modern State – in describing his view of literacy. Although only Rebecca and Daniel made specific reference to literacy, within the category of *Literate*, most of the participants described specific components or sub-categories that they felt were essential to a successful day school graduate.

*Prayer.* The first sub-category within the theme *Literate, Prayer*, refers to the teacher’s prayer-related aims and benchmarks for students. Only one of the participants, Rebecca, directly
mentioned prayer in her interview, saying that something she felt was important for students “is that they are familiar with forms of prayer.” Other participants included the concept of Prayer in with the idea of Rabbinic Judaism or the sub-category Customs.

Hebrew. Referring to a student’s comfort with, use of, and fluency in Hebrew, the sub-category of Hebrew emerged within the theme of Literate. For this category, also, only one participant directly mentioned Hebrew as a language. Daniel stated the following:

Hebrew is important, as part of a Jewish text, but for me personally, Hebrew should not necessarily be judged by being a fluent speaker…However, I do think that every student should be exposed to Hebrew and should be able to understand simple texts in Hebrew, and maybe even be able to say a few sentences in Hebrew. Daniel continued, explaining that, although he values Hebrew, an emphasis on the language should not precede learning Jewish values and texts as not all students may be capable of achieving Hebrew fluency. Other participants indirectly made reference to Hebrew skills when discussing Text Skills or general learning in the classroom.

Terms. Terms, the next sub-category within the theme Literate, refers to the students’ use of and comfort with Jewish, Hebrew, and/or Yiddish terms that are commonly used in Judaism. Both Joseph and Rebecca emphasized the student’s use of terms, with Joseph sharing the following:

I am always tickled by their using Yiddish words and phrases while we’re in the class or something like that. The kids, when they don’t get frazzled by it, I think that’s just great. I think that’s maybe just reinforcing what they already know.
Rebecca echoed the value in student comfort with these terms including it into her definition of literate, saying, “literate is that there are certain terms that they’ll hear, and I guess we could come up with a list of, you know, 200 terms where they don’t go, ‘Wait, what’s that?’.”

For both of these teacher participants, an aspect of a successful Jewish day school graduate involves elements of common language. Additionally, for both Rebecca and Joseph, Terms also pertains to S2 as they use it as an assessment technique.

*Customs.* Customs, the fourth sub-category within Literate, refers to a student’s comfort and fluency with Jewish customs and traditions, including ritual, holiday, and lifecycle events. Both Rebecca and Joseph emphasized familiarity with customs as an important aspect relating to a successful Jewish day school graduate. Rebecca explained that students should be, “familiar with traditional forms of life cycle, um, for lack of a better word, scripts, so that…there is no learning curve for them, even if they haven’t experienced it before, the learning curve is low.” Joseph, explaining the importance of this sub-category, shared the following story:

You know we had this tragedy in the school last week [where a student’s father died], and I teach Life Cycles, and just coincidentally, we were doing death and mourning at the time, and you know, I just felt so glad that I was able to impart this knowledge to them so that they could be part of this whole process and know how to go to a shiva house [house of a mourning family] and how to add comfort, and you know, they understand. Everything they were going to be participating in during the next couple of days, they knew what to do.

For these teacher participants, although the actual classroom learning plays a role, the students’ being able to translate that learning into real-life situations is an important aspect of success.
Similar to *Terms*, *Customs* also pertains to S2 as several teachers use it as a means of assessing their students.

*Text Skills*. *Text Skills*, the final sub-category within *Literate*, refers to the student’s having both confidence and skills to learn Jewish texts independently of the teacher. For Daniel, text skills are important to the students’ daily learning. He describes a successful day school graduate as being able to:

> Go up to a text, any text online, in Hebrew or in English and be able to understand at least the simple text, the simple understanding of it, be able to read it correctly and stuff like that and get something out of it.

Rebecca explained that these text skills go beyond being able to read and comprehend a text, extending to an understanding of the text’s place in history and the student’s connection to other Jews through the text. Rebecca explains:

> Literate is understanding the foundations of, um, Rabbinic Judaism so that, you know, when somebody says to them, “Come to my seder [traditional Passover ritual and dinner],” they don’t think, like, that they understand, sort of, that this is a historical moment that they are a part of, and it’s a historical moment that developed through time.

This code is also connected to the earlier-mentioned code of *Lifelong Learning* as text skills are an important component contributing to a student’s ongoing learning as Joseph explains that one of his goals in the classroom is to enable students with the text skills needed to be someone who “reads and studies texts...even after graduation.” For these three teacher participants, an important part of connecting to Judaism is to be literate in the subject, with the skills and background to understand the implications of what they are learning and to continue learning after their time at Jewish day school.
Themes and sub-categories connected to first sub-question. When analyzing the data, the researcher determined the following themes and sub-categories to be related to the first sub-question which asked about how the participants’ understandings and perceptions regarding a successful Jewish day school graduate affected their goals in the classroom.

Connections with Students. Connections with Students emerged as one of the main themes connected to the first sub-question. The theme Connections with Students refers to the teacher’s building a relationship with the students and features the sub-categories of Teacher, Subject, Individual, and Anti-Academics. All four of the participants emphasized connecting with their students as a major goal in the classroom. Joseph, discussed that connecting with his students was important to him in order to get to know the whole student, beyond just his class: “Well, you know, to me a student is more than my class and more than academics, so to really see the whole student, that community is really needed, and I like to be a part of it.” Orit also emphasized the value of connecting with students, stating “I must say that over the years, my bonding with my students and knowing that I am not only their teacher but am also their friend, their counselor, and they become my friends too” is the most important and enjoyable part of teaching. Orit added that “you have to create personal connections with the students in order to grab their attention and in order for them to know that you are important and you are there for them.” Through making personal connections with students by engaging them in discussions outside of class and taking an interest in their extra-curricular lives, the teachers learned more about their students and were better able to engage them in learning.

Teacher. The first sub-category within the theme of Connections with Students is Teacher which refers to why the teacher participants became a teacher and/or how the participant views teaching and the process of teaching. While some of the teachers, such as Daniel and Rebecca,
felt very passionately about their roles as Jewish Studies teachers, others, such as Orit and Joseph, were drawn more to the profession with the specific subject being of less importance to them. Regardless, none of the participants seemed to make a conscious decision to become a Jewish Studies teacher. Instead, Daniel said, “It’s always been a part of me,” and Rebecca added a similar sentiment, stating, “It’s sort of in my blood. You know, I cannot, at this point, I’ve been doing it for so long that I cannot imagine doing anything else… And, also, I find that it grows me.” Orit, similarly, discussed that she was inspired at an early age by her teachers and she “wanted to follow in their footsteps.” In terms of subject matter, however, becoming a Jewish Studies teacher was less of a decision and more of a natural step in her teaching career. Joseph echoed Orit’s feelings about the specific subject material, indicating that the specific subject material was not important to him. Like the other participants, however, being a teacher came naturally for Joseph:

I think I’ve always been a teacher. I mean, looking back, I didn’t actually decide to do this until I was like 30 years old. Um, but, um, I mean looking back, I realize I’ve always been involved in some form of education… and I just, you know, have always liked, always gravitated toward being a teacher, and even though I didn’t know it, I just sort of fell into this chapter.

For each of the participants, becoming a teacher of Jewish Studies was a part of a progression that stemmed from their own values and experiences, affecting their outlook on the subject matter and the role of the teacher.

The category of Teacher also encompasses the methodology the teacher participants used in determining their goals for the classroom, usually reflecting a personal process that was not necessarily related to the school’s goals. Joseph admitted, “I do have an agenda” that impacts his
classroom and how he teaches, adding that this agenda reflects “how I would like to learn or how I did learn or would have liked to have learned.” The personal nature of classroom goals was also expressed by Rebecca as she explains that in order to determine her classroom goals, “I started by figuring out what is important to me as a Jew” and then moving onto the community. Daniel, also, considers his goals to be part of a personal process and challenge, saying, “The challenge is to turn them around and make them think that they want to do this and find the connection and create it into a kind of a challenging scenario where they want to take part in the class.” Orit added onto the personal nature of goal setting, expressing that her personal goals are not always in line with or supported by the school, commenting that in her time as ECJDS, she felt a shift in school priorities that was not aligned with her own beliefs, saying, “The emphasis was much more on general studies, and Judaic studies were almost like bastards, and you probably felt it.” For each of these teachers, the process of goal setting was very personal and connected to their own identity, independent of the school’s priorities.

In addition to providing valuable information about the perspectives of the individual participants, some of the data within this sub-category of Teacher also served as background information about the participant. This information was helpful in describing the participants and their demographics and understanding their specific outlooks.

Subject. Subject, the second sub-category within the theme of Connections with Students, refers to the role of the subject material taught by the teacher participant, both from the perspective of the teacher and the student. Among the responses related to this sub-category, the participants remarked that the topic of Judaic Studies is unique in that it offers different challenges and opportunities than the secular studies in terms of actual subject material, approach to teaching, and also in terms of attitude toward the subject from different stakeholders. Daniel
focused on the process of teaching and choosing material to teach, stating that, “In Judaic studies, since we don’t have to cover everything, and whatever we do, we do, and whatever we don’t…it gives a chance to carefully choose what to cover and to make the most of it.” Also related to teaching processes, Rebecca added that in Jewish Studies, success is less related to the specific material and really is when the students go “beyond what I wanted to convey to have their own self-discoveries” rather than simply learning the material of the class. Orit, however, shared a specific subject-related challenge based on her experience regarding attitudes from stakeholders and its effect of the subject material, saying:

Students are less and less interested in the study of the Judaic Studies…The emphasis was much more on general studies, and Judaic Studies were almost like bastards…In retrospect, we had kids that were much more interested in Judaic Studies in the past than now. Now they are interested because I am there.

Joseph also focused on the role of the teacher, stating that, “What I teach is kind of secondary. I mean, I think it’s kind of nice that I like Judaic Studies, so I get to teach it,” echoing Orit in emphasizing that teaching is more about the teacher as a person and guide to gaining knowledge, skills, and values than the subject material, with each providing different opportunities to connect to the students and connect the students to the subject material and the lessons that can be learned from it. Each of the teacher participants highlighted that Jewish Studies is distinct and unique among the subjects taught at Jewish day schools due to the nature of the subject and the associated goals, the methodology and process of developing and teaching curriculum, and the attitudes of the various stakeholders regarding the importance of the subject, which all contribute to the teachers’ perceptions and understandings regarding success and the development of their goals in the classroom aimed at fostering that student success.
Individual. Another sub-category within the theme of Connection with Students, Individual refers to the differentiation between goals for individual students and goals for a full class, emphasizing the value of personalized goals for students. During his interview, Daniel highlighted the importance of working with individual students in order to facilitate each student reaching his highest level of achievement possible, stating that success means “personal achievement of students to goals that were set, if it’s class goals or if it’s individual goals, which may not necessarily be the same thing…for me, success is, is an individual basis needs.” Through his student connections, Daniel is able to determine what success is for each of his students and adjust his goals accordingly.

Anti-Academics. The final sub-category within the theme of Connection with Students, Anti-Academics refers to the teacher participant’s de-emphasis of grades, admission to and attendance of prestigious colleges, or other traditional academic benchmarks. Joseph explained his philosophy relating to traditional measures of academic success, stating, “I am trying to show that I don’t think you’re any better than anyone else just because you happen to be going to college or even because you happened to get a good grade.” Orit echoed Joseph, saying “You cannot weigh success in grades…and I don’t think that college is the end of everything, not in today’s world.” Orit added that, for her, rather than focus on grades and similar immediate measures of success, “You have to give success a few years to look back and see where your students are in their personal life, where they are in their professional life, what impact did the subject that you taught them make on them.” Orit, therefore, set a tone in her classroom reflecting this attitude, explaining:
Every student that came to my class knew that only an idiot fails, and none of them is an idiot, right? I did everything to make sure that they don’t fail, and, you know what? I don’t care about the grades that they get.

Daniel, similarly, stated that in his classroom, a student could be successful and should feel successful “regardless of what his grade was.” For these teacher participants, success is not necessarily measured by grades and college admissions, and they worked to convey that to their students. This sub-category also pertains to S2 as it helps to explain the difficulty in teachers’ assessing and measuring their success.

*Cognition*. The second theme that emerged from the data related to the first sub-question is *Cognition* which refers to the general learning experience and the teacher’s aim for the students to be able to think, ask questions, and apply the classroom material to their own lives while in the class. This code also includes the students’ going beyond the course material and teacher expectations to make it their own. The theme of *Cognition* also includes *Connections to Other Jews* as a sub-category which also pertains to S2. Daniel explained his philosophy of teaching and encouraging students to think saying the following:

Especially in Jewish texts, you find a lot concepts and a lot of ideas that, the text that was written a long, long time ago, and may not seem necessarily relevant to our lives, but to find ways to make it a) adaptable and understood in modern day society, and b) to make it relevant to, ah, to students who may not necessarily be age appropriate or may not have the skills to understand the text, make it in a way that they can connect to it and find some way that they will be able to use the text in their own life…The challenge is to turn them around and make them think that they want to do this and find the connection and create it into a kind of a challenging scenario where they want to take part in the class
debate as opposed to just sitting on the side and not wanting to take part in it...They are sidetracking and stuff like that. In most cases, I will go with it because they are interested in the material, and they are making connections, and they are building on it. That’s okay with me, and that’s my way of teaching is connecting their associations with the text.

Orit shares parts of Daniel’s philosophy, sharing that teaching Judaic Studies is:

Building their soul, allowing them to analyze, fly with their thoughts wherever they want, okay? Let them take them to wherever they want because that’s what the Talmud [part of the Oral Torah/Bible] is, and that’s what the Responsa [Rabbinic discussion of questions and answers] is, and that is what the Tosefta [additional commentaries on traditional texts] is, you know? This is true Judaism - let them think...creatively.

Similarly, Rebecca aims for her students to “have a safe place where they can ask questions. I won’t always give them answers, in fact most of the time, there are no answers, but where they can begin to ask and garner answers that work for them.” For each of these participants, getting the students to think about the material and apply it to their lives is a primary goal for the classroom.

*Connection to Other Jews.* Within the theme of *Cognition*, the sub-category *Connection to Other Jews* refers to the teacher’s aim for the students to understand their connection and obligation to other Jews in the world and in history, considering themselves part of that history. Joseph vocalized this goal, saying that he aims for his students to understand that “you are, you can be part of this process too. Instead of saying, you know, ‘Why should I do this just because a Rabbi told me to do it?’ understand why the Rabbi told you to do it,” emphasizing the student’s place in the line of Jewish history and tradition. The code *Connection to Other Jews* also pertains to S2 as several participants mentioned it as a form of assessment.
Themes and sub-categories connected to second sub-question. When analyzing the data, the researcher determined the following themes and sub-categories to be related to the second sub-question, which asked about how the teacher participants measure their own success in reference to their goals.

Immeasurable. A theme that ran throughout the data, especially related to the second sub-question was that of Immeasurable, which is used to designate participants’ perceptions related to difficulty in assessment related to their goals, indicating that true, quantitative measurement is not possible. When asked about measures of success, each of the participants responded with stories and examples from their experience. Daniel started, “There was this student…,” and Orit often answered questions with “I’ll tell you a story….” Joseph, similarly, shared “So this kid, B-…” as well as the following story:

You know, the other day in my 11th grade class, um, I am trying to remember why they did this, but for some reason, a couple of kids got up and started singing ‘Simin Tov u’Mazel Tov’ [a traditional Jewish song of congratulations], and they were kidding around, but I realized that, like, where else would they be able to do this?

Rebecca also shared stories and examples in response to several questions, and when answering a question about measuring success stated, “I think some of it’s immeasurable...the long term, it, because, you know, it’s only by accident that I’ll hear...,” sharing a difficulty in assessing teaching success due to the long term and unquantifiable effects of teaching. Rebecca also added that “it’s easier to measure my failure than my success” because many of the assessment measures that are available or being implemented by the school are geared towards checking for failure. Additionally, the code of Anti-Academics, listed under S1, related to this theme, indicating that the teacher participants did not necessarily use traditional academic measures to
evaluate student progress. For these teacher participants, their success as pertains to their goals related to their perceptions of a successful Jewish day school graduate is immeasurable except through non-systematic and inconsistent means, preventing true assessment.

**Student Impact.** Another theme related to the second sub-question is that of Student Impact, which refers to the teacher’s or subject’s having an impact on the students, engaging and exciting them in their learning. The theme of Student Impact also includes the sub-category Long. Joseph expressed a hope that he has an impact on students, and one student in particular, stating, “I felt like part of his success story, and, you know in little ways… I felt like I was able to facilitate that [his success and feeling of comfort], and that was really terrific.” Daniel shared a story of student impact regarding a specific student stating the following:

Both the student and her parents wrote me that my way of teaching completely changed that student. She opened up. She felt more confident. She was able to contribute more, and that’s a student who was super anxious about everything and didn’t think that she could do anything. Even the parents said that, at the end of the year, because of my class, she had a really good year in all areas.

For these teacher participants, having an impact on students was a measure of teaching success.

**Long.** Within the theme of Student Impact, the sub-category Long refers to differentiating short term and long term goals, emphasizing the importance and value of lasting effects on students. Although data within this sub-category includes the concept of lifelong learning as a long term goal, it also includes other long term measures of success such as community involvement, practice, and development of Jewish identity. In describing her goals, Rebecca differentiated her short term goals and long term goals. Orit stressed the value of long term
successes, saying that, “For me, success is measured years later” and elaborating with the following:

You have to give success a few years to look back and see where your students are in their personal life, where they are in their professional life, what impact did the subject that you taught them make on them. A successful graduate is somebody that, years later, looks at his/her high school education and feels good about themselves. You cannot ask a high school student to measure success or a high school graduate… but the truth is, you have to wait for years to know if anything registered.

Similarly, Daniel emphasized the value of long terms success and measurement of success, stating:

Maybe 20 years from now, they’ll be more involved. If you create something negative for them now, the last thing they’ll want to do 20 years from now is go back and relive that trauma or that negative experience, and that completely shuts them down for life, and that’s a shame because one person can change their identity or their perspective, not only now, but for their entire future.

One aspect of measuring success as pertains to teacher goals that makes the measurement so difficult is the long term nature of that success in different areas.

**Attitude.** The final theme related to the second sub-question is that of *Attitude*, which refers to the student’s attitude towards the subject and class as a measurement of success. Within this category is the sub-category of *Apply*. Additionally, the sub-categories of *Terms* and *Customs* as listed under R1 and *Connections with Other Jews* as listed under S1 also contribute to this theme. Daniel describes the value and importance of attitude as a measure of success by describing his aim to “get students to have a positive experience in Jewish text, for them not to
be scared of Rashi [a traditional commentator], not to be scared of opening a Chumash [the first five books of the Torah/Bible] and being afraid that they won’t understand it” and his measure of that success in seeing the following:

If they [the students] walk in with a smile in the morning…seeing students if they seem engaged and want to learn or if they are coming in looking depressed and like “we don’t want to be here,” and stuff like that…and then the level of discussion in class. If it’s a high level of discussion in class...if they want to learn, and if they are interested, the level of conversation going really high...when the students want to be there because they are interested and when the students just don’t care...I think, for me, it’s just clear. I can tell when they’re on and when they’re not.

Although subjective, attitude can serve as an indicator to teachers as to how successful they are in accomplishing their goals in the classroom.

Apply. The sub-category Apply emerged within the theme of Attitude and refers to the teachers’ seeing the students apply the class material and learning to other areas of their lives outside of the class and then hearing stories from the students, parents, or other teachers that such application is occurring. Joseph shared his measure of success, stating the following:

I really like it when the kids will come to me and say that they were talking about something in their history classes, and they related it back to something that we learned in my class, so again, you know, using Jewish Studies as a way to explore their identity and relate to the rest of the world.

Similarly, Orit shared her assessment of success, stating that success is:
When a student tells me, “I went home, and I shared what I learned with my parents, and I discussed what I learned years later with my peers, and when I had kids, and they learned what I did, I was so happy that I could help them and talk to them about it.”

Rebecca echoed Joseph and Orit in sharing a measure of success in stating “the fact that he could take whatever knowledge that he gained or didn’t gain and put it into practice and feel like that awakened for him in whatever new situation he was in is wonderful.” For these teacher participants, having evidence of the students’ applying the material outside of the classroom serves as a measure of success.

**Outliers.** Smith et al. (2012), in their discussion of how to conduct analysis of data in IPA studies, state the importance of discussing not only the similarities and convergence points of the data, but also the points at which the data diverges. Tables 4.8, 4.9, and 4.10 show the number of occurrences for each code used as well as in how many of the four participant interview transcripts that code occurred. As shown in these tables, although some themes such as Jewish Identity, Lifelong Learning, Student Connections, Cognition, Immeasurable, Student Impact, and Attitude emerged from the data from each of the four participants, not all themes and sub-categories were included by each participant. Within the sub-categories for Student Connections, for example, both Teacher and Subject were found within each set of data, but the sub-category Individual was unique to only one participant’s data.

Many of these points of divergence can be accounted for by the participants’ individual backgrounds and values and how they are manifested in the classroom. Daniel, having grown up in Israel with a strong emphasis on Zionism and having been educated in the yeshiva system, prioritizes Israel, Hebrew, and text skills in a way that not all of the participants do. Additionally, Daniel values setting individual goals for each student rather than generalizing which is shown in
his practice through his emphasis on encouraging students towards achieving these individual goals. Orit shows a strong focus and emphasis on student connections as a way to relate to the students and make the material resonate with them which is connected to her belief that personal connections are essential for making the subject material relevant to the students. Joseph places a high value on citizenship and patriotism as well as continued learning, all values that he incorporates into his own life through his extracurricular activities and ongoing personal study, and this is shown in his practice through his emphasis on holidays such as Memorial Day and activities such as his annual trip to the local military cemetery. Additionally, Joseph’s interest in the whole student translates into his desire to be involved in the whole school, organizing and attending various activities and programs outside of the classroom. Rebecca emphasizes the students’ having an understanding of their place in tradition and in the greater community as well as a cognizance of their choices, which is reflected in her own actions, processes, and choices regarding curriculum development and refinement. Regarding these processes and choices, Rebecca stated:

I started by figuring out what is important to me as a Jew, then looking around and sort of seeing what is important to other people as Jews, and then what is important to the Jewish community to have as Jews, and then what is important to the greater world that Jews should be.

For Rebecca, as with the other teacher participants, her personal values impact her approach to teaching and priorities in the classroom. As such, although many of the themes and sub-categories consistently emerged from the data, some points of divergence were evident, showing the unique opinions of the teacher participants and further emphasizing the diversity of opinions in the field.
Overview of Findings

As a result of this study, the researcher uncovered several essential findings:

1. Jewish Studies teachers are committed to their craft, advancing themselves through academic study and graduate degrees and also engaging in ongoing learning in order to be best-prepared to teach their classes. As education is a priority in Judaism, this sets an example for the students, encouraging them towards life-long learning through establishing learning as an activity of the social group, as per Social Identity Theory, encouraging the students to then engage in continued study and further establish themselves in the group identity.

2. Jewish Studies teachers are less concerned with traditional academic measures of success for their students, opting, instead, for qualitative, anecdotal measures of success related to student identity. These measures are harder to assess and evaluate, leading to some ambiguity regarding teacher success in achieving the goals they set for their classrooms.

3. Adding to the difficulty in assessing teacher success as relates to classroom goals, Jewish Studies teachers focus on long-term goals addressed in Social Identity Theory that relate to Jewish identity, community involvement, and lifelong learning years after graduation rather than the immediate measures of student success that are more easily assessed. Additionally, each of these areas reflects an ongoing process, rather than a specified ending point, making assessment even more difficult. According to Social Identity Theory, if teachers are successful in instilling and fostering a strong sense of identity in the students, the students’ actions will be in-line with that identity and social group, not just immediately after graduation, but into the future.
4. Jewish Studies teachers focus on cultivating a sense of Jewish identity within their students through skill-development, positive experiences, and student connections, working to form their students into productive members of the Jewish community. This finding is related to Social Identity Theory in that students’ identity is shaped and influenced by the social group with which they affiliate, and they will be more likely to engage in activities that are in-line with that social group.

5. Jewish Studies teachers structure their classroom goals in a way that aims to prepare their students for personal success in the world through strengthening their identity and helping them to navigate multiple identities. As per Social Identity Theory, identity is multidimensional and interacts with the environment.

Chapter Summary

This study explored teacher perceptions and understandings as to what constitutes a successful Jewish day school graduate, including how those perceptions affect teachers’ classroom goals and how those teachers assess their success in the classroom according to these goals. The researcher used the Interpretive Phenomenological Approach for this study, focusing on the stories and experiences of the individual participants, highlighting the exact words of the participants as relevant. Through data collection and analysis, essential themes and findings emerged from the data that provided valuable information towards answering the study research questions.
Chapter Five: Discussion of Findings and Implications for Practice

Introduction

Education, especially among the youth, is a focus of Judaism (Wertheimer, 2005; Sacks, 2012), and Jewish day schools are one potential provider of that education. Many of these Jewish day schools are affiliated with specific denominations such as Orthodox, Conservative, or Reform, providing specific guidelines and desired outcomes for learning. Community Jewish day schools, however, are not under the auspices of any denomination and, therefore, make their own decisions about what to teach, how to teach, and how to measure their successes according to the values and needs of the stakeholders involved. The goal of this study was to focus on one of those stakeholders – the Jewish Studies teacher, seeking to explore the understandings and perceptions of those teachers as to what constitutes a successful community Jewish day school graduate. For this qualitative study, through purposive sampling, the researcher focused on four participants from East Coast Jewish Day School (ECJDS), a large community Jewish day school on the east coast. The close analysis of the data gathered from these teacher participants can lead to a better understanding of the community Jewish day school teacher’s perception of a successful graduate, helping to ensure alignment of vision and program and promoting that vision of success. The purpose of this chapter is to look more closely at the findings of the study through the lens of previous research and to explore the implications for future study and current practice.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this qualitative Interpretative Phenomenological analysis study:
How do Jewish Studies teachers describe their understandings and perceptions as to what constitutes a successful graduate of a community Jewish day school?

Sub-questions:

- How do these understandings and perceptions affect the teachers’ goals in the classroom?
- How do teachers measure their own success in reference to these goals?

Overview and Discussion of Themes and Findings

For this study, in line with Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), the primary source of data was semi-structured, in-depth participant interviews. As such, although the study did include an examination of how the perceptions and beliefs of the teacher participants impact their classrooms, the primary source of data was the participants’ own statements and reported understandings rather than the researcher’s observation of classroom practice. The themes and sub-categories discussed in this study, then, emerged from coding and analysis of that data, based on recurring ideas, concepts, and specific words from the participants. The researcher chose the qualitative approach of IPA because of its alignment with the Interpretive Paradigm, seeking to explore different perspectives rather than to determine ultimate truth. Through the use of IPA, participants were able to freely express their opinions and really tell their stories, allowing for the themes to emerge from reviewing, analyzing, and interpreting their narratives. In the interest of organization, the themes or categories and sub-categories are arranged according to research question. An overview of the themes and sub-categories can be found in Table 5.1.
Table 5.1

Summary of Themes and Sub-Categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Themes or Categories</th>
<th>Sub-Categories (when relevant)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RQ1 - How do Jewish Studies teachers describe their understandings and perceptions as to what constitutes a successful graduate of a community Jewish day school?</td>
<td>JEWISH IDENTITY</td>
<td>COMFORT, CONSCIOUS, WORLD, PERSON</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>COMMUNITY</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LIFELONG LEARNING</td>
<td>ISRAEL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LITERATE</td>
<td>PRAYER, HEBREW, TERMS, CUSTOMS, TEXT SKILLS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S1 - How do these understandings and perceptions affect the teachers’ goals in the classroom?</td>
<td>CONNECTIONS WITH STUDENTS</td>
<td>TEACHER, SUBJECT, INDIVIDUAL, ANTI-ACADEMICS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>COGNITION</td>
<td>CONNECTION TO OTHER JEWS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S2 - How do teachers measure their own success in reference to these goals?</td>
<td>IMMEASURABLE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>STUDENT IMPACT</td>
<td>LONG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ATTITUTDE</td>
<td>APPLY</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Aligned with the Interpretive Paradigm, not all participants shared the same answers related to all of the research questions, but the approach of IPA allowed each individual participant to contribute individually to the data. The discussion presented in this section represents the general thematic findings among the data.

**Discussion of first research question.** The first research question used for this study asked how Jewish Studies teachers describe their understandings and perceptions as to what constitutes a successful graduate of a community Jewish day school. For the teacher participants involved in this study, a successful Jewish day school graduate would be described as someone with a strong sense of personal Jewish identity who is comfortable
with his Jewish identity, conscious of the decisions he makes related to that identity, able to function and thrive as a Jew in the greater world, and demonstrates moral and ethical behavior. A successful Jewish day school graduate would also appreciate and value community, continue his Jewish learning after graduation, have a connection to Israel, and show different aspects of Jewish literacy such as familiarity with prayer, Hebrew, terms, customs, and traditional texts. Because of the general lack of research and literature focused on the teacher’s perspective in Jewish day school settings, this study is of great value in illuminating that perspective. Aligned with Social Identity Theory, the results of the study emphasize Jewish identity and the behaviors, actions, and skills associated with a strong Jewish identity, highlighting the role of Jewish identity in the curriculum at community Jewish day schools.

**Discussion of first sub-question.** The first sub-question used for this study examined how these understandings and perceptions related to a successful Jewish day school graduate affect the teachers’ goals in the classroom. According to the data collected for this study, the main effect of these understandings and perceptions was an emphasis and priority placed upon connections with students, stemming from the motivation and inspiration for the teachers to become teachers in the first place and the attitude of the teachers, students, and other stakeholders regarding the subject material of Jewish Studies. The teacher participants all valued their connections with their students and saw these connections as a way to get to know the whole student, connect the student to the material, engage and motivate individual students, and empower the students towards their identity formation. Because of the emphasis on connections and personal achievement related to identity formation, the teacher participants did not focus their classroom goals on traditional measures of success such as
grades and college admissions, instead focusing on encouraging and motivating the students to think about the material, apply the material to their own lives, and use the material as a way to feel connected to other Jews. According to Social Identity Theory, the student’s feeling connected to other Jews would lead them towards actions that are in-line with that social group, further encouraging and strengthening their identity. In general, Jewish day schools have smaller class sizes than public schools and an added focus on school community, allowing for these teacher connections to be more easily created and maintained. Additionally, often Jewish Studies courses are structured differently than secular studies classes without State standards and with a different grading protocol, allowing for more academic flexibility and also allowing for the emphasis to be on identity formation rather than traditional measure of academic success. In light of the teachers’ goals for their classroom, these differences should continue to exist, allowing for Jewish Studies teachers to continue to develop student connections and foster identity formation.

**Discussion of second sub-question.** The second sub-question used for this study explored how teachers measure their own success in reference to the goals they set for their classrooms related to their understandings and perceptions of a successful Jewish day school graduate. For all of the teacher participants interviewed for this study, authentic measurement of success was not possible, and the main form of assessment used was anecdotal, and this was also the main format for describing their successes during the participant interviews. Participants shared stories and examples of specific successes, acknowledging that true measurement is difficult as hearing these stories usually occurs by chance, without a systematic method of evaluation. Additionally, as Jewish Studies teachers emphasize the value of text, narratives and lessons within the text, and integration of students
into the tradition of these narratives, they are effectively weaving themselves and their students into the text through their stories. Within this anecdotal form of measurement, teachers focused on student impact, especially with long-term effects, and student attitude toward the teacher, class, or subject material, encouraging students to apply the subject material to other classes and beyond the classroom. Although the teacher participants were clear about their descriptions of what constitutes a successful Jewish day school graduate and could share experiences related to how they translate that description into goals for their classrooms, measuring their success was more difficult. One reason for the difficulty is the anecdotal nature of their current mode of assessment, and a second difficulty is the long-term nature of lasting student impact and the challenges involved in locating and measuring success years or decades after student graduation. Aspects of success such as a strong sense of Jewish identity, a commitment to lifelong learning, and involvement in community cannot be measured at a specific endpoint as they each reflect an ongoing process in the students’ lives. In light of these difficulties, improved methods of assessment and measuring teacher success should be developed and implemented.

**General discussion of findings.** This study revealed that Jewish Studies teachers are concerned with and committed to fostering identity formation within their students, focusing especially on Jewish identity, and creating productive members of the Jewish community and the greater world. Through student connections and encouraging their students to think, community day school Jewish Studies teachers aim to make traditional Jewish texts relevant to the students in order for these texts to serve as a guide in the students’ identity formation. Of the four participants interviewed for this study, none consciously made a decision to become a Jewish Studies teacher, all sharing that teaching as a profession and Jewish text as
a subject matter were inherently part of them, part of their identities. Because of the vital role of Jewish text in each of the participant’s lives and personal identity formation, they used this as a basis in their teaching and instilling identity into their own students. As one participant, Orit, shared, teaching Jewish Studies to students is akin to “building their soul.”

Use of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Guided by Smith et al. (2012), the researcher used IPA as an approach to data collection, analysis, and interpretation of the participants’ experiences, perceptions, and understandings related to being Jewish Studies teachers. Following one aspect of IPA, idiography, which focuses on the particular, using details and depth rather than quantity, a small sample size of four participants was selected for this study (Smith et al., 2012). Because the researcher built strong rapport with the participants prior to the interviews, the interviews themselves were comfortable and casual, really allowing for the participants to fully express themselves. Additionally, through the use of semi-structured, in-depth interviews, the participants were able to share their stories and really direct the flow of the interviews in order to really share their experiences. Another element of IPA, phenomenology, was essential during data collection and early analysis, directing the researcher to “bracket” all previous knowledge on the subject and all data collected from earlier participants in order to focus on the individual perceptions (Husserl, 1982).

A final element of IPA, hermeneutics, came into play during later stages of analysis and interpretation as, according to Schleiermacher (1998), through hermeneutics, a researcher may be able to offer perspective that the participant is not able to offer. Additionally, the element of hermeneutics helped to connect the research approach to the study subject matter and the study participants themselves as hermeneutics involves the art of
interpretation, and interpretation is essential to being a Jewish Studies teacher. In the classroom, Jewish Studies teachers often work with students on interpreting texts from different perspectives and taking on the hermeneutics of different commentators in order to view those specific texts in different ways. Furthermore, through their own interview responses, the teacher participants demonstrated how their personal hermeneutics affect their perceptions and influence their classrooms by impacting the way they interpret the world around them. With this emphasis placed on interpretation in the field of Jewish education as a whole, the use of IPA for this particular study helped to acknowledge and capitalize on hermeneutics and the art of interpretation throughout the research.

**Use of theoretical framework.** The theoretical framework of Social Identity Theory was adopted for this study in order to guide the research and provide a lens through which to view the data and results. Through this lens of Social Identity Theory, the results of the study clearly showed an emphasis on identity formation and encouraging students towards involvement in Jewish life. The teacher participants viewed a successful Jewish day school graduate as someone who feels comfortable with his Jewish identity and consciously makes decisions in-line with that identity. Social Identity Theory, according to Stryker and Burke (2000) and Ashforth and Mael (1989) states that social identification leads to activities that are in-line with that identity and reinforce that identity. As such, a Jewish day school graduate with a strong sense of Jewish identity will seek a Jewish community and participate in activities that foster his Jewish identity. Trepte (2006) emphasizes the role of that group, or, in this case, Jewish community, on individual behavior. Rosenberg and Gara (1985) and Bronfenbrenner (1979) add, however, that identity is multi-dimensional and reciprocal with the environment. Along these lines, the teacher participants also emphasized an aim for their
students to be able to function and thrive within the greater (mostly non-Jewish) world, living as both a Jew and a citizen of that greater world.

**Connection of findings to earlier research and literature.** Prior to conducting this study, the researcher conducted a comprehensive review of the existing literature (see Chapter 2). Although the literature revealed a major gap related to teacher perspectives, the research related to Jewish identity and other areas is relevant to the study and enhances understanding of the findings.

**Connection of R1 findings to earlier research and literature.** The findings related to the first research question, which asked participants about their perceptions as to what constitutes a successful Jewish day school graduate, were in-line with much of the previous literature.

**Jewish identity.** Teacher participants all prioritized the development of a strong Jewish identity, which was in line with the emphasis on Jewish identity of previous studies (Dushkin & Engelman, 1959; Schiff, 1966; Ackerman, 1969; Weinberger, 1971) and confirmed the connection between Jewish day school education, Jewish learning, and the development of Jewish identity and Jewish actions found by Kelman (1975), Bock (1976, 1977, 1984), Himmelfarb (1977, 1984), Cohen (1988), Paley (1998), Dashefsky and Lebson (2002), Cohen and Kotler-Berkowitz (2004), Bloomberg (2007), and Cohen, Milyavskaya, and Koestner (2009). Additionally, like Himmelfarb (1977) and Charmé and Zelkowicz (2011) showed, the data collected from the participants reflected that consistently defining and measuring that Jewish identity and sense of Jewishness has challenges, with different scholars each defining Jewish identity differently, similar to the different definitions and aspects described by study participants. Furthermore, as mentioned in previous literature
Cooper & Kramer, 2002; Pomson, 2003; Chertok et al., 2007), another focus of the teacher participants is that of fostering student development in a way that will lead them to be productive members of society and be able to thrive in the greater world while still being comfortable with their Judaism and their Jewish identities. In-line with Social Identity Theory, several scholars such as Himmelfarb (1977) and Deci and Ryan (1985, 2000) describe the multi-dimensionality of identity and the different factors that go into developing that identity, which was reflected by the participants in their desire for students to be conscious and aware of their identities and decisions related to Judaism.

Community. Another theme that emerged from the data and was consistent with the literature was that of community and educating students towards valuing community and its impact on the individual. Himmelfarb (1977) similarly, and in-line with Social Identity Theory, connected communal participation and identity, and Wolfson (2013) stressed the importance of building and maintaining communal relationships as a way of staying connected to other Jews and to Judaism itself. The study participants echoed these findings, discussing the value and importance of community as an aspect of a successful Jewish day school graduate.

Lifelong learning. A commitment to lifelong learning was also mentioned by participants as an attribute of a successful Jewish day school graduate, which was in-line with the findings of Himmelfarb (1977) who studied continued learning as a way to measure identity. Teacher participants viewed lifelong learning as a way for students to continue their education and to enrich their lives in a Jewish way after leaving Jewish day school, considering student continued learning as a measure of success.
Israel. Similar to study participants who listed a connection to Israel in their descriptions of a successful Jewish day school graduate, Himmelfarb (1977) also included a connection to Israel as a measure of Jewish identity, and Kardos (2012) described this connection to Israel as an aspect of a successful Jewish day school. Wolfson (2013), likewise, emphasized the importance of a relationship between Jews and Israel as a way of maintaining and strengthening an individual’s connection to Judaism and other Jews around the world.

Literate. Kardos (2010) explained that Jewish schools prepare literate Jews, and three of the four participants agreed with her, listing literacy as an element that makes a successful Jewish day school graduate. However, the data did not show a consensus among the participants as to what constitutes a literate Jew, with each participant describing some combination of different aspects such as familiarity with Hebrew (like Coates, 2001 mentions), prayer, terms, and customs as well as possessing strong text skills. This lack of consensus is similar to that found in previous research.

Table 5.2 shows the themes and sub-categories that emerged from the data related to the first research question along with connections to relevant existing literature.
Table 5.2

Connection of Themes for Research Question to Related Literature

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes or Categories/ Sub-Categories</th>
<th>Selected Related Prior Research and Literature</th>
<th>Connection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>RQ1 - How do Jewish Studies teachers describe their understandings and perceptions as to what constitutes a successful graduate of a community Jewish day school?</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>JEWISH IDENTITY</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>The connection between Jewish education and Jewish identity has been the focus on various studies over the last several decades. Different scholars have used different definitions and measures of Jewish identity, with no consensus on the subject. Similarly, the teacher participants of the study emphasized Jewish identity as a measure of success for Jewish day school education, each with his or her own idea of what exactly Jewish identity entails. Additionally, in-line with Social Identity Theory, several scholars indicated the multi-dimensionality of identity and connection to larger social group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>COMFORT</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CONSCIOUS WORLD</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PERSON</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Selected Related Prior Research and Literature</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Dushkin &amp; Engelman (1959), Schiff (1966), Ackerman (1969), Weinberger (1971) – Focus on textual achievement tests to measure Jewish identity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Bock (1977) – Jewish schools promote Jewish self-esteem and encourage students to act in Jewish ways</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Himmelfarb (1977) – Emphasizes problem of definition and means of measuring identity; identity is multi-dimensional</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Deci &amp; Ryan (1985, 2000) – Self-determination affects how students choose aspects of identity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Paley (1998) – Jewish learning as establishing Jewish identity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Cooper &amp; Kramer (2002) – Goal for Jewish education to prepare students to live Jewish lives in American society</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Pomson (2003) – Goal for Jewish day schools shifted to preparing students to be productive members of society</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Bloomberg (2007) – Goals of Jewish education to impact values and enhance Jewish identity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Chertok et al. (2007) – Goals for day schools include success in secular world, involvement in Jewish life, and learning values</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Cohen, Milyavskaya, &amp; Koestner (2009) – Jewish schooling supplements what used to occur at home in order to instill Jewish identity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Charné &amp; Zelkowicz (2011) – Shift to more fluid definitions of Jewishness, identity includes relationship to Jewish people</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Himmelfarb (1977) – Related participation in Jewish organizations and community-oriented actions to identity</td>
<td></td>
<td>In-line with the literature, community involvement emphasized by the teacher participants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Wolfson (2013) – Stresses the importance of building and maintaining communal relationships</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LIFELONG LEARNING</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Like scholars, participants pointed to lifelong learning as a measure of success.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ISRAEL</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Connection to Israel was emphasized by teacher participants as a measure of success, which is in line with scholarly opinions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LITERATE PRAYER</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher participants emphasized value of educating towards Jewish literacy, with no consensus as to what that entails within the literature.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>HEBREW TERMS</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>CUSTOMS</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>TEXT SKILLS</strong></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Connection of S1 findings to earlier research and literature. The findings related to the first sub-question, which asked participants about how their understandings and perceptions related to a successful Jewish day school graduate were supported by the existing literature.

Connections with students. All four teacher participants emphasized connections with students as an integral aspect of their roles as Jewish Studies teachers, infusing their own lives with the lives of the students and taking an interest in the students’ extra-curricular interests. The teachers who participated in this study aim to promote student growth and transformation in all areas, which is consistent with earlier findings (Serow, Eaker, & Forrest, 1994; Younger, Brindley, Pedder, & Hagger, 2004). They also use their relationships with the students as a conduit to connect them with the material of their courses. As Wolfson (2013) stated, personal relationships are essential to connecting to Judaism, and Jewish day school provides the opportunity for the students to feel connected while still developing their autonomy (Cohen, Milyavskaya, & Koestner, 2009). Additionally, in-line with the findings of Friedman (1984), Coll (2007), and Salomon (2010), the teacher participants all hold Judaism and its different elements to be very much a part of their lives, influencing their identity and the decisions that they make on a regular basis, including their goals in the classroom and approach to teaching (Butler, 2012).

Cognition. Another goal of the teacher participants in the study which is also in-line with the literature is that of encouraging the students to think about the material, apply it to their own lives, and use it as a basis for connecting with other Jews. Kardos (2010) named both students’ connecting with Jews around the world and thinking about themselves, other people, and God in a Jewish way as goals for Jewish education. Additionally, Wolfson (2013) stressed the importance of connections and relationships between Jews in effective Jewish education,
agreeing with the teacher participants who listed such connections between their students and other Jews across geography and time as a goal.

Table 5.3 shows the themes and sub-categories that emerged from the data related to the first sub-question along with connections to relevant existing literature.

Table 5.3

Connection of Themes for Sub-Question 1 to Related Literature

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes or Categories/Sub-Categories</th>
<th>Selected Related Prior Research and Literature</th>
<th>Connection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S1 - How do these understandings and perceptions affect the teachers’ goals in the classroom?</td>
<td>• Friedman (1984) – Jewish Studies teachers continue their own learning while teaching • Serow, Eaker, &amp; Forrest (1994) – Teachers are likely to want to promote both academic and personal development in students • Younger, Brindley, Pedder, &amp; Hagger (2004) – Teachers are committed to transforming students • Coll (2007) – Jewish Studies teachers’ identities ingrained in the subject • Cohen, Milyavskaya, &amp; Koestner (2009) – Jewish day school provides opportunity for students to feel connected and develop autonomy • Salomon (2010) – Those closely connected to Judaism personally are more likely to enter profession of Jewish Studies teacher • Butler (2012) – Teaching is interpersonal; teachers’ goals relate to roles and approach to instruction • Wolfson (2013) – Relationships are essential to connecting to Judaism.</td>
<td>Similar to the findings of scholars, for the teacher participants, Jewish Studies are very much a part of their lives, leading them to become teachers and pushing them to continue their own learning. Additionally, Jewish Studies teachers seek close connections with their students, helping them to connect to the material.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONNECTIONS WITH STUDENTS</td>
<td>• Friedman (1984) – Jewish Studies teachers continue their own learning while teaching • Serow, Eaker, &amp; Forrest (1994) – Teachers are likely to want to promote both academic and personal development in students • Younger, Brindley, Pedder, &amp; Hagger (2004) – Teachers are committed to transforming students • Coll (2007) – Jewish Studies teachers’ identities ingrained in the subject • Cohen, Milyavskaya, &amp; Koestner (2009) – Jewish day school provides opportunity for students to feel connected and develop autonomy • Salomon (2010) – Those closely connected to Judaism personally are more likely to enter profession of Jewish Studies teacher • Butler (2012) – Teaching is interpersonal; teachers’ goals relate to roles and approach to instruction • Wolfson (2013) – Relationships are essential to connecting to Judaism.</td>
<td>A major goal in the classrooms of the teacher participants is for the students to think about the material, connecting it to their lives, and connecting them to other Jews, which is in-line with the literature that points to a need for students to think about different aspects of Judaism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COGNITION CONNECTION TO OTHER JEWS</td>
<td>• Kardos (2010) – Jewish schools should instill graduates with a connection to Jews around the world and also enable students to think about themselves/people/God in a Jewish way while providing substantive and relevant education • Wolfson (2013) – Stresses the importance of Jews’ feeling a connection and relationship to other Jews</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Connection of S2 findings to earlier research and literature. The findings related to the second sub-question, which asked participants how they measure their success in reference to the
goals as they relate to their understandings of a successful Jewish day school graduate supported and enhanced previous research.

*Immeasurable.* A theme that arose from the data of each participant was that of the challenges and immeasurability of success as relates to these specific teacher goals. Previous research (Bloomberg, 2007) has also discussed the difficulty in measuring success of goals related to important areas such as Jewish identity. Scholars such as Wertheimer (2009) have indicated, however, that although difficult, establishing clear goals and means of evaluating is essential to ensuring education success. Although some suggestions have been made as to protocols of assessment (Fisher, 2010), as the teacher participants indicated, the area of measurement of success is still a weakness in the field, leaving all teachers to set for themselves means of assessing their success, usually without any reliable means to do so.

*Student impact.* One way that the teacher participants chose to measure their success was by looking at the impact that they and their classes have had on the students, which is in-line with the research regarding some of the potential influences of Jewish education. Reeve (2002), for example, says that teachers help to internalize important values in youth, showing one potential way that teachers can impact students. A difficulty in using student impact as a means of assessment, however, lies in the long-term nature of student impact. Although Chertok et al. (2007) were able to track college students as a way of measuring impact of Jewish day school, Bloomberg (2007) echoes the difficulty experienced by the teachers, sharing that information about the long-term impact of Jewish learning is rare, especially when looking beyond the college years.

*Attitude.* Another way that the teacher participants indicated that they measure their successes is by gauging student attitude towards the material learned in class and the application
Kash (2012) found that student attitude is actually a strong indicator as to how the Jewish education will impact the student in the future, as student satisfaction with their Jewish education is directly tied to the impact that education has on shaping their future Jewish identity, reinforcing the insights of the participants.

Table 5.4 shows the themes and sub-categories that emerged from the data related to the second sub-question along with connections to relevant existing literature.

**Table 5.4**

*Connection of Themes for Sub-Question 1 to Related Literature*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes or Categories/Sub-Categories</th>
<th>Selected Related Prior Research and Literature</th>
<th>Connection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S2 - How do teachers measure their own success in reference to these goals?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| IMMEASURABLE | • Bloomberg (2007) – Questions still exist in Jewish day schools about consistency of goals, means of measurement, and potential impact on Jewish identity  
• Wertheimer (2009) – Clear goals and means of evaluating is essential for educational success  
• Fisher (2010) – Suggests specific parameters for evaluation | In line with the literature that emphasizes a lack in clear assessment techniques, without a different method, each of the participants used anecdotal and inconsistent means of assessing their success related to goals. |
| STUDENT IMPACT LONG | • Reeve (2002) – Teachers help to internalize important values in youth  
• Bloomberg (2007) – Lack of information about long-term impact of Jewish learning on learners  
• Chertok et al. (2007) – Tracked college students as a way to measure impact of Jewish day school, noting that they stay engaged in Judaism | Student impact, especially long term impact was emphasized by the teacher participants as a means of measuring success, though scholars struggle to measure this impact past college. |
| ATTITUDE APPLY | • Kash (2012) – Student’s satisfaction towards Jewish education shapes future Jewish identity | Teacher participants indicated that they use student attitude and application of learned material as measures of success, which is consistent with scholars who point to the impact of positive mindset on identity. |
**Discrepancies between research findings and existing literature.** Although many of the themes that were addressed in the literature emerged from the data of this study, some were lacking. For example, none of the teacher participants mentioned Jewish practice, faith, or observance when describing a successful community Jewish day school graduate despite its presence in the literature. Perhaps this lack is due to the philosophy of a community school which promotes all forms of Jewish observance and belief, avoiding any specific doctrines. Another theme that was present in the literature but not in the data of the study was that of strong secular academics. Again, none of the teacher participants in this study mentioned the theme of secular academics or secular success when addressing the idea of a successful Jewish day school graduate. The teacher participants did, however, include the student’s being successful in the greater world, so perhaps they considered secular academic success to be a part of this theme.

**Credibility and Trustworthiness**

The concepts of validity and reliability are applicable not only to quantitative studies, but also to qualitative studies so long as they are evaluated according to relevant, appropriate criteria in line with the type of study (Smith et al., 2012). According to Golafshani (2003), one change from quantitative research to qualitative consists of, rather than using the common research terms reliability and validity, discussing the credibility and trustworthiness of the study in qualitative research. For this particular qualitative study, the researcher addressed the concept of credibility through the adaptation of the IPA approach, following the guidelines for data collection, analysis, and interpretation set forth by Smith et al. (2012) in order to explore the understandings and perceptions of Jewish Studies teachers as they pertain to a successful Jewish day school graduate. Through following this approach, the study parameters achieved a high level of credibility. The researcher addressed the concept of trustworthiness by building a rapport with
the participants in order to collect precise and thorough data and accurately transcribing the
interviews and performing member checks to confirm accuracy in order to ensure that the data to
be analyzed correctly portrayed the participants’ words.

Additionally, the researcher used Yardley’s (2000) four principles for assessing quality in
qualitative research: sensitivity to context, commitment and rigor, transparency and coherence,
and impact and importance.

**Sensitivity to context.** Sensitivity to context can refer to showing sensitivity to the
subject being studied, the participants, the social situations involved, the current literature, or the
data obtained from the participants. Through the use of IPA, the researcher chose to focus on a
small number of participants and was able to partake in close engagement with the participants,
allowing for a high level of sensitivity to the participants. Additionally, through building rapport
with the participants and conducting the interviews in convenient locations and convenient times,
the researcher showed sensitivity to context. Through close, careful data analysis, the researcher
showed sensitivity toward the subject matter and the data collected. This sensitivity to the data
was then continued through the analysis, interpretation, and write-up of the study through the use
of the participants’ actual words, continuing to give the participants a voice and allowing the
reader to confirm the interpretations and findings of the researcher. Finally, sensitivity to context
is shown through the researcher’s familiarity with and use of the existing literature, situating the
current study within that literature.

**Commitment and rigor.** Commitment refers to the degree of attentiveness and care
shown during data collection and analysis, and rigor refers to the thoroughness of the study. The
researcher showed a high level of commitment throughout the in-depth interviews, ensuring the
participants’ comfort and allowing the participants sufficient time and opportunity to tell their
stories as they desired. The researcher also achieved a high level of rigor through carefully selecting participants in-line with the guidelines set forth by Smith et al. (2012) and then conducting interviews complete with appropriate probes and follow-up questions. The level of analysis undertaken by the researcher also demonstrated rigor through the various steps meant to ensure the themes would emerge from the data, including interpretation of the individual sets of data and the themes that connect the participants.

**Transparency and coherence.** Transparency refers to how clear the steps of analysis are described in the study write-up, and coherence refers to the logic involved in the study, findings, and write-up. The researcher attained transparency by carefully and thoroughly describing each step of the data collection and analysis, including tables as relevant in order to enhance transparency (see Chapter 4). The researcher also worked towards coherence through careful outlining, drafting, and editing of the study write-up, including the definition of any terms that may be unfamiliar to the reader (see Chapter 1 – Definition of Terms). Additionally, the researcher addressed the concept of coherence through connecting the study findings to the theoretical framework and the existing literature as well as aligning both the study and the write-up with IPA methodology.

**Impact and importance.** Impact and importance refers to a study’s relevance and impact. According to Smith et al. (2012), when discussing a study, “a test of its real validity lies in whether it tells the reader something interesting, important, or useful” (p. 183). The researcher selected the topic of this study based on a gap in the literature, and the results of the study are useful to the field of Jewish education. Through the write-up of the study, the researcher aims to discuss and elucidate the importance of the study and the implications of its findings, which should be interesting to those within the field, if not others as well.
**Additional steps towards credibility and trustworthiness.** Through the researcher’s following the IPA guidelines and adhering to a strict protocol of data collection, transcription, and analysis, the probability of a similar study achieving the same results and findings is high. According to Golafshani (2003), this feasibility of replication for a similar study would cause this study to be considered reliable. Also, as the results are applicable and transferable to the understandings and perceptions of other Jewish Studies teachers in community Jewish day schools, the level of reliability is heightened.

In addition to measures taken to ensure credibility and trustworthiness during recruitment, data collection, analysis and interpretation, and the write-up of the study, the researcher also employed both a peer review and member checks of the findings to ensure that the findings were reliable. Smith et al. (2012) suggest the use of an independent audit as a means of checking that the results of the study are in-line with the data gathered. For this study, the researcher used a peer involved in Jewish education but not day school education as an auditor requesting that she review the procedure, data, analysis, and findings to ensure that they were all aligned. The peer review also helped to ensure that the researcher’s bias and assumed knowledge did not influence the findings of the study. After reviewing the study write-up, the peer auditor confirmed that the findings were consistent with the data and analysis. As a final step, the researcher sent a summary of the findings (see Appendix E) to the teacher participants in order to ensure that the findings of the study were supported by their perceptions and understandings, confirming their experiences were accurately interpreted. In each case, the participants confirmed that the findings were in-line with their understandings and perceptions, adding to the credibility and trustworthiness of the study.
Areas of Vulnerability and Limitations

Although various measures were taken in order to ensure a high level of credibility and trustworthiness for this study, certain areas of vulnerability and limitation emerged as the study was designed, executed, and completed.

From the onset of the study, the researcher was aware that the transferability of the results of the study would be limited due to the specific nature of the topic. This study explored a community Jewish day school, which is different from a denominational school and is different from schools that are not Jewish day schools. Furthermore, the participants were all from one specific school, a large community Jewish day school, referred to here as East Coast Jewish Day School, in one specific area of the country. As such, the themes and findings of this study, though relevant to other educational settings, especially other Jewish Studies departments within community Jewish day schools, could be thought to be specific to only this one school.

Additionally, the nature of an IPA study emphasizes in-depth research and interpretation focusing on a small number of participants, in this case four participants. These participants were chosen through purposive sampling as they represented a relatively homogenous sample, all being Jewish Studies teachers being in at least their third year of teaching at East Coast Jewish Day School, each with understandings and perceptions to share related to the topic of research. This small number of homogenous participants serves to illuminate the specific experiences and understandings of these participants, but it may further prevent the transferability of the findings.

Although the above limitations do pose a challenge to the transferability of the results of the study, general and significant themes of value for the field of education, specifically Jewish education, emerged from the data related to goals and perceptions of success of Jewish education, specifically in the context of Jewish day schools.
Another potential area of vulnerability is that of privacy and confidentiality. Although various steps were taken in order to ensure the confidentiality of the participants’ identities, including the use of pseudonyms for both the participants and the site and not providing specifics about the identities of each participant, participants may still have withheld some information they felt would be harmful to them if they were identified as a participant. The researcher made an effort to ensure the participants’ comfort before, during, and after the study, and the participants all volunteered to be participants, knowing they could end their participation without repercussions at any time, so there is only a small chance that participant concern over confidentiality factored into the study.

One final area of vulnerability is that of the role of the researcher and researcher bias. The researcher was originally drawn to this topic of research due to her connection to Jewish education, specifically community Jewish day school education, and she selected the particular area of success of a graduate based on her own interest in the subject. The researcher attempted to limit the effect of any bias through stating and acknowledging any personal connection to the topic and bias through the Positionality Statement (see Chapter 1), in line with the Interpretive Paradigm, and considering this potential bias throughout the research methodology. Also, through employing a peer reviewer to audit the research and findings, the researcher took an added step in preventing her own bias from affecting the results. As such, the role of the researcher was not considered an area of vulnerability, but rather an aspect that contributed to the richness of this IPA study.

Implications for Future Study

The research in the field of Jewish education has grown significantly in recent decades, helping to advance the field in many areas, but still leaving large gaps and “critical questions,”
leading to need for even more high-quality research in the field (Bloomberg, 2007, p. 281).

Based on this study, the researcher suggests several possible areas for future study.

As mentioned earlier, this study focused specifically on middle school and high school Jewish Studies teachers at East Coast Jewish Day School, a community Jewish day school. Additional research could include exploring similar research questions with secular teachers in Jewish day schools, in denominational settings, and/or in different locations in order to compare the results and better understand the potential transferability of the findings. Further research could also focus on the understandings and perceptions of elementary school teachers at community Jewish day schools with the findings then compared to those related to middle school and high school teachers. These comparative studies, looking at different populations within teachers at Jewish day schools, would lead to better understanding of the general vision for Jewish day school education.

Additionally, the second sub-question used for this study looked at forms of assessment related to teachers’ goals. Scholars such as Bloomberg (2007) and Wertheimer (2009) point to the need to develop and implement assessment tools for the effectiveness of education, and the findings of this study support that suggestion. In response to questions about assessment, the teachers shared mostly anecdotal evidence, having limited options for other assessment tools. Future study in this area could focus on methods and measures of success within the field of Jewish education, possibly involving action research in implementing specific measures of assessment. Furthermore, several teacher participants pointed to the long-term effects of Jewish day school education as being another challenge to assessment. Bloomberg (2007) highlights the area of long-term impact on learners as a particular area in need of more research, another suggestion supported by the findings of this study as the teacher participants mentioned that it is
“only by accident” (Rebecca) that they hear about these longer-term attainments of success. Future research in this area could involve a large-scale study of community Jewish day school graduates, measuring the impact that day school education had for them and how it affects their lives today.

Finally, although different scholars have researched Jewish education from the perspective of parents and administrators (Kapel, 1971; Kelman, 1979; Pomson, 2003; Cohen & Kelner, 2007; Pomson & Schnoor, 2008), the perspective of teachers and students in a Jewish day school setting has been largely ignored. Woocher (1992) explains that the goals of Jewish education are often ambiguous and overly-ambitious because the various stakeholders cannot agree on how to prioritize goals, emphasizing the need to have established clear, specific goals as a first step towards accomplishing these goals. Further research into exploring the understandings and perceptions as to what constitutes a successful Jewish day school from the perspective of each of these stakeholders and then undertaking a comparative study related to each of these specific perspectives would lead to a better picture of what it is that these schools are trying to achieve and could lead to findings that would help Jewish day schools in achieving true success.

Implications and Recommendations for Practice

In addition to having implications for future study, this study and its results directly impact current practice related to the specification and execution of goals for success and the assessment of the attainment of these goals.

One major theme that emerged from this study was the focus on teachers’ instilling and fostering a strong sense of Jewish identity within their students. Although some of the teacher participants differed on the specific components and requirements of this identity, a general
consensus emerged that this Jewish identity would involve the student’s feeling of comfort with his particular Jewish identity, consciously making decisions about how that identity affects his everyday actions in the greater world. Teacher participants also de-emphasized traditional measures of academic success such as grades and admission to college in favor of more values-based measures that affect a student’s behaviors and attitudes.

In light of these findings, community Jewish day schools should rethink their Jewish Studies program, infusing it into various aspects of the school through interdisciplinary programming and including experiential aspects throughout the year, making the ideals and goals of fostering a Jewish identity prevalent throughout the school. If the goal of the teachers is to prepare students to live in the greater world with a strong sense of Jewish identity, students should be given abundant opportunities to cultivate and experiment with that identity, outside of the walls of the Jewish Studies classroom.

Another aspect of this study that has implications for practice is the need for assessment. At many community Jewish day schools, teachers in Jewish Studies classes administer grades similar to teachers of secular subjects as a means of assessing student and teacher progress and success. Jewish identity and the specific impact of a Jewish day school education are difficult to measure in this way, however. As one participant said, “Is there such a thing as a Jew A and Jew B and Jew C?” (Orit), referring to the difficulty in assigning grades to students in the subject of developing Jewish identity. Therefore, a more accurate and informative means of assessment should be developed and implemented into the schools, differentiating the assessment of Jewish Studies classes from secular subjects. Traditional means of assessment such as grades could be maintained alongside these alternative measures if schools determine them to be necessary in order to maintain the academic integrity of the Jewish Studies classes, but these measures are not
sufficient in assessing true success of goals related to identity and other indicators of success, as identified by teachers.

One additional implication suggests connecting the vision of the school with the understandings and perceptions of the teachers. Teacher representatives should be involved in the development and execution of the school’s mission statement and vision when they are developed and/or revised and the determination of yearly goals as teachers are, after all, the ones with the most direct and most frequent contact with the students themselves and are, therefore, an essential element contributing to the success of realizing that vision and achieving these goals. In order to promote successful attainment of school goals, they should be in-line with the values and ideals of the teachers.

Table 5.5 summarizes these implications for practice as recommendations and connects them to the existing literature, the theoretical framework used for this study, and the related themes that emerged from the data.

Table 5.5

*Recommendations for Practice as Connected to Literature and Theoretical Framework*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendation</th>
<th>Connection to Existing Literature</th>
<th>Connection to Theoretical Framework</th>
<th>Related Themes/ Categories from Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Infusion of interdisciplinary and experiential elements into Jewish Studies</td>
<td>While Jewish learning has been shown to influence Jewish identity, scholars have shown that promoting Jewish actions also plays a role. Jewish day schools have also been tasked with preparing students to live in the greater world and be productive members of society including success in secular subjects.</td>
<td>Student identity is multidimensional and affected by surroundings, showing a need to integrate those aspects of identity in with the environment through experiences. Students who have a strong sense of Jewish identity will choose to act in ways that reinforce that identity in other areas of their lives, continually reinforcing that identity.</td>
<td>JEWISH IDENTITY, COMMUNITY, LIFELONG LEARNING, ISRAEL, LITERATE, CONNECTIONS WITH STUDENTS, COGNITION, STUDENT IMPACT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revision of measures of assessment for Jewish Studies</td>
<td>Though scholars agree on the importance of measuring the impact of Jewish day school and Jewish identity, various measures of Jewish identity have been suggested with no real consensus reached, leaving Jewish day schools with a challenge when setting and measuring goals, especially related to the area of Jewish identity. There is evidence, however, that Jewish day school provides a unique opportunity for students to develop and refine their autonomy and identity, which is related to their satisfaction with their Jewish education.</td>
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<td>Sources: Bock (1977), Paley (1998), Cooper &amp; Kramer (2002), Pomson (2003), Chertok, Saxe, Kadushin, Wright, Klein, &amp; Koren (2007)</td>
<td>A student’s Jewish identity is connected to self-verification and social structures, with long-term effects. Having a positive relationship and associations with that identity is important to fostering that identity, and that identity is most easily shown through behaviors that are in-line with the identity and the associated social group.</td>
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<td>Sources: Bronfenbrenner (1979), Rosenberg &amp; Gara (1985), Ashforth &amp; Mael (1989)</td>
<td>JEWISH IDENTITY COMMUNITY LIFELONG LEARNING ISRAEL LITERATE COGNITION IMMEASURABLE STUDENT IMPACT ATTITUDE</td>
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<td>Alignment of school mission and vision with the goals of the teachers</td>
<td>Teaching is an interpersonal art, with teachers’ goals directly impacting their roles and goals in the classroom. Among these goals, teachers are likely to promote both academic and personal growth, transform students, and help students to internalize values.</td>
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<td>Sources: Ashforth &amp; Mael (1989), Trepte (2006)</td>
<td>JEWISH IDENTITY COMMUNITY LIFELONG LEARNING ISRAEL LITERATE CONNECTIONS WITH STUDENTS THINK STUDENT IMPACT</td>
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As shown in the table, the researcher has made three major recommendations for practice: infusion of interdisciplinary and experiential elements into Jewish Studies, revision of measures of assessment for Jewish Studies, and alignment of school mission with the goals of the teachers. Each of these recommendations emerged from the data collected in this study and is supported by the existing literature and theoretical framework.

Schools can include the infusion of interdisciplinary and experiential elements into their Jewish Studies programs through the enhancement of relevant, applicable, hands-on holiday programming as well as integrating concepts and values from Jewish Studies classes into secular classes and other school programs, such as commemorative and celebratory assemblies. Jewish Studies teachers, within their own classrooms, can work towards the integration of class materials into students’ lives through involving families in projects, requesting that students incorporate content and ideas from other classes into their Jewish Studies classes, and encouraging students towards applying the concepts from class to their greater lives. Through such integration, students’ Jewish identities will be strengthened and integrated into the other multi-dimensional aspects of their identities, continually reinforcing that identity through activities that are in-line with Judaism and helping the teachers to attain success related to instilling and fostering Jewish identity and the students’ ability to thrive in the greater world.

True assessment of that success remains a challenge, however, as traditional measures of academic success do not seem to be informative, relevant, or sufficient when looking towards the goals that the teachers describe that lead to a successful Jewish day school graduate. Through the use of alternative, qualitative assessments such as portfolios, application projects, and other long-terms measures either in place of or in conjunction with the grades and traditional measures currently in place, teachers and schools can better understand the degree to which they are
accomplishing the goals that are more difficult to assess. Portfolios, for example, could be used as an ongoing, longer-term assessment throughout a student’s years at Jewish day school, showing the development and enrichment of the student’s Jewish identity, internalization of values and content, and character development. These portfolios could provide information that tests, grades, and college admissions cannot regarding the success of Jewish Studies teachers in the areas discussed in this study. Additionally, through these alternative forms of assessment, teachers and students will not feel that letter grades are indicative of their value as people or as Jews in the way that they are meant to measure skills and knowledge gained in secular subjects, again helping students to gain confidence in their Jewish identities and related areas.

In order to best implement these experiential and interdisciplinary efforts and take steps towards more authentic measures of assessment, the school mission and vision should be aligned with the goals of the teachers as they relate to their understandings and perceptions of a successful Jewish day school graduate. As reflected in the data, teachers integrate themselves, their goals, and their beliefs into their classrooms and their teaching, acting in-line with their established identities and helping to shape the identities of their students. Therefore, in order to work towards a consistent approach to student success, the goals of the school and the teachers need to be in-line with each other rather than opposing each other or being disconnected from each other so that the entire school and faculty are working towards a common goal of student success. As such, when the school considers setting goals and priorities, the teachers should be consulted and be involved as a part of that process in order to ensure alignment. Teachers, also, can work towards this alignment themselves by considering any established school vision or mission when developing their classroom goals, adapting and integrating the concepts into their own practice. Furthermore, teachers can work towards an awareness and connection between
their own beliefs, classroom goals, and practice, ensuring personal alignment and leading to teaching that will be more genuine and impactful for the students. At a school that includes the precept of B’tzelem Elokim, or every person being created in the image of God, for example, a teacher who believes in encouraging students towards making decisions from a strong basis of Jewish knowledge and sets Jewish literacy as a goal for his students can integrate this belief and this goal into the classroom by examining the decisions that Biblical characters, historical figures, or pop culture icons make in light of Jewish tradition or law. Through such an activity, the students’ Judaic knowledge will increase, and they will have a model to follow when making their own decisions that is in-line with the teacher’s goals and the vision of the school. When all stakeholders share a common vision for student success that is clearly integrated into the school, they can better work towards achieving that success and ensuring that each graduate is a successful graduate of the Jewish day school.

**Implications and Impact on Researcher’s Positionality**

In addition to having implications for future study and practice within with the greater field of Jewish education, the process of undertaking this study and examining the results themselves have impacted the researcher’s personal positionality as a practitioner within the field. Prior to undertaking this research project, the researcher personally believed in very specific criteria that would constitute a successful Jewish day school graduate including a connection to God and religious practice, fluency in Hebrew and traditional texts, and a commitment to Jewish peoplehood and the associated values. Having collected and analyzed the data from the teacher participants, however, and exploring the field from their perspective, the researcher now believes in and agrees with the emphasis placed on instilling a sense of Jewish identity within students and enabling them to make decisions in their lives from a foundation of
knowledge. Rather than focusing on coverage and content, the researcher now believes in valuing process and personal development within students.

Additionally, the researcher has shifted her views on the role of Judaic Studies classes in the school. Prior to conducting this research, the researcher believed that Judaic Studies classes should be on the same level as secular studies classes in terms of policies, grading processes, and treatment by the administration. Having completed this study, however, the researcher now believes Jewish Studies classes to be vastly different from other classes and believes they should be treated as such. Though the researcher understands the difficulty involved in obtaining support from students and parents to take the subjects seriously when Jewish Studies classes are not tested and graded in the same manner as other classes, the findings of this study show that Jewish Studies teachers consider their role to be that of shaping identity and building character rather than teaching and assessing specific material and skills like in other subjects. As such, the researcher believes that Jewish Studies classes should not be considered the same as secular studies classes.

Finally, through this study, the researcher has come to appreciate the value of interdisciplinary curriculum and programs. As suggested by the study findings, integrating the material, lessons, and values from Jewish Studies into the greater school environment is essential for building the students’ Jewish identity in a way that allows them to thrive in the greater world, outside of the walls of the Jewish day school. Although the researcher recognized the value of such interdisciplinary actions prior to conducting this study, by examining the data through the lens of the theoretical framework, the researcher came to understand how essential this merging of material and topics is for the strong identity formation of students.
Conclusion

This study sought to enlighten professionals and other stakeholders within the field of Jewish education as to the importance of clear goals and vision regarding what constitutes a successful graduate of a community Jewish day school and to explore the related perspectives of Jewish Studies teachers, a viewpoint largely missing from the existing literature. Currently, the goals and purposes of Jewish education are not defined or standardized, especially within the non-denominational world, leaving community Jewish day schools without specific direction when planning and making educational decisions, but it is essential that each Jewish Studies teacher know what success looks like (Bloomberg, 2007). Without this idea of success, education is left aimless and without clear direction.

Through this qualitative IPA study, the researcher explored the understandings and perceptions as to what constitutes a successful Jewish day school graduate, how those understandings and perceptions affect teachers’ classroom goals, and how teachers assess their success related to these goals. Jewish identity emerged from the data as a major theme with each of the participants prioritizing instilling students with a strong Jewish identity and giving them the tools to lead Jewishly-inspired lives in the greater world. Through student connections and encouraging students to think, the teacher participants aimed to make traditional texts relevant to the students’ lives in order for those texts to act as a guide for living. Unfortunately, without accurate measures of success, however, the teacher participants were left with mainly anecdotal evidence as to their accomplishments related to their goals.

In light of the research findings, Jewish day schools, especially community Jewish day schools, can work towards aligning their vision and goals with the values of the teachers, aiming at ensuring the success of their graduates. These findings are supported by the existing literature
and have the potential to lead to additional, important research in the field. As such, the significance of this study has the potential to impact education within the Jewish day school system and beyond.
References


Appendix A

Letter Seeking Permission from Head of School and Assistant Head of School

Dear Head of School and Assistant Head of School –

As you know, I have been a Jewish Studies teacher at ____________ Day School for the last several years. I am also a doctoral student through Northeastern University and Hebrew College earning a doctorate in Education with a specialization in Jewish Educational Leadership.

As part of my program, I am conducting research that looks at the perceptions of Jewish Studies teachers as to what constitutes success in a graduate of a Jewish day school.

I am writing to you today in order to seek permission to conduct research among the faculty members. Should you consent, I would ask interested teachers to participate in an interview (approximately 60-75). Compensation is offered, and the teachers can participate at a mutually convenient time so as to not detract from their school obligations.

There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this study. The expected benefits associated with your participation are that the information about experiences and perceptions regarding Jewish day school education can help schools and educators to align their visions, goals, and actions in order to better achieve success.

Your approval in no way obligates teachers to participate in this study. Consent to participation is entirely optional, and participants may opt out at any point. Should you have questions about the study, you may contact the researcher, Sarah Levy at levy.sar@husky.neu.edu. Should you have any questions about rights of a research participant, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, at irb@neu.edu.

Thank you very much for your consideration. Should you approve this request, please sign the below:

I, _________________ (insert name), hereby give Sarah Levy permission to contact teachers at ________________ Jewish Day School in order to conduct research. Individual teachers may, then, decide whether or not to participate individually and may opt out at any time.

Signed: ___________________________ Date:

Sincerely,

Sarah Levy, researcher
Appendix B

Letter to Potential Interview Participants

Dear Judaic Studies Teacher,

As you know, I have been a Jewish Studies teacher for ______________ Jewish Day School for the last few years. I am also a doctoral student through Northeastern University and Hebrew College, earning a doctorate in Education with a specialization in Jewish Educational Leadership.

As part of my program, I am conducting research that looks as the perceptions of Jewish Studies teachers as to what constitutes success in a graduate of a Jewish day school.

I am writing to you today in order to ask you to participate in my study through an interview. The interview will last approximately 60-75 minutes at a mutually convenient time and place, and a $15 gift card to Target will be offered as compensation. Additionally, all participants will have the opportunity to review the findings.

There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this study. The expected benefits associated with your participation are that the information about your experiences and perceptions regarding Jewish day school education can help schools and educators to align their visions, goals, and actions in order to better achieve success.

Consent to participation is entirely optional, and you may opt out at any point. Additionally, all responses will be 100% confidential. Should you have questions about the study, you may contact the researcher, Sarah Levy at levy.sar@husky.neu.edu. Should you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, at irb@neu.edu.

As a teacher myself, I know how busy you are with all of your responsibilities, so I thank you in advance for your time and for contributing towards this research that I feel will help inform Jewish Education.

Sincerely,

Sarah Levy, researcher
Appendix C

Participant Informed Consent Form
Teacher Perceptions of a Successful Jewish Community Day School Graduate: Qualitative Study

Dear Participant,

The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in the present study. You should be aware that you are free to decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time without affecting your relationship with the researcher.

The purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions of Jewish Studies teachers regarding what constitutes success in a Jewish day school graduate. The procedure will be what is called Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis, focusing on the interpretations of a specific experience.

For the purposes of this study, the main source of data will be qualitative interviews. Only the researcher, Sarah Levy, will be involved in the collection, transcription, coding, and analysis of the data.

Please do not hesitate to ask any questions about the study before your participation, during your participation, or after your participation. Once the study is complete, the researcher will be happy to share the findings with you. However, your name will not be associated with the research findings in any way, and your identity as a participant will be known only to the researchers.

There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this study. The expected benefits associated with your participation are that the information about your experiences and perceptions regarding Jewish day school education can help schools and educators to align their visions, goals, and actions in order to better achieve success.

In order to most accurately record data during interviews, the researcher requests permission to record the interviews for future transcription. The recording will be kept for approximately one year and will be kept in an encrypted file on the researcher’s password-protected computer. After the data is no longer needed, the recording will be destroyed.

Consent to this interview is entirely optional, and you may opt out at any point. Should you have questions about the study, you may contact the student researcher, Sarah Levy, at levy.sar@husky.neu.edu or Dr. Carol Young, the principal investigator, at c.young@neu.edu. Should you have any questions about your right as a research participant, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, at irb@neu.edu.

Please sign your consent with full knowledge of the nature and purpose of the procedures. A copy of this consent form will be given to you to keep.

Signature: ______________________ Participant: _____________________ Date: _________

Sarah Levy, student researcher
Appendix D
Interview Protocol Form

Interviewee (Title and Name): ______________________________________

Interviewer: _____________________________________________________

Date: _____________________________________

Location of Interview: ____________________________________

Previously attained background information:

Part I: Introductory Question Objectives (5 minutes)

- Build rapport
- describe the study
- answer any questions
- review informed consent form/sign

Introductory Protocol

You have been selected to speak with me today because you have been identified as someone who has much to share about your perceptions and opinions about being a Jewish Studies teacher. This research project focuses on the perceptions of Jewish Studies teachers concerning what constitutes success of a graduate of a Jewish day school. Through this study, I hope to gain more insight into your goals as a teacher and how you measure success as pertain to these goals. I hope this study will help schools to strengthen their visions and work towards achieving success according to that vision research.

Because your responses are important and I want to make sure to capture everything you say, I would like to audio tape our conversation today. Do I have your permission to record this interview? [If yes, thank the participant and turn on the recording equipment].

I will also be taking written notes during the interview. I can assure you that all responses will be confidential and only a pseudonym will be used when quoting from the transcripts. I will be
the only one privy to the recordings which will be eventually destroyed after they are transcribed.

To meet our human subjects requirements at the university, you must sign the form I have with me [provide the form]. Essentially, this document states that: (1) all information will be held confidential, (2) your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and (3) we do not intend to inflict any harm. Do you have any questions about the interview process or this form?

I have planned this interview to last about 60-75 minutes. During this time, I have several questions that I would like to cover. Ultimately, however, your story is what is most important, so you feel free to share any related information. Do you have any questions at this time?

Part II - Interviewee Background (10 minutes)

1. How long have you been a Jewish Studies teacher at this school? In general?
2. What classes/subjects do you teach?
3. What made you decide to become a teacher? Jewish Studies teacher?
4. What is your favorite part about being a Jewish Studies teacher?

Part III – Objectives (30 minutes)

I would like to hear about your understandings and perceptions in your own words. To do this, I am going to ask you some questions about success and what role it plays in your teaching. There are not right or wrong answers.

1. Please tell me what “success” means to you. What about in the context of a Jewish day school?
2. Please describe one of your teaching successes.
3. How would you define a successful graduate of a Jewish day school? What constitutes success?
   Potential prompts:
   - Hebrew fluency?
• What does that mean?
• How would you measure?
  o Jewish identity?
    • What does that mean?
    • How do you measure it?
  o Jewish practice?
    • What does that mean?
    • How do you measure it?
  o Text skills?
    • How would you measure?
  o Connection to Israel
    • How would you measure?
  o Jewish Values
    • What does that mean?
    • How do you measure it?
  o Success in secular academics?
    • Admission to college?

4. What factors have affected your understandings and perceptions of success?

5. What are your personal goals as a teacher at a community Jewish day school?

6. How did you determine these to be your goals?

7. How do you measure success as pertains to these goals?

8. How do your understandings and perceptions of success affect the students? School?

9. Are there any other teachers with whom you would suggest I speak to get more information about these subjects?
Appendix E

Letter of Summary Findings Sent to Research Participants

Dear Research Participant –

Once again, thank you for volunteering to participate in the research study, entitled “Teacher Perceptions of a Successful Jewish Community Day School Graduate.” The stories, explanations, and other information that you provided during your interview provided valuable data and led to the richness of the richness of this study.

As part of the measures I am taking in order to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of this study, I am including below a summary overview of the findings of the study as relate to the research questions for your consideration. This summary overview generalizes the findings of all participants in the study, so it is possible that some parts are not reflective of your personal views. I would welcome your review, and please do not hesitate to be in touch should you believe any of these findings to be totally out of line with your personal understandings and perceptions.

Please also do not hesitate to be in touch with any questions.

Sincerely,

Sarah Levy, researcher

Summary overview of findings:

Discussion of first research question. The first research question used for this study asked how Jewish Studies teachers describe their understandings and perceptions as to what constitutes a successful graduate of a community Jewish day school. For the teacher participants involved in this study, a successful Jewish day school graduate would be described as someone with a strong sense of personal Jewish identity who is comfortable with his Jewish identity, conscious of the decisions he makes related to that identity, able to function and thrive as a Jew in the greater world, and demonstrates moral and ethical behavior. A successful Jewish day school graduate would also appreciate and value community, continue his Jewish learning after graduation, have a connection to Israel, and show different aspects of Jewish literacy such as familiarity with prayer, Hebrew, terms, customs, and traditional texts.

Discussion of first sub-question. The first sub-question used for this study examined how these understandings and perceptions related to a successful Jewish day school graduate affect the teachers’ goals in the classroom. According to the data collected for this study, the main effect of these understandings and perceptions is an emphasis and priority placed upon connections with students, stemming from the motivation and inspiration for the teachers to become teachers in the first place and the attitude of the teachers, students, and other stakeholders regarding the subject material of Jewish Studies. The teacher participants all valued their connections with their students and saw these connections as a way to get to know the
whole student, connect the student to the material, engage and motivate individual students, and empower the students towards their identity formation. Because of the emphasis on connections and personal achievement related to identity formation, the teacher participants did not focus their classroom goals on traditional measures of success such as grades and college admissions, instead focusing on encouraging and motivating the students to think about the material, apply the material to their own lives, and use the material as a way to feel connected to other Jews.

**Discussion of second sub-question.** The second sub-question used for this study explored how teachers measure their own success in reference to the goals they set for their classrooms related to their understandings and perceptions of a successful Jewish day school graduate. For all of the teacher participants interviewed for this study, the main form of assessment used is anecdotal. Participants shared stories and examples of specific successes, acknowledging that true measurement is difficult as hearing these stories usually occurs by chance, without a systematic method of evaluation. Within this anecdotal form of measurement, teachers focus on student impact, especially with long-term effects, and student attitude toward the teacher, class, or subject material, encouraging students to apply the subject material to other classes and beyond the classroom. Although the teacher participants were clear about their descriptions of what constitutes a successful Jewish day school graduate and could share experiences related to how they translate that description into goals for their classrooms, measuring their success was more difficult. One reason for the difficulty is the anecdotal nature of their current mode of assessment, and a second difficulty is the long-term nature of lasting student impact and the challenges involved in locating and measuring success years or decades after student graduation.

**General discussion of findings.** This study revealed that Jewish Studies teachers are concerned with and committed to fostering identity formation within their students, focusing especially on Jewish identity, and creating productive members of the Jewish community and the greater world. Through student connections and encouraging their students to think, Jewish Studies teachers aim to make traditional Jewish texts relevant to the students in order for these texts to serve as a guide in the students’ identity formation. Of the four participants interviewed for this study, none consciously made a decision to become a Jewish Studies teacher, sharing that teaching as a profession and Jewish text as a subject matter were inherently part of them, part of their identities. Because of the vital role of Jewish text in each of the participant’s lives and personal identity formation, they used this as a basis in their teaching and instilling identity into their own students.