Shabbat Challenge Narratives:
Examining the use of blended learning in family engagement

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Abstract

Jewish family education attempts to educate and engage the entire family in Jewish knowledge, practice and community. The programs, activities and classes are designed with the explicit goal of having the families transport the experiences and the learning out of the location of delivery and apply them to their families’ lives through the creation of a community of engaged practitioners. However, several scholars have questioned if family education has the ability to empower families to change their beliefs and practices in their daily lives once the family is outside the sight of delivery.

The purpose of this narrative study was to examine how blended learning could offer a unique and powerful pedagogy for Jewish family engagement, allowing families to incorporate Jewish learning and behaviors into their daily lives through both the support and empowerment of a community of peers. Specifically, this research aimed to illuminate the narratives of participants in a challenge group created to empower participants to incorporate Shabbat dinner into their families’ week. Five participants were interviewed to better understand the lived reality of being a participant in the Shabbat Challenge. As well as to understand what the participants believed the blended learning Shabbat challenge brought to their family life. As well as understanding what the participants believe the community of peers brought to their Shabbat challenge experience?

Several important finds emerged from this narrative study. Following the Shabbat Challenge, participants expressed increased intentionality or mindfulness concerning Shabbat. Participants expressed increased Shabbat dinner practices than prior to the Shabbat Challenge. They exhibited goal setting behaviors concerning Shabbat dinner practices. They expressed that the Shabbat Challenge offered them the space to address the emotional issues of Shabbat. And
participants reported that they were motivated to continue to create a weekly Friday night Shabbat dinner. Overall, participants reported feeling that the Shabbat Challenge had a lasting impact on their families’ Shabbat awareness and practices. These personal narratives illuminate how the field of Family education and engagement could best move forward concerning the use of on-line, peer group learning to empower families to bring Judaism into their homes, making Judaism relevant to their daily lives. On-line, peer group learning, using a connected learning approach, aids families in incorporating Jewish learning, behaviors, and community into their daily lives.

Key words: Blended learning, Connected learning, Family Education, Family Engagement, On-line challenge group, Jewish family education, experiential education
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Chapter One: Introduction

Research Problem

Jewish family education attempts to educate and engage the entire family in Jewish knowledge, practice, and community. The programs, activities, and classes are designed with the explicit goal of having the families transport the experiences and learning out of the location of delivery, and apply them to their families’ lives through the creation of a community of engaged practitioners. Online learning, with its at home location and flexibility, offers a great deal of potential for family education and engagement. However, there has been little use of online learning within supplemental Jewish education, and even less within the field of family education. There is almost no research examining how families engage with online learning platforms within Jewish communities.

Inherent to the conversation on family education and community building, with the goal of affecting practice, is what happens once the family leaves the organized space of learning. Since family education is designed to be applied elsewhere, the learning cannot stop at the end of the session or activity, it must continue to the space created by the family outside the formal educational space. This space in between learning and community creation is a rich source for research.

Blended learning, the combination of face-to-face and online instruction as part of a purposeful educational design, could lead to families extending their learning (Bliuc, Goodyear, & Ellis, 2007; De George-Walker & Keeffe, 2010; Garrison & Kanuka, 2004; Graham, 2006; Macdonald, 2008). Blended family education has the potential to increase the connection between the learning, beliefs, and actions of the family. Families could spend time learning at home, as a family, about specific Jewish rituals or values. They could then incorporate these
rituals and values immediately into their daily lives while connected, both face to face and virtually, to a community of other families engaged in similar learning, offering a natural support system. Periodically, this larger group of families could come together for face-to-face learning and network weaving opportunities. Blended family education can aid in the creation of a community that expresses higher levels of engagement with Judaism due to the ability to bring the learning into the home, offer educational opportunities that fit multiple learning styles and life situations (De George-Walker & Keeffe, 2010) and in general offer a more robust learning experience (Rovai & Jordan, 2004).

**Justification for the Research Problem**

Jewish family education attempts to educate and engage the entire family in Jewish knowledge and practice. However, several scholars have questioned if family education is able to empower families to change their beliefs and practices in their daily lives, once the family is outside the sight of delivery (Merhaut, 2007; Reimer, 1991; Wolfson, 1985) or help families see “how Jewishness makes a difference in individuals’ lives and for the world” (Woocher & Woocher, 2013).

The research on blended learning suggests that blended learning is a unique educational opportunity. Blended learning offers many educational advantages concerning learning and community development (Dziuban, Moskal, & Hartman, 2005; Garrison & Kanuka, 2004; Means, Toyama, Murphy, Bakia, & Jones, 2010; Ocak, 2011; Rovai & Jordan, 2004; So & Brush, 2008). The opportunity to study within one’s home, surrounded by a familiar and familial setting allows families to imagine themselves acting on the learning in which they are engaging. With blended learning, the need to transport the learning from the space of delivery into the personal family space is removed. Immediately, the family is able to imagine how they could
apply the learning directly to their family’s experiences and practices. Additionally, blended learning allows families to interact with the learning on their own terms; where and when the family chooses, allowing for engagement during optimal conditions for each family. At the same time, they would be connecting to families in a community that is experiencing similar learning. Families connect with and draw support from other families experiencing the similar joys and struggles of changing habits of practice.

Since the Mandel Commission on Jewish Education issued, “A Time to Act” (1990), which discussed the inadequate role of Jewish education and the 1990 National Jewish Population Study was released, claiming that the intermarriage rate was at 52% within the Jewish community, there has been a slow acknowledgement within the Jewish educational community that the goal of Jewish education is no longer adding facts and knowledge to the student’s Jewish lives. Instead in many cases the goal of these educational experiences is to foster and create a Jewish identity, a lived Jewish life. The community has acknowledged that the majority of children and adults spend most of their time outside of a Jewish environment. The milieu has become predominately American, and not Jewish (Woocher & Woocher, 2013). Many children are not even exposed to a community of living Judaism. In the words of Aron, Reimer, Koller-Fox, and Borowitz, (1978), they have lost a “norming” Jewish community or in Berger’s (1967) terminology, there is no plausibility structure for a lived Jewish life. The community “an essential ingredient when trying to bring a child into the practices of a group that is different than the larger society” (Weissman & Weinberg, nd, p. 9), even within the synagogue environment, is lacking for families today. Robinson shares, “education does not work if the life toward which one is being educated is not being regularly and powerfully experienced by the learners” (Robinson, 2016). Blending family engagement programs, such as the Shabbat challenge, could
empower families to change their beliefs and practices in their daily lives, offering their children powerful, sustainable Jewish experiences.

**Deficiencies in Evidence**

When the research for this dissertation began in 2010, no articles discussing the use of blended learning in a Jewish environment were found during an examination of the scholarly research published. In fact, little information regarding the use of blended learning, or online learning in general, appeared to be available in the field of Jewish education or family education. Solomon and Flexner (2010) claim that the Jewish community had not yet entered into the realm of harnessing online learning technologies, and confirmed that not much blended learning was occurring in Jewish educational environments. Since that time, blended learning has entered the Jewish educational scene leading day schools to now employ blended learning. These schools can be divided into two models, those schools which were designed from inception with a pervasive blended learning model, to date these schools are all Orthodox, and schools which introduced blended learning in various degrees into their educational philosophy (Cohen, 2013; Schick, 2014). Additionally, during this time there have been many calls for supplemental schools to embrace blended learning practices, such as online Hebrew lessons and flipped classrooms. A few educational providers, such as ShalomLearning, which were created entirely on a platform of blended learning, have emerged in the past five years. Most of the information concerning blended learning in supplemental education is still in its infancy, found most frequently in the popular press and personal blogs. With the noted exception of Sohn (2014) there is not much in the academic literature concerning blended learning and Jewish education. Additionally, there is little to no literature on blended learning in secular or parochial family education.
learning. An examination of how blended learning could offer a unique and powerful pedagogy for Jewish family education would help begin to create this body of scholarly knowledge.

**Relating the Discussion to Audiences**

Further examination of the use of blended learning in Jewish family education will be specifically useful to Synagogue educators, which include Directors of Congregational Learning, Family educators, Educational directors, Early Childhood educators and Rabbis. Day schools, summer camps, community centers and other educational institutions that work with the entire family may also benefit from the information gleaned in this study, as well as Jewish foundations that support Jewish family education and engagement. This study offers scholarly research on the usefulness of blended learning in Jewish family education and engagement.

Additionally, this research speaks to all parochial education. The Pew Center research (2010) shows that millennials are significantly less religious than their parents’ or grandparents’ generations. In fact, one in four millennials is unaffiliated with a particular faith. As all parochial education struggles to remain meaningful and relevant, this research provides a better way to meet families’ needs and interests. Outside of a religious context, this research is applicable to any community that desires to create at-home capacity for learning, specifically related to changing habits of practice and community creation.

**Significance of Research Problem**

As Weissman and Weinberg (nd) state, “The vast majority of children from liberal Jewish households live their lives immersed in communities that affirm the values and practices of American secular life” (p. 9). There is a large possibility that the liberal Jewish community will continue to shrink due to a lack of knowledge, understanding and emotional connection to the Jewish religion, culture and people. If children are not educated Jewishly or are educated in a
manner that does not offer the student a path for incorporating the practices and values of the religion into their daily life, then the community will continue to shrink. A smaller Jewish population will cause Jewish institutions to wither due to a lack of participants. The already small world Jewish population will decrease to next to nothing. Ultimately the teachings of Judaism could be lost. An insignificant liberal Jewish community would be a loss not only to the Jewish religion, but also to the population at large which bases many values of Western Civilization on the teachings of the Hebrew Scriptures. It would be a loss to the world if the Jewish people, who have existed for nearly six thousand years ceased to exist in any significant number or only as a cloistered right-wing religious community.

Inherent to the conversation on family education and community building, with the goal of affecting practice, is what happens once the family leaves the organized space of learning. Since family education is designed to be applied elsewhere, the learning must not stop at the end of the session or activity, it must continue to the space created by the family outside the formal educational space. If Jewish people choose to express their Judaism only inside of the synagogue building or other Jewish institution, then they are only retaining a small portion of their religion and culture. This space in between learning and practice and the creation of community is a rich source for further research.

**Positionality Statement**

Jewish family education programs are increasingly looking for models of success. Success in these programs is most frequently defined as increased levels of family knowledge, practice, and identification with Judaism, as well as community association. I believe that blended learning has untapped potential as a successful model for Jewish family education. Before engaging in a literature review, I believed that blended learning offered much potential
for Jewish education in general, and for family education in particular. After conducting a literature review, I now believe that the potential is even greater than I initially estimated. I feel that there is an undefined space occurring in between the organized space of learning and families’ beliefs and actions subsequent to the learning. I believe this space is crucial for families to be able to translate the educational experiences into behaviors and practices. I also believe that this space is one that is ripe for community identification. I believe the families are seeking ways to make Judaism meaningful and practical in their families’ lives but are unsure how to achieve this goal. At the same time, many families are seeking meaningful community creation.

my interest in family engagement. I have been working in Jewish education for more than fifteen years. I have seen how family involvement with Judaism directly impacts students’ attitudes towards their own personal involvement with Judaism. For the past thirteen years, my position has included family education, providing educational experiences for the entire family. During this time, I began to ask myself if the family educational programs I, and others, was offering were effective or simply enjoyable? Were the families changing their beliefs and behaviors after attending the programs? Were the families creating community and applying the learning outside of the synagogue? I was particularly impacted by three events.

First, I met and studied with Cyd Weissman, a fellow Jewish educator, who speaks of Quotidian Judaism, Judaism which speaks to the daily navigation of life, a Deweyian perspective of Judaism.

To inspire Jews who seek ways to make meaning of their daily lives. A Jewish vernacular that speaks to the everyday person with everyday needs is our agenda. A new and compelling narrative elucidating Quotidian Judaism, Judaism for the everyday, will
positively impact the work of communal planners and the lives of American Jewry.

(Weissman, 2011)

Then, I was sitting in a presentation by Jonathan Woocher, who at the time was the Chief Ideas Officer of JESNA (Jewish Education Service of North America), when he commented that we, the Jewish educational community, need to develop family engagement systems. Following Woocher’s comments, the Jewish Family Educators Network (JFEN) of St. Louis, Missouri, of which I was a member, underwent a two-year study with the help of a grant from The Crown Family to examine how a community moves from a history of strong Family Education programs to the creation of Family Engagement Systems. I sat on the committee that helped envision and steer this process named FELI, Family Education Learning Initiative. As stated in the grant application,

The current thinking around the country is to uncover the “big questions” that Jewish parents are trying to answer and to provide a system that attempts to address these questions in a Jewish way. In the past, we have tended to educate our families by appealing to the children first and then involving the parents. Our challenge is to reverse that process of thinking by looking at the “big questions” of parents first and then crafting a system of engagement around that. (Crown Grant Application, 2011)

The FELI group created the following working definition for family engagement systems:

A Jewish Family Engagement System purposefully involves families/congregants by inspiring them to take responsibility for their Jewish identity as they move through their life. The result is a deepened relationship to Jewish living that connects families across multiple settings (the congregation, the home, the larger community, etc.). (FELI meeting notes, 2011)
Building on the themes of Cyd Weissman’s Quotidian Judaism and Jonathan Woocher’s Jewish Family Engagement Systems and impacted by the FELI process, I became very interested in the potential uses of social media as both an educational and as a community-building tool for family engagement. My interest led me to investigate the use of blended learning in educational settings.

**Researcher Biases/Perspective**

I am a practicing Jew who is actively engaged in Jewish study, values, and traditions. I believe that I live Quotidian Judaism. I have also chosen to dedicate my professional life to both the study of and the practice of Jewish education. I have worked as a Jewish educator for more than fifteen years and I have obtained a MA in Jewish Education and at the time of this study was a doctoral candidate in Jewish Educational Leadership. I have engaged in a number of programs, which encompassed either Jewish study, or the study of Jewish education. Additionally, I was the principle designer and moderator of the Shabbat challenge. This background and my personal interests, practices, and beliefs are all biases I brought with me to this study. One of my goals as a Jewish educator is to help Jewish families lead Jewish lives. I want to help create Quotidian Judaism, to use Cyd Weissman’s terms. I come to this research with the assumptions that the families I work with have an interest in developing a Jewish practice that occurs in their daily life, that their lives will be enhanced by Jewish knowledge and observances, and that they are seeking to develop community with other Jewish families.

Another inherent bias in my research is the belief that families are interested in taking the learning outside of the site of delivery. Other researchers have both exhibited and reflected on this bias. Reimer (1991) sights that Schiff and Botwinik (1988), Himmelfarb (1974) and Bock (1977) all argued that involvement in and practice of Judaism needs to occur in the home in
order to have an effect. They believed that creating programs in the synagogue brings family education only to the synagogue and not to the home.

A synagogue-based set of programs can successfully bring families to the synagogue and involve them in Jewish activities and learning in that context, but will that success motivate the families to similarly increase the Jewish experiential level of their home lives? (Reimer, 1991, p. 274)

And Wolfson (1985) asked if synagogues even teach Jews how to be Jewish in their homes, rather than “continuing to feed the family’s dependence on it [the synagogue] as the central vehicle for Jewish expression while failing to significantly move the family towards Jewish self-sufficiency in the home” (p. 6).

In one study, Bernard (1991) found that participants were not interested in increasing their home practices when attending family educational programs held in a synagogue. When interviewed, participants said they enjoyed the opportunity to attend a family evening, such as a Shabbat dinner, in a distinctively Jewish setting. However, they were not interested in transferring these behaviors into their home life. In fact, when asked, participants rated highest the opportunity for family time, followed by the opportunity to create community relationships. Learning tools and skills to take home were ranked low. Bernard concludes that people are satisfied with a passive Jewish role. “For most, being with their family in an audience of congenial fellow Jews is as much Jewishness as they are prepared to accept” (Bernard, 1991, p. 297). As a researcher who is aware of my own personal biases, I worked to ensure that they did not influence my research outcomes. As Machi & McEvoy (2009) state, “By rationally identifying and confronting these views, you can control personal bias, opinion, and preferred outcome, and can become open-minded, skeptical, and considerate of research data” (p. 19).
outcomes of study. From this study, I gained an understanding of the personal narratives of participants in a challenge group created in order to empower participants to incorporate Shabbat dinner into their families’ week. I described the participants’ interactions with blended learning as a tool used to aid families in incorporating Jewish learning, behaviors, and community into their daily lives. I explored how blended learning offers a unique and powerful pedagogy for Jewish family engagement, allowing families to incorporate Jewish learning and behaviors into their daily lives through the support and empowerment of a community of peers. These personal narratives help illuminate how the field could best move forward concerning the use of blended learning to empower families to bring Judaism into their homes, making Judaism relevant to their daily lives. Many families “do Jewish” only when they are in the synagogue, or other Jewish institutions, and I want to help these families see that Judaism has a lot to offer them no matter where they are, or what issue they are facing.

Additionally, there is a lack of academic literature regarding Jewish family engagement as well as the uses of blended learning in Jewish educational settings. I hope this research makes a contribution to the field, and hopefully my research will encourage more institutions to embrace the use of blended learning as a way to bring Judaism into their constituent’s daily lives.

Research Questions

Problem of practice: The purpose of this study was to examine blended learning as a unique tool for incorporation of Jewish learning, behaviors, and community into participants’ lives during a Shabbat challenge.

Overarching Question: What are the experiences of the participants in a blended learning Shabbat challenge?

Sub Question 1: What do the participants believe the blended learning Shabbat challenge brought
to their family life?

Sub Question 2: What do the participants believe the community of peers brought to their Shabbat challenge experience?

Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework offers a lens through which the researcher can examine and interpret the research, data, overall findings, and conclusions of the study. The framework offers guidelines and boundaries to help explain the situation examined. Given that this research is interested in how families bring Jewish learning and practice into their homes, and that blended learning offers many educational advantages concerning learning and community development, this research is best framed by the ideas of Connected learning.

Connected learning is “when a young person is able to pursue a personal interest or passion with the support of friends and caring adults and is in turn able to link this learning and interest to academic achievement, career success or civic engagement” (Ito, et al., 2013, p. 4). Connected learning draws from sociocultural learning theory and builds on a Vgotskian tradition. Sociocultural learning theory values learning found within meaningful practices, supportive relationships, and a multitude of pathways to form knowledge and increase expertise (Ito, et al., 2013). Vygotsky posited that knowledge blends into other knowledge; learning happens when engaged in practical activities mediated by the surrounding culture (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky is best known for his developmental learning theory, the Zone of Proximal Development. The Zone of Proximal Development posits that children can learn that which is within their grasp of development through the aid of adults, or more accomplished peers, by the art of imitations. “The Zone of Proximal Development defines those functions that have not yet matured but are in the process of maturation, functions that will mature tomorrow but are currently in an embryonic
state” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). Modeling and speaking precede learning and thinking: if someone is able to do something today in collaboration with others, then Vygotsky (1978) believed tomorrow they would be able to do the task independently. He believed that social interactions allowed individuals to learn to problem solve independently. The problem solving which occurs in groups leads to increased thinking and understanding on the subject (Lundeberg & Moch, 1995).

However, even once something is mastered, it is not simple to uproot the learning, applying the learning which occurred in one space or domain to another. In fact, learning in one area has very little application to learning in another area (Vygotsky, 1978). Connected learning “emphasizes horizontal knowledge and the connections across domains of experience in and out of school” (Pacheco, 2012) as a way to help knowledge transfer. The design principles of connected learning include learning that is based on individual interests, linked to practice, involving strong relationships, both peer relationship and intergenerational relationships, and offering a multiplicity of pathways to meaningful and valuable learning.

Students, and adult learners both, learn more when their personal interests are activated. When personal interests are involved, the learning is stickier. Gladwell (2002) defines sticky learning as learning that makes an impact on behaviors, learning that stays with the individual after the initial learning experience. Learners are more excited, engaged and involved in the learning when personal interests are activated, and therefore, better able to apply the learning in a variety of settings. Learning is strongest when it links environments, such as home and school, with peers and community. When learning is linked to practice, learners highly value the knowledge gained as well as the relationships involved. “Learning (in Connected learning) is highly relational and tied to shared purpose and activity” (Ito, et al., 2013, p. 47). Personal interests, relationships, and shared activities or goals are the primary reason for the engagement in Connected learning situations.
Relationships, both peer and intergenerational, are key components in Connected learning. Most often these relationships are created through technology, but they can also occur face to face. These relationships, built around a shared interest, purpose or goal, are the foundations for the creation of a collaborative production (Miell & Littleton, 2004). “When young people are learning with peers and adults, pursuing shared interests and goals, the learning is both meaningful and resilient” (Ito, et al., 2013, p. 47). Vygotsky (1978) found that children were capable of greater achievements when involved in collective activities, if the skills in question were within their zone of proximal development, then when the child performed independently. “Learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with his peers” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 90). Many interest driven activities are intergenerational. The mentors, or experts, remembering that expert refers to a level of skill and knowledge attained and not a chronological age, are invaluable in the Connected learning process. Participating in interest driven networks offers opportunities to learn from expert participants and, therefore, allowing learners to develop new thinking skills (Rogoff, 1990; Vygotsky, 1978). The value placed on relationships is one of the key differences between Connected learning and Constructivist learning. Although very similar, Constructivist learning locates the learning within the individual, whereas Connected learning places the learning within the social relationship (Ito, et al., 2013, p. 44).

The final component to Connected learning is the presence of multiple pathways to participation with a strong internal feedback loop. “Environments that exemplify Connected learning are characterized by low barriers to entry and a multiplicity of roles, ways of participating, and improving and gaining expertise.” Online learning opportunities often offer
opportunities to lurk, watching from a distance before joining as an active participant. Once the learner is ready to take on a more active role, then there are frequently a variety of pathways towards participation from which to choose. Once a learner is engaged, a feedback loop activates. This continuous feedback allows the learner to improve and refine their current skills and build new skills as they continue their participation. The feedback loop is supported by informal yet practical assessments that are essential to the learning process (Cornwell & Cornwell, 2006). By offering multiple pathways to learning, learners feel comfortable participating to the level and in the style of their choosing. The feedback loop supports their continued growth and development. This combination allows for voluntary participation in the learning and accommodates a variety of learners.

Connected learning, occurring most frequently in voluntary settings, draws upon the learner’s interests and self-directed nature. The participants’ interests, creation of strong relationships and choice of pathways toward learning with an internal growth mechanism, allows the learner to engage in the learning in a manner that feels authentic. The learning is meaningful and valuable. The learner is provided with options, support, and opportunities for growth. Ultimately, Connected learning allows for stickier learning that can be applied to one’s life. Blended Jewish family education, using a Connected learning approach, could aid families in incorporating Jewish learning, behaviors, and community into their daily lives.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

Jewish family education seeks to educate and engage the entire family in Jewish knowledge and practice. The programs, activities, and classes are designed with the explicit goal of having the families transport the experiences and the learning out of the location of delivery and apply them to the families’ lives. A second objective of family education is to create a community of engaged practitioners. There has been interest in Jewish family education in many educational settings including camps, informal education programs, day schools and supplemental schools. This interest stems from the belief that educating a child, without educating the family, will ultimately, be only partially successful. If a student enters an educational setting and learns about beliefs and behaviors that are vastly different than their current home lifestyle they typically ignore the education, feeling that it has no bearing on their life, or they become enthralled with the ideas, practices, or learning being shared only to return home and become disillusioned when their family practices do not mesh with their newfound excitement (Heilman, 1992; Reimer, 1991).

In an attempt to better understand the current role of Jewish family education, several areas of the literature are reviewed to situate blended learning as part of a purposeful educational design, which could lead to families extending their learning into their daily family life. This literature review contains the following sections: History of family education in non-Jewish and Jewish educational settings, history of blended learning, definition of blended learning, uniqueness and advantages of blended learning, blended learning as Constructivist education, and community and blended learning in Jewish family education.
History of Family Education

Parent education is as old as the founding of the United States (Croake & Glover, 1977). The first record of a gathering in the United States for the specific purpose of parental education dates back to 1815 in Portland, Maine (Croake & Glover, 1977). In the secular world, family education was originally conceived as parent education. “Parent education is operationally defined as the purposive learning activity of parents who are attempting to change their methods of interaction with their children for the purpose of encouraging positive behavior in their children” (Croake & Glover, 1977, p. 151). In its beginnings parent education, which historically has focused on pre-adolescent children, utilized mass media, group discussion and individual counseling, however, over time group discussions became the method of choice (Croake & Glover, 1977). Parent education adopted a variety of methods and techniques from other fields including education, psychotherapy, and counseling.

Parent education and involvement has repeatedly shown to be an important predictor of student achievement (Cotton & Wikeland, 1989; Davis-Kean, 2005; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Halle, Kurtz-Costes, & Mahoney, 1997). Halle et al. (1997), found that in low-income minority families, mothers with higher levels of education had higher expectations for their children’s academic achievement. They also found that these higher expectations correlated with higher levels of achievement in math and reading. Greenwood and Hickman (1991) found that parental involvement had as much affect on student success and behavior as did the school environment. According to the Coleman Report (1966), as well as Mosteller and Moynihan’s (1972) reanalysis of the Coleman Report, “approximately one-half to two-thirds of the student achievement variance studied was accounted for by home variables” (Greenwood & Hickman, 1991, p. 279). The effect of parent education, parent actions, and home environment on student
behavior and school achievement, has been of much interest to both parents and researchers alike since the 1815’s. However, notwithstanding the significant interest parent education has acquired, it has never become a field of its own, remaining instead within the realm of psychology, education, and sociology.

History of Jewish Family Education

Family education in Jewish educational settings developed out of a believed need to educate parents about Jewish traditions and customs. This is a different concern than that of parent education classes which focused on how to parent. However, there are similarities found in the literature of the 1970’s concerning the alleged weakening of the American family (Bane, 1976; Berger & Berger, 1983; Keniston, 1977; Reimer, 1991) and the conversation concerning many Jewish families’ abilities to properly educate their children concerning values, traditions, and observances. Keniston (1977) and Bane (1976) discuss the fear at the time, in the general public, of the decline of the American family due to rising rates of divorce, increased numbers of children born to single mothers, declining fertility rates, and increased numbers of working women. Additionally, the Jewish community was facing the trend of people marrying later in life, having less children, and an increased rate of intermarriage. Each of these trends led to a perceived decline in Jewish population. Jewish family education initially developed out of a similar fear of the dissolution of the Jewish family and threats of assimilation (Appelman Winnick, 1985; Cohen, 1985).

Jewish family education, defined as education that attempts to involve, educate and affect the entire family, became a popular form of Jewish education starting in the 1980s. There were attempts to educate families prior to 1980, dating as far back as the early 1920’s, the Jewish Homemakers Association, a division of the Bureau of Jewish Education under Samson Benderly
was “dedicated to teaching young mothers how to Judaize their homes and initiate Jewish activities with their young children” (Krasner, 2011, p. 70). The majority, however, of Jewish education has focused on children, specifically pre-adolescent children parallel to secular parent education.

Before modern times (and still today in more traditional Jewish communities), there was little need for family education. Judaism was found in the home and neighborhood. Home-based rituals, values and holiday practices, were taught and experienced daily. “Formal education was a complement and extension of the Jewish identity forged in the home and neighborhood” (http://www.jesna.org/sosland/resources/complementary-education/spotlight-paper-jewish-family-education). Even when this was acknowledged as more myth than fact, the approach taken to correct it was to educate girls rather than families. As Benderly wrote, “Unless a system of education is worked out for Jewish women in this country there is no hope of ever having a Jewish home life here” (Krasner, 2011, p. 104).

Over time, as people moved outside of traditional Jewish neighborhoods, outside of all-encompassing Jewish environments, many Jewish home practices were lost. As families began to acknowledge their lack of Jewish knowledge they turned to the synagogues as a place to educate their children. This model, drop off or carpool Judaism, created a disconnect where children were educated in a school setting about a religion that was not practiced in the home.

During the 1980’s and early 1990’s there was an attempt to create and define the field of Jewish family education (Reimer, 1991; Appelman Winnick, 1985; Wolfson, 2004). Supplemental school was failing the majority of children, and enrollment was decreasing; one of the primary reasons ascribed to these problems was a lack of parental investment in the education offered. Educators and scholars began questioning the ability of the Jewish family to
pass on Judaism. If a significant portion of students’ success in school can be attributed to home variables (Cotton & Wikelund, 1989; Davis-Kean, 2005; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Halle et al., 1997) then how much more so do home variables affect a child’s religious education? Simultaneously, baby boomers were becoming parents, and there was an increase in intermarried families entering the educational system. These two groups brought renewed interest in being involved in their children’s education. Shrage (1988) argued that there were actually higher then believed affiliation rates at this time, that a majority of families were affiliating with a synagogue but only for a few pre-B’nai Mitzvah years (cited in Reimer, 1991). Rather than work on outreach, Shrage urged the educational establishment to improve the education offered in order to keep the affiliated, if even only for a few years, committed and interested in a Jewish life beyond a Bar Mitzvah ceremony. This pushed the Jewish educational conversation towards family-orientated services instead of simply childcare or child education; a focus on the family as client rather than the child (Reimer, 1991). Reimer defined Jewish Family Education during this time period as “an attempt by educators to reach out to family members and invite them to join with their children in learning the joys of Jewish living” (Reimer, 1991, p. 269). The Jewish educational community had recognized that the family acts as the primary influence over children’s Jewish identities. Unless what was being taught in the classroom was modeled at home, the education would remain irrelevant. In an attempt to remedy this situation, “Jewish educators sought to devise and provide Jewish educational activities that would impact on the entire family unit” (http://www.jesna.org/sosland/resources/complementary-education/spotlight-paper-jewish-family-education).

However, as Jewish family education began to gain popularity in synagogues across the country, some educators and scholars questioned the value, or transferability, of family
educational programs held in the synagogue and not in the home. Schiff and Botwinik (1988), Himmelfarb (1974) and Bock (1977), as cited in Reimer (1991), all argue that involvement in and practice of Judaism needs to occur in the home in order to have maximal effect. They believe that creating programs in the synagogue brings family education only to the synagogue, and not to the home. “A synagogue-based set of programs can successfully bring families to the synagogue and involve them in Jewish activities and learning in that context, but will that success motivate the families to similarly increase the Jewish experiential level of their home lives?” (Reimer, 1991, p. 274). And Wolfson (1985) asked if synagogues even teach Jews how to be Jewish in their homes, or rather are they “continuing to feed the family’s dependence on it [the synagogue] as the central vehicle for Jewish expression while failing to significantly move the family towards Jewish self-sufficiency in the home (p. 6). Christian religious education has faced similar questions. Merhaut (2007) argues that in order for children to have a faith, there must be faith formation in the home and that the church needs to support parents in providing for their child’s religious education, their faith formation. Merhaut (2007) believes that church-based education has actually done a disservice by having people only see God in church and not in their homes. “Our church-centered and school-centered programs have not helped the majority of our people believe that God is with them constantly” (Merhaut, 2007, p. 43).

Conversely, it has been debated, as to whether families even wish to increase the Jewishness of their homes. In one study, Bernard (1991) found that participants were not interested in increasing their home practices when attending family educational programs held in a synagogue. When interviewed, participants said they enjoyed the opportunity to attend a family evening, such as a Shabbat dinner, in a distinctively Jewish setting. However, they were not interested in transferring these behaviors to their home life. In fact, when asked, participants
rated the opportunity for family time the highest, followed by opportunity to create community relationships while learning tools and skills to take home were ranked low. Bernard concludes that people are satisfied with a passive Jewish role. “For most, being with their family in an audience of congenial fellow Jews is as much Jewishness as they are prepared to accept” (Bernard, 1991, p. 297). Perhaps it was simply easier to involve families in Jewish family education in the synagogue or perhaps that is ultimately what families are seeking. No matter the reason, Jewish family education, outside of a handful of exceptions, has remained within the realm of educational institutions.

Although a number of family education programs have been created over the last several decades such as parallel classes for parents, commercial and movement-based materials, community wide mega-events as well as internet resources and intensive experiences such as retreats and family camps (http://www.jesna.org/sosland/resources/complementary-education/spotlight-paper-jewish-family-education), family synagogue education programs have remained predominately one time add-ons, optional opportunities that families could choose to complement the education of their children in the classroom. Many supplemental schools adopted the model of offering a single family program for each grade; challah making and learning about the Friday night Shabbat dinner in the first grade for example. However, the dilemma of family education is the presumption on the part of the educator that the family is lacking something, in this case, the ability to bring Judaism meaningfully into their family life, and that they, the educator or their educational curricula can provide the families what they are lacking. This assumption, even though it was frequently based on truth, led educators to create Jewish education that did include the family, but was educator driven. Jewish educators created programs where families were brought together sporadically to be “given” the tools to lead a
Jewish life. The teacher, or facilitator, would instruct the family on how to “make Shabbat” or establish Jewish bedtime rituals. The entire family unit, no longer just the students, was the empty vessel that Jewish educators could fill with a set body of knowledge. The belief of family educators was that if families were given the tools, for example a set of Shabbat candles and the accompanying blessings for the candles, and experienced the practice once, lighting the candles together before a synagogue sponsored family Shabbat dinner, then the family would walk away not only understanding the ritual, but having the ability and motivation to begin to practice this ritual weekly in their home. By 1990, Jewish family education, “had achieved recognition within the organized American Jewish community, as an impressive number and variety of Jewish family education programs had been established” (Reimer, 1991, p. 275). It was a popular movement, which had grown more by passion then by purposeful design and systematic implementation.

1990-2010 in Jewish family education. The 1990’s began a search for new and innovative methods for Jewish education initially labeled as transformational projects and most recently coined new models. “New models” is the current nomenclature used to describe Jewish education that is broader than classroom based, traditional religious education frequently embracing experiential models. This interest was sparked by two major publications, both appearing in 1990 that provoked a drastic communal conversation on the apparent failure of the Jewish educational enterprise. First the Mandel Commission on Jewish Education issued, “A Time to Act” (1990) which discussed the inadequate role Jewish education was playing given that, “The responsibility for developing Jewish identity and instilling a commitment to Judaism for this population now rests primarily with education” (p. 15). “A Time to Act” called for a new vitality in Jewish education based on the dual platform of developing the profession of
Jewish education and mobilizing community support towards the goals of Jewish education. In the same year, the 1990 National Jewish Population Study was released which claimed that the intermarriage rate was at 52% within the Jewish community. This statistic shocked the Jewish community and in fact, this population study led to a dramatic shift in the agenda of the organized American Jewish community.

Since the release of these two publications, and supported by the communal conversation, there has been a slow acknowledgement within the Jewish educational community that the goal of Jewish education is no longer adding facts and knowledge to the student’s Jewish lives, but in many cases the goal of these educational experiences is to foster a Jewish identity, a lived Jewish life. The community has acknowledged that the majority of children and adults spend most of their time outside of a Jewish environment. The milieu has become predominately American, and not Jewish. Most children are not even exposed to a community of living Judaism. In the words of Aron, et al., (1978), they have lost a “norming” Jewish community or in Berger’s (1967) terminology, there is no plausibility structure for a lived Jewish life. “The community is an essential ingredient when trying to bring a child into the practices of a group that is different than the larger society” (Weissman & Weinberg, nd, p. 9). As Weissman and Weinberg state, “The vast majority of children from liberal Jewish households live their lives immersed in communities that affirm the values and practices of American secular life” (p. 9). What is lacking in this reality is the community that lives a Jewish life. Without a plausibility structure, people are not able to conceive of any possibilities outside of their normal boundaries. Living a full Jewish life is simply outside of their realm of plausibility. This leaves an environment bereft of people and practices who honor Jewish values; a lack of Jewish role models. “The Jewish
neighborhood that once served as a model for Jewish living is more rare than common for today’s children” (Weissman & Weinberg, nd, p. 9).

**Jewish family education today.** The need to shift from after-school education teaching skills and facts to children as a complement to the Jewish lives lived in the student’s homes to identity development, Jewish life skills and personal Jewish meaning making for families has necessitated a shift away from Perennialist philosophies of education and caused a movement toward Progressive forms. “The field of supplemental Jewish education is brimming with new ideas and curricula, a raft of new innovations, new strategies, and dozens of schools actively engaged in a process of reinvention” (Wertheimer, 2007, p. 9). It has also, overtime, pushed the educational conversation out of the sole focus of the classroom, or even the realm of add-on family education, which arose as an intermediary step, and into the discussion of new educational systems and experience which merge the goals of student knowledge acquisition with family meaning making in new, creative endeavors. Constructivist inspired family education creates situations where learners are able to construct meaning that is not only integrated but also integral to their daily life, education for living not preparation for living. This move, from family education under a Perennialist model to the use of a Progressivist model, is the move from family education programs to the creation of family engagement systems. “Twenty-first century models shift family engagement from episodic calendared events to a natural family rhythm in sync with Jewish time” (Weissman & Weinberg, nd, p. 5).

Inherent to the conversation regarding family education, community building and education, with the goal of affecting practice, is what happens once the family leaves the organized space of learning. Since family education is designed to be applied elsewhere, the learning cannot stop at the end of the session or activity. It must continue to the space created by
the family outside the formal educational space. This space in between learning and community creation is a rich source for further research. Blended family education has the potential to increase the connection between the learning and the beliefs and the actions of the family. It can aid in the creation of a community that expresses higher levels of engagement with Judaism.

**History of Blended Learning**

There is little mention of blended learning in scholarly articles before 2000, but since then, there has been an explosion in interest, research, and educational endeavors involving blended education. In fact, Masie (2006), Massy (2006) and Ross and Gage (2006) believe that blended learning will replace traditional learning in the future. This section examines multiple definitions of blended learning, as well as how blended learning differs from both face-to-face and online learning. The research suggests that blended learning is a unique educational opportunity, one that is Constructivist in nature. Additionally, the educational advantages blended learning offers and the role community plays in blended learning are examined.

Education has a long history of occurring in spaces other than traditional classrooms or institutional school settings. Many early professions were learned through apprenticeships and on the job experiences. The Industrial Revolution created not only a revolution in the workplace, but also a revolution in education. In the 19th century, universal schooling, as a result of the industrial revolution, became the norm. “Universal schooling led people to identify learning with school” (Brint, 2006, p. 4; Collins & Halverson, 2010). During this time, the state took over the responsibility of educating children from their parents, due to concerns of an increasing immigrant population and the need to inculcate American values and the English language (Collins & Halverson, 2010). The main objective of this education was to teach obedience, hierarchy, English, and American values.
Although education and school became synonymous for most people living in industrial societies, distance learning has a long history. The earliest accounts appear to be correspondence classes in London, England. Although the definition is not universally agreed upon, distance learning can be most expansively defined as any education where the teacher is in a geographically different space than the learner (Moore, Dickson-Deane, & Galyen, 2011, p. 129). With the availability of high quality technology, distance learning has evolved primarily into online learning. The first instances of online learning, which overlapped earlier versions of distance learning such as video conferencing, educational television and correspondence courses, occurred during the 1980s (Means, et al., 2010). Online learning, defined as learning that occurs through the use of the Internet, has evolved over the past three decades with the increased availability of technology and specifically Web 2.0 technologies.

With the advent of the Internet and the World Wide Web, the potential for reaching learners around the world increased greatly, and today’s online learning offers rich educational resources in multiple media and the capability to support both real-time and asynchronous communication between instructors and learners as well as among different learners (Means, et al., 2010, p. 22).

In the past ten to fifteen years, there has been increased interest in blending learning, learning that is a combination of face-to-face, traditional education and online education. Blended learning is increasing at such a rapid pace that Masie (2006), Massy (2006) and Ross and Gage (2006) predict that all learning in the future will be blending learning, so much so, in fact, that they believe eventually the word blended will drop and it will simply become known as learning.
Collins and Halverson (2010) categorize learning into three historical stages of development: apprenticeship, schooling and life-long learning. Within these historic stages, Collins and Halverson (2010) focus on seven main areas of change: responsibility, content, pedagogy, assessment, location, culture, and relationships. Responsibility for education in the apprenticeship era was individual; during the schooling era it moved to the state and now, in the era of life-long learning, it is becoming the responsibility of the family. Content was based on practical skills and basic knowledge in the past, and in the life-long learning era content focuses on learning how to learn. Pedagogy transitioned from an apprenticeship model to a didactic model, to one of interaction. Concurrently, assessment moved from observations to testing to embedded assessments. Location was centered in the home during the apprentice area, it moved into the school during the schooling era and is currently moving toward multiple locations in the life-long learning era. The movement of location has impacted the culture surrounding the learning from an adult culture to a peer culture and then to a mixed-age culture. Finally, there has been a change in the student-teacher relationship. During the apprenticeship era, students learned from adults with whom they had a personal relationship. This relationship changed from personal to authoritarian when education moved into the institutional school system. Today, student-teacher relationships are increasingly built on computer-mediated interactions. In the era of life-long learning, education is no longer in the realm of the school or the teacher; everyone is able to learn when and where they wish. Education in the life-long learning era can be described as learning how to learn, using a model of interaction, which employs embedded assessments in order to evaluate the learning. It has become the responsibility of the family. The learning takes place in multiple locations co-existing in a mixed-age culture and with computer-mediated student/teacher interactions.
**Definition of Blended Learning.** There does not appear to be one clear accepted definition of blended learning. In fact, it can be defined so broadly that some might argue any type of learning would count (Graham, 2006). A common definition is the assimilation of both traditional face-to-face education and online learning opportunities into a seamless whole (Bliuc et al., 2007; De George-Walker & Keeffe, 2010; Garrison & Kanuka, 2004; Graham, 2006; Macdonald, 2008). Graham, Allen and Ure (2003) state the three most common definitions involve 1) combining instructional modalities, 2) combining instructional methods and 3) combining online and face-to-face instruction. Graham (2006) in the *Handbook of Blended Learning: Global Perspectives, Local Designs* defines blended learning as a system that, “combine[s] face-to-face instruction with computer-mediated instruction” (p. 5). A slightly more nuanced definition is offered by Singh (2003) “Blended learning combines multiple delivery media that are designed to complement each other and promote learning and application-learned behavior” (p. 51). Allen and Seaman (2005) attempt to classify the face-to-face/online learning continuum into four categories: 1) Traditional = 0% online content; 2) Web Facilitated = web technology to facilitate the learning process, used between 1% - 29% of the time; 3) Blended/Hybrid = 30%-79% of learning delivered online; and 4) online = 80% or more of the class is online. And Staker and Horn (2012) in the report, “Classifying K-12 Blended Learning,” one of the few studies done on blended learning in the K-12 classroom offer the following: A formal education program in which a student learns at least in part through online delivery of content and instruction with some element of student control over time, place, path and/or pace and at least in part at a supervised brick-and-mortar location away from home. (p. 6)

Face-to-face education is traditionally associated with learning that is teacher focused, live,
involving person-to-person interactions and synchronous, whereas distance learning is typically self-paced, text based and asynchronous. Face-to-face education allows for community development opportunities, students can rely on the teacher to lead and monitor the classroom learning and feedback can be immediate and clear, especially for students adept at reading non-verbal cues. Arnold, Ducate, Lomicka and Lord (2009) found that students preferred face-to-face meetings for group projects, especially when major decisions were involved. However, due to constraints of time and finances, educational institutions experimented with content delivered through online learning platforms. Historically, face-to-face learning has typically been believed to focus more on the human-to-human interaction, whereas distance learning places a greater focus on the learner-material relationship. Blended learning is the attempt to capitalize on the strengths of both educational formats in an attempt to create a unique learning experience. De George-Walker and Keeffe (2010) state, “Blended learning focuses on optimizing achievement of learning objectives by applying the ‘right’ learning technologies to match the ‘right’ personal learning style to transfer the ‘right’ skills to the ‘right’ person at the ‘right’ time” (p. 2). The challenge of blended learning is to meld the best of face-to-face interaction with online learning while leaving behind the flaws of both educational settings. Garrison and Kanuka (2004) succinctly summarize the issues educators face when developing blended learning educational experiences,

Blended learning is both simple and complex. At its simplest, blended learning is the thoughtful integration of classroom face-to-face learning experiences with online learning experiences. There is considerable intuitive appeal to the concept of integrating the strengths of synchronous (face-to-face) and asynchronous (text-based Internet) learning activities. At the same time, there is considerable complexity in its implementation with
the challenge of virtually limitless design possibilities and applicability to so many contexts. (p. 2)

**Uniqueness of Blended Learning.** The challenge of blended learning is to utilize the benefits of face-to-face educational interactions with online learning while removing the flaws of each educational setting. Blended learning is able to offer a unique learning environment that is greater than simply the sum of face-to-face education and online learning. Blended learning offers more choices for learning than traditional online or distance classes and is more educationally effective (Dziuban, et al., 2005; Ocak, 2011; Rovai & Jordan, 2004; Singh, 2003). Early attempts at online learning lead to the realization that there cannot be only one method offered for online learning. The use of several methods, such as face-to-face combined with a variety of online educational experiences or the use of different online educational tools, leads to increased socialization, choice and engagement. “The result is potentially a more robust educational experience than either traditional or fully online learning can offer” (Rovai & Jordan, 2004, p. 4). In a meta-analysis of over a thousand articles discussing online learning published between 1996 and July 2008, Means, et al. (2010) found students perform moderately better in online classes than face-to-face classes, this effect was even more significant for blended classes. Arnold and Paulus (2010) found that students were more likely to read more student responses online and respond more often than was required when enrolled in blended classes. Possible reasons for increased student performance in blended learning class will be discussed in the following section. Other studies have shown that blended learning environments allow for interaction with the material in a variety of modalities that best meet the learners, needs based on both learning style preferences and life situations. De George-Walker and Keeffe (2010) found “blended learning offered these students the autonomy to learn at a pace and in the manner that
suited their needs” (p. 10). Students report enjoying blended learning because they feel it is flexible and convenient education, while at the same time there is no sacrifice of the social community face-to-face learning offers.

Oliver and Trigwell (2005) and De George-Walker and Keeffe (2010) offer the critique that blended learning could be more accurately described as blended teaching. They argue that the teacher may teach in a variety of settings, in person and online, but that they are not actually thinking of blended learning in so far as how the student interact with and learns the material. They suggest that the focus needs to be refined; attention should turn away from the teacher, content and technology and toward the students, experiences, and pedagogies. As Garrison and Kanuka (2004) assert “It is not just finding the right mix of technologies or increasing access to learning…Blended learning inherently is about rethinking and redesigning the teaching and learning relations” (p. 99).

**Advantages of blended learning.** Blended learning has the potential to offer the benefits of face-to-face education combined with the allure of online learning. Osguthorpe and Graham (2003) identified six reasons why an institution, instructor or student might choose to design or use a blended learning system: 1) Pedagogic richness; 2) Access to knowledge; 3) Social interaction; 4) Personal agency; 5) Cost effectiveness and 6) Ease of revision. Learners want the convenience of online learning but do not want to sacrifice the value of a face-to-face community and the social experience of the classroom. Graham, et al. (2003) found that overwhelmingly students choose blended learning for three reasons: 1) improved pedagogy, 2) increased access and flexibility, and 3) increased cost effectiveness.

Research supports learning and teaching that employ a blended approach” (Ocak, 2011, p. 689). Garrison and Kanuka (2004) found that blended learning has led to improved retention,
higher student satisfaction, and increased positive attitudes toward the material. Blended learning decreased perceived distance between instructors and students, adds pedagogic richness and flexibility, and helps meet the needs of different types of learners. Students report they are happier with blended learning (Dziuban, et al., 2005). Blended learning leads to more active education, addresses multiple learning styles, allows for flexibility and promotes community. Blended learning in some cases leads to an increase in peer-to-peer learning strategies, active learning strategies, and learning centered strategies (Dziuban et al., 2005; Means, et al., 2010).

Blended learning is also frequently used for work training purposes. One reason workplace training programs were early adopters of blended learning was the benefit that a learner was able to immediately try out the learning in a mentored environment. Learning from others and interpreted experiences is one of the five conditions Gee (2008) suggests is necessary for optimal learning (p. 21-22). Increasingly higher education, as well as K-12 institutions, is creating blended learning opportunities.

**Blended Learning as Constructivist Education**

Constructivist education is the need for students to construct their own learning from personal experiences. Furthermore, a social-constructivist view of pedagogy, which has greatly influenced online learning, is based on the idea that “an individual person constructs his or her knowledge through the process of negotiating meaning with others” (So & Brush, 2008, p. 3). Blended learning intrinsically lends itself to Constructivist pedagogy. As noted previously, blended learning, when properly constructed, can move the locus of focus from the professor to the student. There is conscious thought concerning the production of learning, reaching out to students in the place in which they are, and a strong emphasis on the creation of a community of inquiry. Community of inquiry is described by Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2000) as the
learning that occurs through the interaction of the cognitive, social and teaching presence. In blended learning environments the instructor can become the learning environment designer, rather than the lecturer or the receptacle of knowledge. This new environment allows the student to create and inquire for him or herself. The student is able to discover and construct his or her own personal knowledge while being supported by a community of inquiry.

What makes blended learning particularly effective is its ability to facilitate a community of inquiry. Community provides the stabilizing, cohesive influence that balances the open communication and limitless access to information on the Internet…Blended learning has the capabilities to facilitate these conditions and adds an important reflective element with multiple forms of communication to meet specific learning requirements. (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004, p. 3)

The value of a community encouraging inquiry moves the learning from a purely Constructivist model, which locates the learning within the individual, to a Connected learning model, a subset of Constructivist education, which places the learning within the social relationship. (Ito, et al., 2013, p. 64). The Evaluation of Evidence-Based Practices in Online Learning: A Meta-Analysis and Review of Online Learning Studies (2010) report found that students were more academically successful in blended learning environments, not because of the use of media, but because of different elements of learning employed in blended learning environments than in either face-to-face learning or online learning. These elements included increased class time, easier access to the instructor, the ability to reflect both before participating and then again after acquiring new knowledge, seeing other students model learning and at the same time the need to actively engage with the material personally, rather than passively, and additional materials and opportunities for collaboration. These elements were shown to be crucial to the success of
blended learning in multiple studies (Dziuban, et al., 2005; Garrison & Kanuka, 2004; Means, et, al., 2010; Ocak, 2011; Rovai & Jordan, 2004; So & Brush, 2008). “Indeed, the concept of blended learning may be a synthesis of these areas as the learning environment becomes more learning–centered, with emphasis on active learning through collaboration and social construction of understanding” (Rovai & Jordan, 2004, p 11). Ultimately, blended learning lends itself to rethinking the teaching/learning relationship in positive Constructivist, or Connected, manner (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004).

**Community.** Many believed that face-to-face classes lead to increased feelings of community amongst students more so than online learning, or other forms of distance learning. However, the research appears unclear. Community has been well documented to be an important aspect of learning (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004; Rovai, 2002; Sergiovanni, 1994). Community allows for free, open dialogue, critical debate, negotiations and agreement (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004). Rovai (2002) found that “students with stronger sense of community tended to possess greater perceived levels of cognitive learning (p. 330). In addition, many scholars point to the need for a community of learners in order for a student to grasp a complex body of knowledge. Distance learning was thought to focus on the student-material relationship, rather than peer-to-peer or peer-to-instructor interactions. However, blended learning environments may in fact foster greater community connections (Arnold & Paulus, 2010; Rovai & Jordan, 2004). Arnold and Paulus (2010) found that the use of a Ning, in a blended college course lead to an increased sense of community and provided benefits of modeling, even when this was not one of the explicit goals of the professor. In fact, they found that students felt the individual profiles on the Ning encouraged bonding. Students reported doing more than the minimum work required online, and they enjoyed the ability to see other student’s responses, serving as a model
to help further their own thinking. The Ning facilitated the locus of control of the class to move from the professor to the students. Students perceived the Ning as a facilitator of communication and collaboration, whereas, previous online classes, which employed a course management system, were perceived as offering a one-way transfer of knowledge from instructor to student (Arnold & Paulus, 2010). Rovai and Jordan (2004) state that computer-mediated communication can lead to “group communication and cooperative learning that promotes a level of reflective interaction that is often lacking in a face-to-face, teacher-centered classroom” (p. 3).

However, it is still unclear how online and face-to-face community building and maintenance differ in blended courses (Arnold & Paulus, 2010). Some questions that require further consideration are: What happens when a group of learners have two venues for community building available (online and face-to-face)? Does this create two separate communities, or do they overlap? How do the two distinct venues allow for the learning to grow in the in between space? What type of content is best suited for each learning environment? What way does blended learning transform the connection of learning to the physical space as well as the facilitator? This is an area ripe for future research. A closer examination of the role community plays in the success of blended learning is necessary.

**Summary**

Jewish family education programs are increasingly looking for models of success. Success in these programs is most frequently defined as increased levels of family knowledge, practice, and identification with Judaism, as well as with a Jewish community. The literature shows that blended learning has untapped potential as a successful model for Jewish family education and engagement. No articles discussing the use of blended learning in Jewish family engagement were found during an examination of the scholarly research published to date. In
fact, little information on the use of blended learning, or online learning in general, appears to be available in either the field of Jewish education or family education. Solomon and Flexner (2010) suggest Jewish education could benefit from blended learning. However, they also claim that the Jewish community has not yet entered into the realm of harnessing online learning technologies and confirm that not much blended learning is occurring in Jewish educational environments. Solomon and Flexner (2010) further claim that congregational schools, where a majority of family education occurs, are wary of using the technology of online learning because their primary goal is community creation which many synagogue educators feel requires a physical presence.

There are signs, articles in the popular press and the creation of digital learning initiatives, that the Jewish community is moving in the direction of increased use of online learning. However, all of these articles appeared in the popular press, none appeared to be research based, and the few digital learning projects are new, and largely focused on student centered learning.

There appears to be, as of yet, undefended space which occurs in between the organized space of learning and families’ actions and beliefs subsequent to the learning. This space is crucial for families to be able to translate the educational experiences into behaviors and practices. This space is one that is also ripe for community identification. Bended learning has the potential to offer Jewish family education the tools to help bridge the gap between the learning obtained in the synagogue, and the families’ beliefs and practices in their daily life. As Collins and Halverson (2010) described in their three stages of the historic development of learning, the current stage of lifelong learning is described as learning how to learn, using a model of interaction, which employs embedded assessments in order to evaluate the learning. In
the age of lifelong learning, Collins and Halverson (2010) claim that the learning has become the responsibility of the family and that the learning takes place in multiple locations co-existing in a mixed-age culture and with computer-mediated learning/teacher interactions. This description can be naturally applied to the goals of Jewish family education and engagement.

Family education attempts to educate and engage the entire family in Jewish knowledge and practice. The programs, activities, and classes are designed with the explicit goal of having the families transport the experiences and the learning out of the location of delivery and apply them to the families’ lives. This literature review began to answer the question, how can blended learning propose a unique and powerful pedagogy for family education. Through an examination of the history and current reality of Jewish family education, an examination of multiple definitions of blended learning, how blended learning differs from both face-to-face and online learning this review suggests that blended learning can offer a unique educational opportunity, one that is Constructivist in nature, which allows families to incorporate Jewish learning, behaviors, and community into their daily lives.
Chapter Three: Research Design

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to examine how blended learning could offer a unique and powerful pedagogy for Jewish family engagement, allowing families to incorporate Jewish learning and behaviors into their daily lives through both the support and empowerment of a community of peers. Specifically, this research aimed to illuminate the narratives of participants in a challenge group created to empower participants to incorporate Shabbat dinner into their families’ week. This study describes the participants’ interactions with blended learning as a tool to aid families in incorporating Jewish learning, behaviors, and community into their daily lives. Primary question: What are the experiences of the participants in a blended learning Shabbat challenge?

Two sub-questions act as a guide in approaching this research:

1: What do the participants believe the blended learning Shabbat challenge brought to their family life?

2: What do the participants believe the community of peers brought to their Shabbat challenge experience?

Research Design

A qualitative approach allowed the researcher to share the narrative stories of participants in a weeklong blended learning Shabbat dinner challenge. Qualitative research methods allowed for the researcher to approach the participants without a predefined theory. It allowed the researcher to capture the stories of these participants, creating rich descriptions of the participants’ experiences in the blended learning Shabbat challenge.

This study relied on the Constructive-Interpretivist tradition. Constructivism believes that “reality is constructed in the mind of the individual, rather than it being an externally
singular entity” (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 129). Meaning, it is uncovered through the interaction of the researcher and the participant. A main characteristic of this approach is understanding the “lived-reality” through the eyes of the participant. This tradition allowed for a dynamic understanding of how participants understood their experiences in the Shabbat challenge. Each participant created their own ontology, their own individual understanding of reality (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 130), which was illuminated through their individual stories. From an epistemological perspective, constructivists “advocate a transactional and subjectivist stance that maintains that reality is socially constructed; and, therefore, the dynamic interaction between researcher and participant is central to capturing and describing the “lived experience of the participant” (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 131). Finally, the role of the researcher (Axiology) in the Constructivist tradition is to bracket or describe his or her personal values. The researcher does not attempt to eliminate their values, but rather believes that by acknowledging them within the research and attempting to place them to the side, they are being truer to the reality the researcher brings to the research. This is of particular importance because the researcher was also the principle designer and moderator of the Shabbat challenge.

**Research Tradition**

This study employed a narrative methodology. In narrative research designs, researchers describe the lives of individuals, collect and tell stories about people’s lives, and write narratives of individual’s experiences. Narratives can be employed to explore the “educational research problem by understanding the experiences of an individual” (Creswell, 2012, p. 505). Chase shares that “Narrative is a way of understanding one’s own and other’s actions, of organizing events and objects into a meaningful whole, and of connecting and seeing the consequences of actions and events over time” (Chase, 2005, p. 656). People are storytellers, telling and retelling
stories is how individuals make sense of their lived realities. Narrative research taps into this storytelling experience as a way of deeply exploring one’s understanding of their experiences (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). The narrative perspective was appropriate for this study given its research focus on human learning as a result of participation in the Shabbat challenge.

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) and Clandinin (2013) cite that Dewey’s theory of experience (1938) is the philosophical underpinning of narrative inquiry. Dewey expresses two foundational requirements for experience: interaction and continuity enacted in situations (Clandinin, 2013). These two requirements, according to Dewey, allow people to understand their lived experiences through three domains: temporal, space, and sociality. Temporal refers to the view that experiences are all built on one another. One’s understanding of experience is continuous through time. Spatial is one’s understanding of the context of the experience within a specific moment in time. And social refers to the fact that humans are social creatures, our experiences happen within relationships, within community. These social influences affect one’s understanding of lived experiences. Clandinin (2013) further expands on these three aspects, naming them fundamental to narrative inquiry under the categories of relational, continuous and social.

The narrative approach helped the researcher to investigate the reality of the participants in the Shabbat challenge and their use of blended learning. Chase (2005) identifies five diverse approaches to narrative inquiry. This study most closely aligns with what Chase describes as identity work. “That people engage in as they construct selves within specific institutional, organizational, discursive and local cultural contexts (Chase, 2005, p. 658). Within narrative inquiry, the participant becomes the narrator of his or her personal story. The role of the researcher is to invite the story, through the use of broad questions to guide the interview and to
discover the story worthy narrative, not just to list to the stories the narrator wishes to tell. Frequently, subjects will speak in generalities rather than specifics during the interviews because they assume that is what the interviewer wants from them. The narrative researcher must help the subjects share their specific story, not jumping to generalize or contextualize their lived reality.

From an educational research perspective, blended learning appears to be a positive educational tool for family engagement. However, there are currently few programs employing this tool. The participants’ stories aided the researcher in developing a narrative of blended learning uses in family engagement. Carr (1986) suggests that narrative inquiry can explore formation of community. Family engagement and community involvement is an individual experience. Stories, narratives, of how participants lived the Shabbat challenge, helped create a deeper understanding of how families connect to and engage with Judaism as well as gain support from their peer community. The individual stories were woven together, using the lens of the researcher to create a picture of the possibility of using blended learning in general, and the challenge model specifically, in family engagement.

**Participants and Sampling Strategy**

For this narrative study, five participants in a blended learning Shabbat challenge were interviewed. Purposeful sampling was used to engage the five individuals in the research. Purposeful sampling is selecting individuals “because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon” (Creswell, 2013, p. 156). Since participants in this study were a self-selecting group who chose to participate in the Shabbat challenge, it was the belief of the researcher that at least four participants would agree to be interviewed about their experiences in the challenge simply from a request for participants presented to the group.
Recruitment, Access & Protection of Human Subjects

Participants for the Shabbat challenge were a self-selecting group of individuals who agreed to take part in the Shabbat challenge. Using purposeful, nonprobability sampling, eligible individuals who chose to participate in the challenge were not currently engaged in a weekly traditional Shabbat dinner as part of their families’ life but did express interest in the idea of having family Shabbat dinners. The challenge was advertised on the researcher’s personal Facebook page, at the Conservative synagogue where the researcher was employed as the Director of Education, through a PJ Library listserv and though personal contacts of the researcher. When participants signed up for the challenge, they were asked if they were willing to be interviewed concerning their experiences in the Shabbat challenge. Snowball sampling, when the researcher asked participants if they knew of other potential participants for the challenge, was employed. No payment or remuneration, outside of participating in the challenge, was offered for challenge participants. Five participants, who agreed to be interviewed and complete the challenge, become the participants for this narrative study. A consent to participate in the Shabbat challenge (Appendix B) was shared with each participant. Additionally, a consent to participate as a research participant (Appendix C) was shared with and signed by each of the five participants interviewed. It was also verbally explained, emphasizing the fact that participation is voluntary, that the participant may withdraw from the study at any time, that the participant will receive complete confidentiality throughout the process of the study and a complete copy of the final research.

Data Collection and Storage

For this narrative study, data was collected through personal interviews and through the online platform (a private Facebook group) of the Shabbat challenge. All interviews were
conducted in person. All interviews were digitally recorded and followed Active Interviewing (Holstein & Gubrium, 1997) and Responsive Interviewing protocols (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). All data collection was performed by the student researcher.

All data for this study was stored in a locked cabinet, and digitally password protected on a thumb drive, to which only the student researcher and principal investigator, when necessary, had access. A transcriber was hired to transcribe the interviews. The transcriber first signed a Confidentiality Agreement (Appendix D). Each participant was assigned a pseudonym and only the student researcher had access to the code for the pseudonyms, which remained digitally password protected. All of the data collected from this study was used for the completion of this doctoral dissertation, as well as potential future research papers or conference presentations. Complete confidentiality will be maintained in all cases. All material from this study will be deleted or destroyed five years after the completion of the study.

**Data Analysis Overview & Trustworthiness**

The data in a narrative study is the stories the researcher uncovers during extensive, individual interviews. “These stories, called *field texts* (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), provide the raw data for researcher to analyze as they retell the story based on narrative elements such as the problem, character, setting, actions and resolution” (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2000). When the researcher narrates the story, he/she analyzes the field texts for themes that emerge. Following Polkinghorne’s (1995) model, the field texts of the individuals interviewed were mined for similar themes or “taxonomies of types of stories” (Creswell, 2013, p. 72). A key point of narrative research is the collaborative nature of the research. The researcher and participant work together in constructing the narrative story (Creswell, 2012). The participant often checks the story and negotiates the meaning of the data in partnership with the researcher.
Validating research findings and interpretations are of the utmost importance in any qualitative research study (Creswell, 2012). To ensure trustworthiness and avoid threats to internal validity in this study, several processes were examined including clarifying researcher bias, member checking, and the use of thick, rich descriptions.

**clarifying researcher bias.** The student researcher is a practicing Jew who is actively engaged in Jewish study, values, and traditions. She has chosen to dedicate her professional life to both the study of and the practice of Jewish education. As a researcher who is aware of personal biases, every effort was made to both disclose these biases and then set them aside during the data collection and analysis. Additionally, the researcher is also the principle designer and moderator of the Shabbat challenge. As Machi & McEvoy (2009) state, “By rationally identifying and confronting these views, you can control personal bias, opinion, and preferred outcome, and can become open minded, skeptical, and considerate of research data” (p. 19).

**member checking.** Narrative research relies on a collaborative effort between the research participant and the researcher. The two enter into a relationship of shared negotiation of understanding. This negotiation occurs throughout the process of collecting and analyzing the data. Therefore, by nature, narrative research has a strong element of member checking. In order to insure participants’ words, thoughts and feelings are accurately described, participants were asked to read over the transcribed interviews and comment if something was not reflected accurately. Additionally, participants were provided the opportunity to read over the final analysis.

**thick, rich descriptions.** Thick, rich descriptions of the participants and their stories were provided. These descriptions allow the reader to receive a complete description and determine transferability (Creswell, 2013). Transferability occurs when a reader is able to
determine if the study can apply to their setting “because of shared characteristics” (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993, p. 32). Allowing for thick, rich descriptions, providing “abundance, interconnected details” (Stake, 2010, p. 49) discourages threats to internal validity.

**Interview Processes**

This study included interviews of five participants who completed the blended learning Shabbat challenge. An interview guide (Appendix F & Appendix G) was created of open-ended questions and probes. All interviews occurred in person, which is the preferred setting for interviews. The initial intake conversation (Appendix E) occurred over the phone in most cases, but a few did occur in person. During the intake conversation participants were asked if they were interested in participating in the interviews, if they met the research criteria. The formal first interview lasted 10-30 minutes. In addition to the open-ended questions, demographic information was collected from each participant including: age, gender, membership status within the Jewish community, and number of children. A second interview, to clarify responses, gain perspective of time and further probe ideas was scheduled with three of the five participants. The second interviews lasted also 10-30 minutes in length.

The interview settings selected were comfortable and private spaces, located away from interruptions, that were mutually convenient for the participant and the researcher. Each interview was digitally recorded, professionally transcribed, and stored securely in both paper and electronic formats. Participants provide permission for the digital audio taping of the interview on the Informed Consent form (Appendix C).

An active interview approach was employed. Holstein and Gubrium (1997) conceive of an active interview “as an interpersonal drama with a developing plot” (p. 120). During an active interview, the subject of the research emerges through the interview process. “The imagined
subject behind the respondent emerges as part of the project, not beforehand” (p. 121). This view, of the interview subject as a partner in the creation of the subject matter, proved to be particularly useful as this study attempts to describe the experiences of participants in a blended learning Shabbat challenge. Participants were encouraged to reflect on their involvement in the challenge, what the challenge brought to their family life, and their interactions with the community of participants as a support and growth network. “Treating the interview as active allows the interviewer to encourage the respondent to shifts positions in the interview so as to explore alternate perspectives and stocks of knowledge” (Holstein & Gubrium, 1997, p. 125). In active interviews, the interviewer sets the general parameters for the conversation, offering “pertinent ways of conceptualizing issues and making connection” (Holstein & Gubrium, 1997, p. 125) in partnership with the subject as the drama of the interview unfolds. This approach allowed the interviewer, the principle designer and moderator of the Shabbat challenge, to work in partnership with the participants to share the story of their experience in the blended learning Shabbat challenge.

Coding

In order to understand, make sense of, and illuminate common themes from the narrative data collected, a two-phase coding process was applied. During this process coding, both in vivo and descriptive coding were employed. “The process of coding involves aggregating the text or visual data into small categories of information, seeking evidence for the code from different databases being used in a study, and then assigning a label to the code” (Creswell, 2013, p. 184). The transcripts were shown to the participants in order for them to corroborate the information before any codes were assigned. Then during the first cycle of coding, each transcript was read, without preconceived ideas to gain a feel for the story shared. During a second reading both in
vivo and descriptive codes were assigned. In Vivo codes refer to labeling sections of interview data using short phrases or words directly from the data. Using the participant’s words can provide “a crucial check on whether you [the researcher] has grasped what is significant to the participant and may help crystallize and condense meaning” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 57). In Vivo coding also aids the researcher to become aware of the participants worldview perspective. (Saldana, 2009). Descriptive coding was also employed. This is when the researcher codes parts of the data using words that describe the participants’ comments.

Second cycle coding was also applied to the data. Second cycle coding “develop[s] a sense of categorical, thematic, conceptual, and/or theoretical organization” of the codes that emerged during first cycle coding (Saldana, 2009, p. 149). During second cycle coding both pattern and focused coding were employed. Pattern coding allows numerous first cycle codes to be combined into a few meta-codes. While focused coding “searches for the most frequent or significant Initial Codes to develop the most salient categories in the data corpus” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 46, 57). Through the use of first and second cycle coding, the researcher was able to analyze the data and created a picture of the experience of the participants during the Shabbat challenge.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has demonstrated how a qualitative narrative study of participants in a blended learning Shabbat challenge responded to the problem of practice, fills a gap in the literature associated with Jewish family engagement and presents a model for future replication. Although this study will not solve the problem of engaging families in Jewish knowledge and practice, nor will it help explain why there is a lack of the use of blended learning in family engagement, it is the hope of the researcher that the study will illuminate how blended learning
can be a powerful tool when engaging families in Jewish practice, specifically bringing Shabbat dinner into their homes. It is also hoped that the Shabbat Challenge model can potentially lead to the creation of a series of Jewish engagement challenge programs which will be replicable to a variety of settings.
Chapter Four: Research Findings

As was previously stated, Jewish family education attempts to educate and engage the entire family in Jewish knowledge, practice, and community. The programs, activities, and classes are designed with the explicit goal of having the families transport the experiences and learning out of the location of delivery and apply them to their families’ lives through the creation of a community comprised of engaged practitioners. Due to its at home location and flexibility, online learning offers a great deal of potential for family education and engagement. The purpose of this research was to examine blended learning as a unique tool for incorporation of Jewish learning, behaviors, and community into participants’ lives during a Shabbat Challenge. The specific question asked was what are the experiences of the participants in a blended learning Shabbat Challenge? There was a secondary focus on what do the participants believe the blended learning Shabbat Challenge brought to their family life, and what do the participants believe the community of peers brought to their Shabbat Challenge experience?

Shabbat

Shabbat, the Jewish Sabbath, begins on Friday nights eighteen minutes after sunset and lasts until a person can see three stars in the sky on Saturday night, approximately one hour after sunset. This twenty-five hour time period is designated as the Jewish day of rest. Using a traditional understanding of Shabbat, during these twenty-five hours, people refrain from doing work. What is defined as work in this context is derived from a list in the Torah of 39 types of work that were involved in building the temple in Jerusalem. These 39 types of work, and their interpretations, are forbidden during Shabbat. The most widely known are the prohibitions on the use of electricity and, therefore, all electronics, including phones, cooking, driving and writing. Shabbat is meant to be a day apart from the rest of the week. A day to spend with family and
community. A day to praise God, enjoying good meals and human interaction. How people observe Shabbat differs widely from the traditional belief that all of the Jewish laws, the Halakhot, are binding and must be followed completely to the letter of the law to others who mainly focus on the family or the communal aspect of Shabbat.

**Interviewees**

Five participants in the Shabbat Challenge were interviewed in order to better understand the lived reality of being a participant in the Shabbat Challenge. Three of the five participants also engaged in a second interview to provide additional information, clarification, and a second reflection at a later date concerning their experience in the Shabbat Challenge. All interviews were conducted in person using open ended questions and an active interview approach associated with narrative analysis (Clandinin, 2013). The first interviews occurred approximately six weeks after the conclusion of the Challenge, and the second-round interviews about six months post Challenge.

**Terra** (pseudonyms are used for the five interviewees) is a 36-year-old stay-at-home mom of two children, ages 3 and 6. She immediately expressed interest in the study upon hearing about it. Terra shared that she and her husband grew up in Conservative homes, although they are not currently members of a congregation. When her oldest started preschool, she specifically looked for a synagogue-based preschool with the hopes that the synagogue would become her Jewish community, and it has. Since the time of the interview, Terra and her family have joined the synagogue and enrolled her eldest in religious school.

Through the nursery school we’ve been drawn in more to the community and that’s what I wanted. I specifically picked a Conservative Jewish school for their nursery school in the hopes that we would find a community where we felt comfortable and then it would just
translate through and we have. So, our intention is to become members. We are waiting for it to be at a point that makes sense in our lives, and degree of observance (Terra).

Terra mentioned that they also enjoy PJ Library, both the books and the in-person events, and her older child has attended summer camp at the JCC. Terra shared that she signed up for the Challenge because she was interested in learning more concerning her own questions of Judaism. Understanding why Judaism prescribes certain things in certain ways was a theme Terra expressed several times during our conversations. Knowledge of traditions, understanding the why behind Jewish traditions and rituals is very important for Terra, both for herself and for her ability to teach her children.

Again, I’ve been kind of flying blindly with all this and my background is one where we always observed Shabbat in my house every week because my father made sure to. My motivation for all this is that my dad basically has always observed Judaism blindly. He does it because he was told to. You never question, that’s that because that was his upbringing. I want to be able to answer their [her children] questions so I need to educate myself. I haven’t been able to do that in a more formal way or even to read about it because life is hectic. It is just something that always get put to the back burner. This was a way to kind of force me to focus on what I had hoped to do, to educate myself at some point so that I can answer their questions. (Terra)

Their typical family Friday night involves Terra trying to make the evening special and distinct for her children with challah and candles, but her husband works late most nights and Friday is no exception. Terra was an enthusiastic participant in the Shabbat Challenge even though she was more passive with her posts. The most powerful moment during the Shabbat Challenge for Terra was when she posed a question on the Shabbat Challenge board to learn more about the
blessing for children. Once Terra learned about the background of the blessing and had the text in hand, she recited the blessing on the Friday night of the Challenge and received a very positive reaction from her six-year-old son.

Terra’s personality tends to be intense, she is very talkative and deeply concerned with doing something incorrectly. At the same time, she is deeply interested in understanding the reason or logic behind things. She participated in one interview, which was held in my office with her three-year-old on her lap. The interview was scheduled and rescheduled several times due to work obligations (on my part) and children’s needs (on her part). Yet once we were in the interview, she was extremely open and happy to answer all my questions at length. Overall this scheduling process characterized the stage of life Terra is currently in, she is very focused on the needs of her young children while her husband is at work, more frequently than he is at home.

Melissa saw an ad for the Shabbat Challenge in a community email to PJ Library families. She was the only member of the Challenge who participated in the interviews, who was not either a member, or closely connected with Congregation Shaarei Tikvah (pseudonym). Melissa, age 38, works part time as a private college counselor and is married with three young daughters, ages six, four, and two. She was a particularly active participant in the Shabbat Challenge, frequently posting multiple times a day, offering suggestions, asking questions, and sharing stories. It was quite easy to feel as though you knew Melissa personally through her online postings. Melissa’s daughters all attend a Reform preschool due to its proximity to her home, but she shared that they are not members of a synagogue because, although they enjoy the preschool, they do not feel that a Reform synagogue is the right fit for them. However, they are leery of joining a Conservative synagogue due to the fact that it is further away. They worry they may never attend. Prior to the year of the Shabbat Challenge, Shabbat was not a priority in their
home. However, this year, with her oldest attending a public elementary school, she realized that her daughter was not going to have Shabbat each week at school and wanted to do something. “Every Friday night we do something, and some weeks it’s we eat pizza at the dining room table and light the candles” (Melissa).

Melissa mentioned that one of their challenges is that her husband, who works downtown, is frequently unable to make it in time for dinner with her young children. Melissa’s biggest Shabbat Challenge was the in between place of Shabbat in her life. Melissa knows people who are completely committed to keeping Shabbat in a traditional manner, and others who do not observe Shabbat at all. She appeared to be searching for a community that was similar to her, although I am not sure that this search was fully in her consciousness. Interestingly, during the first interview she mentioned applying to day school for her eldest daughter, and now that is where her daughter is attending school. Melissa willingly participated in the initial interview. She shared her thoughts through in depth answers, even happily repeating herself when there was an issue with the recording device. The interview took place in her at-home office. She agreed to participate in the second interview, but unfortunately, due to scheduling issues during summer vacation this did not happen. Melissa discovered ways, through the Challenge, to set aside the time during the week to help make Friday night special for her family.

**Sara** (37 years old) has a strong connection to both her personal Judaism and to her Jewish community. She is very intentional concerning the Jewish environment she is working to create for her family, which includes her husband and two children ages seven and three. Both Sara and her husband work full time outside of the home. Their children do not attend a Jewish preschool; however, they are both involved in Shaarei Tikvah’s religious school education program. The Cohen family is very involved in their synagogue community and in fact, Sara
commented, “We don’t do a lot outside of the synagogue in terms of community engagement. A lot of it’s just, we get our community engagement through the synagogue” (Sara). Sara is very knowledgeable Jewishly, in part due to her day school education, as well as from her family’s engagement with Judaism when she was growing up. She is a helper by nature and throughout the Challenge was quick to jump in with a helpful suggestion or idea in response to anyone’s questions.

I approached Sara about participating in the Shabbat Challenge, and once committed she became one of the most active and engaged participants in the Challenge.

At first it was like, oh well, you know what? Let me help out. But as we got into it, I thought, you know, I’ve been trying to make Shabbat special, so maybe this is a way that I can help get a little bit more spiritually connected. (Sara)

Before the Challenge, Sara’s family would have dinner together on Friday night but the ritual of challah, as opposed to a slice of bread or pulling a bagel out of the fridge, had fallen by the wayside for the family, as had their desire to have guests over on a regular basis. Sara mentioned that during a previous job, she had worked from home on Fridays, which had allowed her to make challah each week. Once she transitioned to five days a week in the office, she did not have the time to make homemade Challah. The loss of being able to provide homemade Challah for her family weighted on Sara’s thoughts greatly. Sara used the Challenge to put into action some of the things she had desired for her family’s Shabbat dinner for years. Her goals focused specifically around Challah, which for Sara represented a level of authenticity, as well as inviting guests to join her family for Shabbat.

Sara participated in both the initial and follow-up interviews. The first interview was held at my dining room table, and the second interview was held on a park bench near an area of
shops and restaurants which was mutually convenient. Sara freely answered the interview questions, offering lots of detail and really drew the interviewer into her story which centered around Challah and guests.

Jessica was the outlier of the group in many ways. Having grown up Reform with little knowledge, education or involvement, both Jessica (48) and her husband do not regularly observe Shabbat in their home. They had in fact never had a Shabbat dinner in their house before the Challenge. When their daughter who is now age 12, was younger, she attended summer camp at the JCC. When she entered third grade they became members of a Conservative synagogue where she had been attending Religious School. The choice of synagogue was due to a feeling and comfort level with the community rather than an identification with the Conservative movement. Over time Jessica and her husband have become increasingly interested in Judaism, her husband has even chosen to become an active lay leader in the congregation. As they attended services more frequently to prepare for their daughter’s Bat Mitzvah, they discovered that they both enjoyed the time spent in services and also that they had real gaps in their understanding and knowledge of Judaism. Jessica saw an ad about the Challenge and inquired further about it before signing up. She felt that she had been looking for something to help her fill some of her Jewish gaps and believed the Challenge could do that. “I personally have been looking for a while, and it’s been developing at Congregation Shaara Tikva, more of a connection back to my community” (Jessica).

Not only was Jessica the outlier when it came to Jewish background, lack of any Shabbat acknowledgement in her home, and the age of her daughter, but Jessica was also the only participant who spoke about the active involvement of her family, her husband and daughter, in the Shabbat Challenge. For Jessica, this experience was truly a family affair.
Jessica, who works full time as a lawyer, participated in the Challenge as well as the initial and follow up interview. The initial interview occurred in the interviewee’s dining room and the follow up in the interviewee’s office. On both occasions, Jessica was happy to discuss her experiences, frequently referencing that she was the outlier, being the one who did not already engage in some form of Shabbat in her home. Jessica’s major Shabbat Challenge experience focused around having a Shabbat dinner in her home for the first time ever including the use of candlesticks that she received as a wedding present and had never used, as well as learning that Shabbat does not need to be a major event (five course meal, brisket and chicken soup, replete with prayers over everything) as she had previously assumed.

Rachel. Each week Rachel (36) and her family which includes herself, husband, and three-year-old son, observe Shabbat with her parents. Her built-in Shabbat dinner, which required little thought and no preparation, led her to wonder whether or not the Challenge would do much for her, although she was happy to participate in order to help the study. This is how Rachel who is a stay-at-home mom, approaches many things in life, she is happy, eager to help and participate, volunteer her time, all while believing that the experience does not necessarily apply to her. Rachel is a very matter of fact person, and this is how she approached both the Challenge and subsequent interviews. When asked why she choose to participate, Rachel answered, “It sounded like an interesting way to approach Shabbat differently.” Both Rachel and her husband are involved in the Jewish community. They are members of the congregation in which Rachel grew up and where both Rachel and her parents are actively involved lay leaders. Additionally, her son attends the early childhood center at the congregation. Rachel participated in both the initial and follow-up interviews. Both were held in the principle researcher’s office. Although very willing to help, and easy to schedule the interviews with, both of her interviews
were the shortest of each group. The length of the interviews could be attributed to her matter of fact nature. Rachel was able to find a way to connect to the Shabbat Challenge through her personal focus on Shabbat. She shared that the peacefulness of Shabbat is often hard for her to achieve due to a weekly dinner with her parents and husband, which frequently leads to stressful conversations or a revisiting of longstanding disagreements. Throughout the Challenge, Rachel chose to not allow the family situation to cause her stress with the application of a mindful approach. In the second interview, she shared that her family had branched out and began hosting Shabbat dinners in their home as well as at her parent’s home, inviting guests to join them. Sometimes these at home Shabbat dinners included her parents, and other times, when her parents were out of town, they continued to host Shabbat dinners on their own.

Findings

A number of findings emerged from the analysis of the two sets of interview transcripts. The first set of interviews, held six weeks after the Shabbat Challenge, included five participants. Three of the five participants who partook in the initial interview also, participated in a second interview six months after the Challenge. The two participants who did not engage in the second round, were unable to due to initial scheduling challenges. After three interviews, it was believed that there was a richness of information and, therefore, the remaining two participants were not pursued for an additional interview.

The findings are organized into the following sections: Linking and Sustaining: Ideas of Shabbat: The Place of Shabbat; six weeks and six months following the Challenge, Elevating the Experience, Sharing Shabbat, and Transitioning Thoughts into Action, The Struggles, Making it Work, and The In Between Place of Shabbat, Family Engagement and The Participant Experience.
linking and sustaining: ideas of Shabbat. The majority of participants interviewed already believed that Shabbat, and specifically a family Friday night dinner, was something they wanted for themselves and their family prior to the Challenge. This belief in the inherent value of Shabbat was evident when participants were asked to reflect on a famous Achad Haam quote about Shabbat, “More than the Jews have kept Shabbat, Shabbat has kept the Jews.” Rachel said in relation to this quote and Shabbat,

I think it’s true [the quote] because it’s that ritual that you have to do every week. And even as we move forward and not been so devout, people still do it. So it’s [Shabbat] a way to bring everyone together and it’s a commonality between all the different branches of Judaism. (Rachel)

Jessica shared, in reaction to the same quote,

So I think that it’s [Shabbat] linking and sustaining over time. It is the ties that bind. I don’t know, when we’re Jews, I feel like it is more integral to our continued existence in some way. As opposed to just individually, anybody observing their Sabbath. (Jessica)

place of Shabbat. Participants reflected on the place of Shabbat in their lives both six weeks after the Shabbat Challenge and then again six months after the Challenge. Several participants commented that there was more of an intentionality or mindfulness of Shabbat in their lives both at six weeks and six months following the Shabbat Challenge. The Shabbat Challenge only required participants to have a Shabbat dinner in their home the Friday night of the Challenge, although most participants already had some level of Shabbat acknowledgement in their home before the Challenge. This elevated mindfulness led to increased Shabbat dinner practices in their homes than prior to the Shabbat Challenge. During the interview, Terra shared,
It's definitely also made me more mindful of each Shabbat, like the prep for it, to make sure that I am definitely ready. In the past I was like, oh a little more haphazard. If I didn't get a Challah, we'll use a slice of bread. Now I am trying to make it more deliberate, which is also a challenge. It's a good thing, it's a good challenge. (Terra)

This mindfulness led to goal setting for some participants, such as Sara, who first felt she had to tackle the challenge of having Challah each Friday night and then started inviting guests over on a weekly basis. She even made hints of one day including a regular Torah discussion into her Friday night meals, but quickly added that they (her family) were not quite ready for that yet.

Challah, which both Terra and Sara mentioned, was a major topic of discussion during the Challenge. For some of the participants, Challah became the symbolic representation of the authentic Friday night Shabbat dinner experience. Without Challah, participants did not feel as though they had achieved a Shabbat dinner experience. Frequently the acquisition of Challah, making it, purchasing it, et cetera was laden with much more meaning than the actual bread. It became the representation of whether or not the family had achieved the Shabbat experience that they desired. Challah remained a symbol for authenticity for many of the participants.

For Jessica, the outlier who had never experienced a Shabbat dinner in her home prior to the Challenge, the Challenge allowed her to let go of preconceived ideas and find a group she felt comfortable with, a place where she could ask questions about what she did not know Jewishly. Others reported that not only did they have a newfound mindfulness concerning Shabbat, but that this mindfulness began seeping into other areas of their Jewish practice. Passover was the first Jewish holiday to immediately follow the Challenge and the first-round interviews. Terra shared how her experience with the Shabbat Challenge led her to be more intentional in her Pesach preparations at home.
This is the stuff that of course they’re [her children] learning in preschool and I rely on preschool to teach them. I’m making sure that I’m echoing the messages in a way I wasn’t before because I want to show them that this is actively in our home” (Terra)

**six weeks later.** Several participants commented on being more mindful of Shabbat after the Challenge, and that this mindfulness led to increased Shabbat dinner practices in their homes then prior to the Shabbat Challenge.

It’s definitely also made me more mindful of each Shabbat, like the prep for it, to make sure that I am definitely ready. In the past I was like, oh a little more haphazard. If I didn’t get a Challah, we’ll use a slice of bread. Now I am trying to make it more deliberate, which is also a challenge. It’s a good thing, it’s a good challenge. (Terra)

Sara commented on her increased intentionality towards Shabbat, how thinking about Shabbat in advance had crept into her weekly planning, “I’m looking forward to making Challah with my older daughter who’s off from school tomorrow. So I’ve already incorporated that into our daily…into our plans for tomorrow” (Sara). Rachel also commented that since the Shabbat Challenge, she has been thinking more about the Shabbat experience she wishes to have with her family. Melissa shared, “I think it has motivated me to keep going and to keep trying to do it every week and trying to make it more special in any way that I can” (Melissa).

Terra also shared that this mindfulness is not only present concerning her family’s Shabbat practices, but also in finding its way into other areas of her Jewish life including how she prepares for holidays with her children and the messages she is reinforcing in her home. She shared in the interview about singing Passover songs and sharing recipes with her children, whereas, in the past she would not have thought to include them, her children, as much in the holiday preparation or household conversation.
This is their stuff of course they’re learning in preschool and I rely on preschool to teach them. I’m making sure that I’m echoing the messages in a way that I wasn’t before because I want to show them that it is actively in our home. (Terra)

Jessica shared this same mindfulness concerning her daughter’s upcoming Bat Mitzvah. Although her family chose not to incorporate a Shabbat dinner in the Bat Mitzvah celebration, feeling that her family was too small for such an addition, their new found interest in Shabbat and the connection to the Bat Mitzvah was highly present during the Bat Mitzvah preparations.

Well, and interestingly enough for Eliana’s Bat Mitzvah in December, I’m having, well for her and for myself a Tallit [prayer shawl] made, from a cloth that was my great grandfather’s, so while we are at it, we’re making Challah covers for us and for Eliana, so we can have…so it’s incorporated that way as well, something probably before I wouldn’t have thought about, cared about, whatever, but thought while we’re at it, it’s a nice thing to have for when we do [have Shabbat dinner]. (Jessica)

six months later. The initial interviews took place six weeks after the Shabbat Challenge occurred. The second interview happened six months after the Challenge. This time lapse allowed participants to answer questions about their experiences with the additional perspective of time. Not only were they able to reflect on the Challenge itself, but also how the Challenge had affected their thinking and behaviors in the intervening weeks and months. At the initial interviews, although there were clear similarities amongst the interviewees, there were also a number of personal differences. By the second interview, these differences were much less pronounced. Each of the three participants commented on how the Shabbat Challenge had a lasting impact on their family’s Shabbat awareness and practices. Rachel shared how having a Friday night dinner, and specifically in her case when her parents were not around to host, had
become more of a conscious action for her. “I don’t know if we would have been motivated to really do it [Friday night dinner] if it hadn’t been on my mind because of the program” (Rachel).

Jessica echoed this feeling of increased consciousness,

So, before it was never in the conscious strain unless Eliana would say something about it after Hebrew School or something, but now I actually think about it from time to time. I’m sure it will be something we do again. (Jessica)

This increased level of consciousness of Shabbat led to several of the participants bringing their spouses into the process, something which had not initially occurred to them. Shabbat Challenge participants went into the Shabbat Challenge as individuals, they may have created Shabbat for their family, but they saw their participation in the Challenge as something for them, not necessarily something they were doing with their partner or children. Six months after the Challenge, several of the participants were able to increase their partner’s and/or children’s involvement into the process and preparation of Shabbat, and holidays transforming the experience into something that was not solely created for them, but something created with them. The learning from the Challenge transferred from the individual to the family.

Rachel and Sara both reflected on their spouses in the second interview, in a way they had not done in the first. Jessica had been the outlier of the group in many ways, including the intentional involvement of her family in her participation in the Shabbat Challenge. At the initial interview, all the other participants commented that their spouses and children had little or no awareness of their participation in the Shabbat Challenge, and they did not express a desire to involve their spouses in any way. However, during the second interview, both Sara and Rachel, unprompted, discussed the value of their spouse’s participation in their family’s Shabbat dinners.
They both commented that over time, their husbands became more on-board with the idea of a family (both with and without outside guests) Shabbat dinner.

So, we ended up being able to get together with people, because they offered, which was great. And what made it really nice is knowing that my husband was willing to make the effort to get home early enough that we could go to friends’ houses, because sometimes when we’re at home, he’s just so exhausted, he’s like, “I just don’t want to make the effort with people,” and now he’s sort of taken more of that turn. Yeah, we need to make an effort”…He’s more proactive, exactly. ...So that part’s good. (Sara)

Rachel commented on how Shabbat present in her life ebbs and flows, but now both she and her husband are more aware of their desire to have a family-oriented Shabbat experience,

So sometimes I’ve moved away from that [being mindful of the Shabbat experience she wishes to create for her family even while physically celebrating at her parent’s home] and sometimes I’m more on top of it and thinking okay like let me just take a minute and step away from this. And that, you know, we’re both, my husband and I, are on board with having people over more. (Rachel)

Both of these comments reflect on the idea that the women present needed the support of their spouse in order to make this family value a weekly family experience. It proved too much for one person to be the soul orchestrator of these experiences, weekly, for the entire family.

Over time, the learning from the Challenge moved from the individual to the family. The experience became more of a collaboration, a raised family awareness of the place and value of Shabbat in their home.

**elevating the experience.** Participants discussed ways they evaluated the Shabbat experience for themselves and their families. Sharing Shabbat with others was a powerful
experience, as well as an anxiety provoking thought. Many of the participants shared this concern. They also discussed the process they experienced as they translated their thoughts and values into actions. Participants reflected on both long held goals that now they felt they had a platform with which to experiment, as well as newer reflections on the Shabbat experience which they could immediately try out.

**sharing Shabbat.** Celebrating Shabbat with others was a common theme amongst the participants. The Shabbat Challenge asked participants to have a Shabbat dinner in their home the week of the Challenge. However, each participant was free to define the parameters of their personal Shabbat dinner. None of the Shabbat Challenge participants chose to have guests in their home the week of the Challenge. For some, this was happenstance or meeting the logistical needs of a family with young children. For others it was the concern that they did not know enough or do enough to invite others into their home to share Shabbat. This concern of including guests in their Shabbat experience was quite pronounced, highlighting the fear, even among people who expressed that they have a regular Shabbat presence in their home, of being judged, of “doing it wrong.” However, participation in the Shabbat Challenge helped the participants rethink their fear and exposed them to the idea that there is not a strict wrong or right way to have a Shabbat dinner. During the second interviews, all three of the participants spoke of expanding their Shabbat experiences to include others.

There has been an uptake in being more participatory with other people outside my parents. It’s a change, Yes, entirely due to the Shabbat Challenge. I don’t know if we would have been motivated to really do it if it hadn’t been on my mind because of the program. (Rachel)
Jessica, who had never had a Friday night Shabbat dinner in her home and felt at the beginning of the Challenge there was no way they would ever expand the experience to include guests, began to consider the possibility of hosting guests during the first interview. By the time of the second interview Jessica and her family had invited guests to a Friday night Shabbat dinner, enjoyed the experience, and were looking forward to doing it again. Jessica commented on how sharing Shabbat with her guests elevated the experience for her and her family. Their guests had been dinner guests of theirs in the past but adding the element of Shabbat really elevated the experience for her.

I mean we have people over, and that’s nice, but there was something special about starting the meal that way, something we share, even though we have had these friends over before, but it made it something even more special as a way to start. (Jessica)

Welcoming Jewish ritual into her home, sharing Friday night blessings with friends, and naming the dinner Shabbat dinner was all a new experience for Jessica. This experience deepened her connection to both her Judaism and her friends. The ritualizing of the dinner, the sharing of traditions allowed her to deepen the social experience of the meal. Jessica has now turned her thoughts to the idea of her family unplugging during Friday night dinner.

*transitioning thoughts into action.* During the interviews, many of the participants reflected on how they transitioned their thoughts into actions throughout the Challenge. Sara was most aware of how the Challenge helped her transition her thoughts into actions,

What I saw kind of evolve is some of the things that I had been thinking about over the years but hadn’t really put into place. I felt like this might be an opportunity to kind of push those boundaries a little bit. (Sara)
She also mentioned that participation in the Challenge made her more cognizant of what others were doing with their Shabbat dinners and that she was then able to incorporate those ideas into her family meals.

Others like Jessica said the Challenge allowed her the space and knowledge to put aside thoughts she had about what Shabbat should be like, thoughts that were preventing her from action. “It allowed me to let go of some of my own thoughts on how things needed to be or should be or what have you. That was very liberating for me” (Jessica). Jessica and her family had never had a Shabbat dinner in their home because they believed that there was only one right way, a complex and detailed way, to have a Shabbat dinner. Through the Challenge they realized that it did not need to be as big of a production as they had anticipated. Jessica commented that her husband said, “That’s it?” following their first Shabbat dinner, expecting the evening to be much more involved. Ironically, although Jessica expressed feelings of freedom from a preconceived notion of an idealized Shabbat, her first Shabbat dinner was a very traditional multi-course event, complete with matzah ball soup and brisket. In the first interview, Jessica shared “The first time, I was like, okay, I got to do this the right way. Yeah, you can’t do that all the time” (Jessica). But then four months later, Jessica reflected that she had learned there is not only one way to do Shabbat. “It’s not like when I told you before, it was making sure I had the secret tablets, and I realized okay, there aren’t any of those, so it’s just a matter of doing it” (Jessica). This was a major shift in thinking that allowed for increased ritual observance for Jessica and her family.

Interestingly, almost all of those interviewed believed that their family “did more” when it came to Shabbat then the other participants. Even though ranking or discussing their Shabbat observances vis-a-vis other participants was not asked in any of the interviews, almost every
interviewee volunteered, with the exception of Jessica who very much felt like the outlier in the opposite direction, shared that they felt that they were at the more “observant” end of the group.

I think probably more so than some of the other participants. If you look at the spectrum, right, I think that there were two of us, that were kind of, maybe three, that were closer to the side of doing things very frequently versus those that may not have done this as often.

(Sara)

Many of the participants attributed a higher level of observance to their own family than toward others. This self-reporting of higher observance could be due to a need to please or impress the interviewer or more likely it was a way to assuage feelings of guilt that these women may have been feeling in regard to their family’s Shabbat observance. Perhaps participating in the Shabbat Challenge reassured these women that they are actually able to create the Shabbat experiences for their family that they wish to create but may not have previously felt they had permission to, due to feelings of inadequacy. "Hey, I thought I was so ignorant about this but I'm actually doing okay" (Terra). These feelings, of their families personal Shabbat practices in comparison to other families, influenced each participants’ transition of thoughts into action.

the struggles. The struggles that participants encountered with Shabbat was an important theme which arose during the interviews. Even though the majority of the participants had a desire for a Friday night Shabbat dinner in their home, and a personal belief that they were more observant concerning their Shabbat practices than others in both the Shabbat Challenge and their peer group, they struggled with how to make Shabbat dinner happen with competing work and children’s schedules. Physically being home at dinner time on Friday night proved to be a challenge for many. For some of the participants, this manifested itself into a larger degree with the reality of young children who need an early dinner and bedtime when one spouse was still at
work or in the process of commuting home during dinner. Terra, decided that this obstacle would not prevent her family from lighting the candles and blessing the wine and challah together, so she started including her husband in a video chat each Friday.

For others, the struggle was overcoming their preconceived ideas of what Shabbat looked like. Rachel almost always had Shabbat dinner with her family at her parent’s home. If her parents were not available on a particular Friday, Rachel and her husband would ignore Shabbat. Sara had convinced herself that without the right Challah, her family just would not be able to have a complete Shabbat dinner. Previously, she had been able to bake Challah each Friday, but with a change in job she was no longer able to do so. She faced the challenge of getting challah, the challah she wanted. Through the course of the Shabbat Challenge Sara recognized that Challah represented authenticity for her. Jessica and her family had never had a Shabbat dinner in their home. The fact that she signed up for the Challenge was already something far outside her comfort zone. Throughout the Challenge, Jessica expressed that her preconceived notion of Shabbat was a five-course meal complete with homemade matzah ball soup and brisket. Although her family choose to have this style dinner for their first Shabbat experience, she also learned that Shabbat does not have to be only one traditional way. “It allowed me to let go of some of my own thoughts on how things needed to be or should be or what have you. That was very liberating for me” (Jessica).

making it work. Many of the participants spoke about the tensions and stresses of daily life in conjunction with their desire to have a family Shabbat dinner experience.

How it fits into your life when you’ve got kids with early bedtimes and you’ve got older kids that have activities, and your husband commutes from the city and isn’t home
until…That’s a lot of what I struggle with. You work, and sometimes you don’t get home until right before then (Shabbat). (Melissa)

Sara shared that with young children, and the challenges of daily life, it is easy for her to lose the spiritual connection and move away from her family goal of celebrating Shabbat.

You know, I’ve been trying to make Shabbat special, so maybe this is a way that I can help get a little bit more spiritually connected. Because I had felt kind of disconnected and wanting to do things and just too tired to get them done. (Sara)

Several of those interviewed spoke about how they were “making it work” for their current family situation by finding the essence of Shabbat and doing things in that spirit. Terra, started including her husband in a video chat each Friday while he was still in his office, in order to be able to include the whole family in the ritual of lighting the candles, blessing the wine, and challah. Other participants spoke of letting go of ideas of Shabbat from their childhood or an idealized vision of the perfect family dinner in favor of something that works for them, in a week to week situation.

Every Friday night we do something, and some weeks it’s we eat pizza at the dining room table and light the candles.... Some weeks we do, like this past week, instead of having Shabbat dinner we had our normal macaroni and cheese at the dining room table, we lit the candles, we had challah. (Melissa)

Terra mentioned that although the first time she recited the traditional Shabbat blessing over her children, a particularly meaningful moment during the Shabbat Challenge, for both her and her children, in the following weeks, when she did not have the text on hand and had not yet memorized the traditional blessing, she chose to create her own Shabbat children’s blessing.
It’s always been the pause of separation, the crazy week from the time with family ahead. That one blessing enriches the spirit of that… I’ve just basically done my own version of it, you know a quick little, “I love you guys, you’re awesome. Thank you for being wonderful. (Terra)

Adopting this “making it work” mindset was both liberating and empowering for the women of the Challenge. This realization, the permission that I am allowed to do what works for my family, in my particular situation and this is still an authentic Shabbat experience for my family may have been the most poignant realization for several of the participants in the Challenge. Jessica spoke about how she had always thought there was a magic formula to a Friday night dinner, one which her family did not know and therefore completely avoided the experience labeling Shabbat dinner as something for other, more religious people. But six months after the Challenge, during our second interview she shared, “It's not like when I told you before, it was making sure I had the secret tablets, and I realized okay there aren't any of those, so it's just a matter of doing it” (Jessica). Other participants talked about how the Challenge helped them realize they need to make Shabbat preparation manageable, part of their weekly routine and plan for it to happen in order to create the Shabbat experience they wish for their family. Melissa mentioned how she started setting the table on Thursday night so that on Friday morning, not only was one task already taken care of, but also when her family came downstairs, it set the tone for the day. No matter if the families were creative on how they gathered, worked more planning into their normal weekly routines, or discovered the essence of what they were looking for, all those interviewed spoke about ways of how they were “making it work.” And how that was just what their families needed in order to bring Shabbat into their current life situation.
In-between space of Shabbat. Another struggle many of the participants shared was what could be termed the in between place of Shabbat. None of the participants were observant, Shomer Shabbat Jews, in a traditional sense. Meaning, the participants did not observe Shabbat out of an acceptance of commandedness, nor did they feel the need to follow all the of the rules of Shabbat. Participants were looking for a connection to Judaism and a continuation of rituals for their children but in a manner that fit into their lifestyle. As Sara mentioned, “It helps us continue our faith and our Jewish identity. It’s how we separate ourselves from the community” (Sara). And Terra shared, “We don't observe because it's prescribed, we observe because it's our cultural identity. It's who we are and this is how you carry on the values of Judaism” (Terra). This desire to hold onto traditions, making them meaningful for their family when they do not believe they are obligated in a traditional sense lead to struggles with the in between place of Shabbat. Participants wrestled with questions like: If Shabbat is one of many values a family holds, where does Shabbat fall in the list of priorities? What do you do when you have other family values competing with Shabbat? How is Shabbat more than simply family time?

Melissa described this in between place of Shabbat perfectly:

Seeing that there are other people in the same situation that I’m in with young kids who are attempting to have…to make Shabbat special and to do it every week, but are struggling with some of the same obstacles with kids needing to get to bed or kids having activities, and just that there’s an in between…between people who don’t observe Shabbat at all and people there’s just a no-brainer part of their week since they grew up, since they were kids. (Melissa)

Jessica commented on how Shabbat elevated their Friday night dinners, making it more than family time or social time.
I mean we have had people over, and that’s nice, but there was something special about starting the meal that way [Friday night blessings], something that we share, even though we’ve had these friends over before, but it made it something even more special as a way to start.” (Jessica)

Terra continued with her struggle of finding meaning in the practices she clearly valued. She grew up doing Shabbat because that is what their family did and there was a clear black and white idea of what you do but without any explanation or nuance. “This [participating in the Shabbat Challenge] was a way to kind of force me to focus on what I had hoped to do, to educate myself at some point so that I can answer their questions” (Terra).

This internal struggle of the place of Shabbat that many of the participants felt, may be one of the causes of the previously mentioned self-reporting of greater observance. This internal struggle was unconscious for many of the participants. Melissa, who was very aware and articulate with her struggles in this area, was the exception. Others attempted to justify their Shabbat choices, or lack of Shabbat choices, by framing their actions within their other values. If they held true to one of their values, they could justify to themselves their lack of Shabbat. “For us it’s always been the spirit of it verses the religious root of it…. We don’t observe because it’s prescribed, we observe because it’s our cultural identity. It’s who we are, and this is how you carry on the values of Judaism” (Terra). Terra went on to share the story of a recent Friday night when they unexpectedly, at her husband’s insistence, went to a restaurant. She chose to see the evening as fitting in with her values of family time.

We didn’t say any blessings in the middle of the Chinese restaurant, but it was in the spirit of, now it’s family time. Again, the separation. I don’t think we’re going to make it
a habit to go out to restaurants on a Friday night. I’d rather be a little more traditional, but it was still the general idea of it. We ate the challah the next morning. (Terra)

For Jessica’s family, there was a clear acknowledgement that they had very much enjoyed the experience, would look forward to future Shabbat opportunities both as a family and with guests, but that they had no intention of radically altering their family’s weekly plans as exhibited by the choice not to incorporate a Shabbat dinner into their daughter’s upcoming Bat Mitzvah celebration.

I do think that it’s something that I would like to do from time to time. I know it’s not going to be an all the time thing for us…In fact, when we did it the first time, what I liked was I said, you know what, let’s continue this, and I said no, let’s observe more of the Shabbat. No phones, no devices, no anything. Let’s just unplug and be together, and it really was a nice family evening, and I felt very relaxed afterwards. (Jessica)

**family engagement.** The Shabbat Challenge as a family engagement program focused on Shabbat and community creation. Participants were asked to have a Shabbat dinner in their home with their family during the Friday night of the Challenge. Initially, participants saw themselves, in almost every case as participating in this experience as an individual and not as a family. During the first-round of interviews, family was only talked about when the researcher asked direct questions about family and even once probed, most participants believed that the Challenge had had little impact on their family. Rachel said that she did not tell her husband about the Challenge until after it was over and although he expressed some interest, she did not believe it had had any impact on him. When asked if this Challenge had an impact on her husband or children, Melissa shared, “Not really because my husband doesn't really pay attention or know…He doesn't really know what I was doing, and my kids are younger” (Melissa). The
one outlier on this issue was Jessica, who felt very strongly that her family had shared in this experience, and that it had had an impact on her entire family. “…we’re doing something together, we’re all learning together, and everybody has their equal part, and this one I was like I was doing but I was sharing it with them” (Jessica).

At the same time, the participants shared stories of meaningful family moments, like Terra’s moment when she blessed her children for the first time, or Sara discussing how Shabbat became a space for guests, challah, and increased mindfulness each week in her home. Rachel and Sara both reflected on their spouses in the second interview in a way they had not in the first. Unprompted, both Sara and Rachel discussed the value of their spouse’s participation in their family’s Shabbat continued dinners. They both commented that over time their husbands were more on-board with the idea of a family Shabbat dinner, both with and without guests.

So, we ended up being able to get together with people, because they offered, which was great. And what made it really nice is knowing that my husband was willing to make the effort to get home early enough that we could go to friends’ houses, because sometimes when we’re at home, he’s just so exhausted, he’s like, “I just don’t want to make the effort with people,” and now he’s sort of taken more of that turn. Yeah, we need to make an effort”…He’s more proactive, exactly…So that part’s good. (Sara)

Rachel shared in her second interview, six months later, that her family had begun not only going to her parents’ home, but also having Shabbat dinners in their home, inviting guests to celebrate with them, including hosting her parents at her house. She talked about her husband’s willingness to have Shabbat dinner in their home as part of what made this change a reality. Sara shared that over the six months, her husband become more proactive in their Shabbat plans, and what a difference that made to her and her family’s celebration. She
continued to add that having Shabbat present in her life ebbs and flows, but now both she and her husband are more aware of their desire to have a family Shabbat experience,

So sometimes I’ve moved away from that [being mindful of the Shabbat experience she wishes to create for her family even while physically celebrating at her parent’s home] and sometimes I’m more on top of it and thinking okay like let me just take a minute and step away from this. And that, you know, we’re both, my husband and I, are on board with having people over more. (Rachel)

Both of these comments reflect on the idea that the women needed the support of their spouse to make this family value a weekly family experience. It proved too much for one person to be the soul orchestrator of these experiences, weekly, for the entire family. Overtime, the learning from the Challenge transformed from the individual to the family, the experience became more of a collaboration, it raised family consciousness of the place and value of Shabbat in their home.

Some of the participants’ perception that their families were not involved can be credited to the fact that most of the families were composed of very young children. The women in these families felt like they are crafting each and every experience for their children without their explicit knowledge or buy-in, and in several cases, they felt as if they were alone in these efforts because they had a spouse who was not home, due to work and commuting, during these moments. Some participants reported not telling their spouse about the Shabbat Challenge as a conscious decision, and others simply never thought to share with their partner about the experience in which they were engaged. However, during the intervening time, between the two interviews, the influence that the Challenge had on the families became increasingly clear to both the participants as well as the researcher. The influence, or the participant’s awareness of the
influence, on the family was stronger in the second round of interviews than the first, with each participant mentioning the influence that the Shabbat Challenge had on their entire family. Sara shared why spousal support was so important to her:

Frankly, a lot of it is also the challenge with the spouse, right because we need that support there as well to be successful, and so trying to change his lens on things is hard, but sometimes being able to have this community to be like, “Yeah we know how our spouses are can help bring ideas to the table. Can be really helpful. (Sara)

Shabbat Challenge participants went into the Shabbat Challenge as individuals, they may have created Shabbat for their family, but they viewed their participation in the Challenge as something created for them, not necessarily something they were doing in partnership with their significant other or children. Six months after the Challenge, several of the participants had involved their partner and/or children in the process and the preparations of making Shabbat, and holidays, turning the experience into something that was not solely created for them, but an experience, reflecting a family value, created with them. In this way, the learning from the Challenge moved from the individual to the family.

the Shabbat challenge: unique and powerful pedagogy. As part of understanding the participants’ lived experience it is important to not only uncover their experiences surrounding Shabbat, but also their experience interacting with the structure of the Challenge itself. All of the participants spoke about how much they enjoyed the structure of the Shabbat Challenge. They commented on the learning, community, and support they received during the Challenge.

manageable and convenient. Participants felt the Challenge was “bite-size” and manageable. Sara shared that the use of Facebook, something most people are already checking daily, added to the ease and convenience, "It's five minutes of your day, and I'm on Facebook
way too often during the day" (Sara). Sara further commented that the use of Facebook, allowed her to tap into this new community of support on her terms at her convenience when she needed or wanted that community. The asynchronous structure allowed participants to “plug in” when and where they wished rather than at a specific time and place like traditional family engagement or adult education opportunities, which often times is not convenient, especially for busy parents. Several participants also commented on the semi-autonomous structure, which allowed them to feel part of a community and have a support system while at the same time feeling comfortable asking questions or sharing challenges they might not have shared in person. Sara reflected that the use of a Facebook group for support and community was a familiar space for many, including herself.

> I think it's important to leverage tools like Facebook to create that sense of community. A lot of times it seems that the places that I've gone to for support, and help have been in that arena [Facebook] because you can kind of tap in to those folks when they're available. (Sara)

**community.** When asked about the community the Challenge created, most participants felt a connection to the Shabbat Challenge community. Many commented that the in-person meeting, following the online Challenge, was nice but they were not sure if the meeting added anything to their experience. Rachel was the exception who expressed a desire to meet in-person before the Challenge, most others said they preferred the semi-anonymous approach. Some also commented that they would have liked a more diverse group participating in the Challenge.

But I think expanding it a bit, so you have people that are at different stages. What I found most useful, actually, was the women whose house we went to whose name-
Diana, who is a good couple of years past me. That's sort of what I am striving for, because she has kids that are older and she's not at the same stage. (Melissa)

Although not the initial goal of the researcher, the group was rather homogenous in the age the participants’ families represented, as well as the fact that the participants were all female. The similarity in age could have been due in part to the researcher’s own age and stage in life, having a young family herself. Additionally, many women, especially with young children, may be seeking opportunities to make Jewish life, and particularly Shabbat, meaningful in their home in a way that is not always the case as children age up and out of the house.

**experiential not just educational.** Participants were asked to reflect on how the Shabbat Challenge compared with other adult education experiences, both Jewish and non-Jewish in which they had previously participated. Overwhelmingly, the participants spoke of the experiential component, as well as the on-going support and commitment to the group leading to actual change in their family’s behaviors. This was in direct contrast to other adult education programs which had not led to behavior changes.

Well I guess the primary difference is that this was not just educational but experiential. You had to do something, where most of the things that we've done as a family that were educational were more learning about something but not necessarily doing something.” (Jessica)

Rachel shared,

You had to keep participating and you had to be posting and you had to be following the threads. So, it engaged you for a longer amount of time, and then you're getting feedback. So, I think that helped make a behavioral change.’ (Rachel)
The commitment of time, of participating not just once, and not just passively, such as in a lecture or even more actively, such as in a hands-on family program, but rather the personal creation of content, in the group, the feedback loop and the individualistic approach to what each person chooses to give to and take from the Shabbat Challenge experience, led to the belief that the Challenge had a significant impact on each participant.

Sara shared that this style of Family Education actually led her to incorporate new ideas into her daily life,

Oh, wouldn't that be nice if… but I never did anything with it. Whereas with this, I felt like, okay, I have a commitment to the folks that are in the program, to myself, that I wanted to be able to continue. (Sara)

The experience of the Challenge allowed for the ideas to become part of daily life because it was in fact occurring in daily life, not at a separate time labeled adult or family education program within a synagogue or other institution and not as a one-time event, but on-going over a period of two weeks. Interestingly, the majority of participants commented that they would like the Challenge to be longer. Although they all commented that the shorter nature was important in their decision to sign up for the Challenge, they unanimously felt three weeks would have been a better length of time.

It was just enough to get a taste, to kind of get mentally prepared, but if you want to commit something as a habit, I felt like you really needed three weeks to build that habit. Because the first time it's like, oh well, maybe this was a rough week for me so I didn't really do it, whereas three weeks, you've got a little bit more commitment but it's not so much that it's intimidating. It's not like "oh, you have to do this for a whole month. (Sara)
The other clear difference from other adult and family education programs the participants reflected upon, was the community aspect.

This created a community, a small community, and the intimacy of the group was very immediate, and it was about the Challenge, but it also wrapped in some other things here and there. There was a support group element to it, so it kind of was feeding, literally and figuratively, in a number of different ways that I guess it was multi-dimensional compared to other adult ed. that I've done. (Jessica)

Jessica further shared that it offered her an "outlet of people to raise things where I didn't feel uncomfortable to share what I didn't know." The Shabbat Challenge offered her a space and a context to let go of preconceived ideas that she was holding onto but did not feel as though she had a comfortable space to address before the Challenge.

**Discussion of Themes**

The Shabbat Challenge offered a unique and powerful pedagogy for Jewish Family Engagement. The Challenge epitomized Connected Learning; demonstrating that Connected Learning is an excellent framework for Family Engagement. The Shabbat Challenge tapped into personal interests, allowing participants to think about, learn and practice in their everyday spaces, with a supportive group of peers and mentors, and offered a strong feedback loop allowing participants to experiment with and deepen their own learning and practices.

The Shabbat Challenge offered **personalized engagement**, occurring when and where participants wanted to plug in. This meant that the learning, thinking and experiences were happening in their homes, but it was also happening when they were at work, running errands, or sitting in the carpool lane. A community was created where the participants felt comfortable asking questions, sharing challenges, gaining support and testing out new behaviors. Due to the
fact that the **learning was linked to practice**, the participants reported high rates of behavioral changes within their families both during the Challenge and over the six months following the Challenge. Participants in the Shabbat Challenge shared how others within the Challenge served as **mentors/experts** for them. The experts were participants with a child at a future stage of development who others could learn from or someone who was more actively engaged in weekly Shabbat dinners sharing their tips and tricks.

Participants in the Shabbat Challenge choose how and when they wished to participate. Once they did engage a **feedback loop** was immediately activated. Participants were able to gain support, have questions answered and be able to see that their challenges were the same challenges others shared. The feedback of the group allowed each individual to improve and refine their current skills and thinking and building new understandings as they continued their participation. The commitment of time, of participating not just once and not just passively such as in a lecture or even more actively such as in a hands-on family program, but rather in the ongoing, personal creation of content in the group, the feedback loop and the individualistic approach to what each person chose to give to and take from the Shabbat Challenge experience allowed the Challenge to have a significant influence on each participant. Participants felt the Shabbat Challenge provided them meaningful and personal options, as well as opportunities for communal support and growth. Ultimately, the Shabbat Challenge allowed for sticker learning that the participants were able to apply directly to their life.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this research was to explore how blended learning could offer a unique and powerful pedagogy for Jewish family engagement, allowing families to incorporate Jewish learning and behaviors into their daily lives through the support and empowerment of a
community of peers. Specifically, the research aimed to illuminate the narratives of participants in a challenge group created to empower participants to incorporate Shabbat dinner into their families’ week. An effort was made to describe the participants’ interactions with blended learning as a tool to aid families in incorporating Jewish learning, behaviors, and community into their daily lives.

The study focused on participants in a two-week Shabbat Challenge. All of the participants interviewed willingly took part in the online two-week challenge, the in-person meeting following the challenge, and either one or two interviews with the research held six weeks and six months after the initial Challenge. All of the five participants interviewed were females, between the ages of 35 and 50 at the time of the study and all of the participants were moms in a traditional household structure, involving a male and female couple with at least one child. All but one of the interview participants’ children were under the age of seven.

Shabbat challenge. Participants felt that the Shabbat Challenge was a unique and powerful pedagogy which altered their families’ Shabbat practices. Participants expressed increased intentionality or mindfulness concerning Shabbat at both six weeks and six months following the Shabbat Challenge. This increased mindfulness led to increased Shabbat dinner practices in their homes than they held prior to the Shabbat Challenge. Participants also reported goal setting behaviors concerning Shabbat behaviors and practices they wished to incorporate in future Shabbat experiences. Participants shared that they were motivated to continue creating a weekly Friday night Shabbat dinner experience, both directly following the Challenge and in the future. Moreover, this mindfulness and intentionality influenced holiday and lifecycle celebrations for the participants. Overall, participants reported feeling that the Shabbat Challenge had a lasting impact on their families’ Shabbat awareness and practices.
Participants reported that the Shabbat Challenge aided them in transforming their thoughts and values concerning Shabbat into family Shabbat experiences in which their family could engage. They reported how including guests in their experience elevated the evening from merely a social event with friends to a meaningful shared Jewish experience. The Shabbat Challenge offered the space, knowledge, and supportive community which allowed these transformations to occur. Participants shared that with the tensions and stresses of daily life, adopting a “making it work’ mentality was both liberating and empowering in allowing these women to create a family Shabbat dinner experience.

This desire to hold onto traditions, making them meaningful for their family when they do not believe they are obligated in a traditional sense, led to struggles with the in-between place of Shabbat. Participants wrestled with questions such as: If Shabbat is one of many values a family holds, where does Shabbat fall in the list of priorities? What do you do when you have other family values competing with Shabbat? And is Shabbat more than simply family time? Initially, participants saw themselves, in almost every case, as participating in this experience as an individual and not as a family.

Shabbat Challenge participants went into the Shabbat Challenge as individuals, they were the creators of Shabbat for their family, but they saw their participation in the Challenge as something for them, as an individual, and not necessarily something they were doing with their partners or children. Six months after the Challenge, several of the participants had included their partner and/or children more into the process and preparation of making Shabbat and holidays, turning the experience into something that was not solely created for them, but something created with them. In this way, the learning from the Challenge moved from the individual to the family.
the Shabbat challenge: unique and powerful pedagogy. Participants reflected on the learning, community and support the Shabbat Challenge provided. Participants felt that the structure of the Challenge was manageable and convenient. They enjoyed the Facebook platform as a convenient space they were already visiting regularly. The asynchronous structure allowed participants to “plug in” when and where they wished, rather than at a specific time and place such as in a traditional family engagement or an adult education opportunity, which oftentimes is not convenient especially for busy parents. Several participants also commented on the semi-autonomous structure, which allowed them to feel part of a community and supported while at the same time feeling comfortable asking questions or sharing struggles and concerns they might not have asked in person.

Many commented that the in-person meeting, following the online Challenge was nice but they were not sure if the meeting added anything to their experience. A strong connection to the community was created simply through their online participation. Overwhelmingly, the participants spoke of the experiential piece, as well as the on-going support and commitment to the group as leading to actual change in their family’s behaviors in a manner in which other adult education or family engagement programs had not. This commitment of time, of participating not just once, and not just passively, such as in a lecture or even more actively in a hands-on family program, but rather the personal creation of content, in the group, and the individualistic approach to what each person chose to give to and take from the Shabbat Challenge experience led to the belief that the Challenge had a significant impact on each participant. The experience of the Challenge allowed for ideas to become part of daily life because it was, in fact, occurring in daily life, not at a separate, segregated time labeled adult or family education within a synagogue or other institution, and not as a one-time event but over a period of two weeks.
Chapter Five: Discussion of Findings and Implications for Practice

Introduction

Jewish family education attempts to educate and engage the entire family in Jewish knowledge, practice, and community. The programs, activities, and classes are designed with the explicit goal of having the families transport the experiences and learning out of the location of delivery and apply them to their families’ lives through the creation of a community comprised of engaged practitioners. Due to its at-home location and flexibility, online learning offers a great deal of potential for family education and engagement. The purpose of this research was to examine blended learning as a unique tool for incorporation of Jewish learning, behaviors, and community into participants’ lives during a Shabbat Challenge. Specifically, this research aimed to illuminate the narratives of participants in a challenge group created to empower participants to incorporate Shabbat dinner into their families’ week.

Research Questions

The research responded to the primary question What are the experiences of the participants in a blended learning Shabbat challenge? This primary question was designed to be addressed through two sub questions: (1) What do the participants believe the blended learning Shabbat challenge brought to their family life? (2) What do the participants believe the community of peers brought to their Shabbat challenge experience?

Overview of Findings

This narrative study utilized the Constructive-Interpretivist tradition. In narrative research designs, researchers describe the lives of individuals, collect and tell stories about people’s lives, and write narratives of individual experiences. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) and Clandinin (2013) cite that Dewey’s theory of experience (1938) is the philosophical underpinning of
narrative inquiry. Dewey expresses two foundational requirements for experience: interaction and continuity enacted in situations (Clandinin, 2013). These two requirements, according to Dewey, allow people to understand their lived experiences through three domains: temporal, space, and sociality. Temporal refers to the view that experiences are all built on one another. One’s understanding of experience is continuous through time. Spatial is one’s understanding of the context of the experience within a specific moment in time. And social refers to the fact that humans are social creatures, our experiences happen within relationships, within community. These social influences affect ones’ understanding of lived experiences. Clandinin (2013) further expands on these three aspects, naming them fundamental to narrative inquiry under the categories of relational, continuous, and social. Throughout the participant interviews, data collection and analysis, these three categories of experience were closely examined.

This study attempted to illustrate the narrative stories, sharing the participant’s lived experiences participating in the Shabbat Challenge. However, during the analysis of the findings, it became clear that the tool of the Challenge was deeply connected to those experiences and, therefore, worthy of examining in the findings. Blended learning, as seen through the Shabbat Challenge, proved to be a unique and effective tool for the incorporation of Jewish learning, behaviors and community. The Challenge empowered participants to incorporate Shabbat dinner into their families’ week. The narrative stories of the participants experience in the Shabbat Challenge focused on the following themes: community creation, engagement, autonomy, mindfulness/intentionality, family, complex emotions, in-between place of Shabbat, structure of the Challenge, and the interplay of virtual verses in person.

Overall, after participating in the Shabbat Challenge participants expressed a desire to continue to embrace a weekly Friday night Shabbat dinner practice. The Shabbat Challenge
empowered families to change their beliefs and practices concerning Shabbat in their daily lives, offering their children powerful, sustainable Jewish experiences. Blended learning offers a unique and powerful pedagogy for Jewish family engagement, allowing families to incorporate Jewish learning and behaviors into their daily lives through the support and empowerment of a community of peers. The personal narratives collected helped illuminate how the field could best move forward concerning the use of blended learning to empower families to bring Judaism into their homes, making Judaism relevant to their daily lives.

**Discussion of Findings**

Participants felt that the Shabbat Challenge was a unique and powerful pedagogy, which altered their families Shabbat practices. Participants expressed increased intentionality or mindfulness concerning Shabbat at both six weeks and six months following the Shabbat Challenge. This increased mindfulness led to increased Shabbat dinner practices in their homes than prior to the Shabbat Challenge. Participants also reported goal-setting behaviors concerning Shabbat dinner behaviors and practices they wished to incorporate into future Shabbat experiences. Participants shared that they were motivated to continue to create a weekly Friday night Shabbat dinner experience, both directly following the Challenge and in the future.

Moreover, this mindfulness and intentionality influenced holiday and lifecycle celebrations for the participants. Overall participants reported feeling that the Shabbat Challenge had a lasting impact on their families’ Shabbat awareness and practices.

**community creation.** Participants reported that the Shabbat Challenge became a comfortable and intimate community for them. A community where people felt comfortable asking questions, sharing challenges, gaining support, and testing out new behaviors was formed. The level of conversation and genuine discussion in the Facebook group was even better than
anticipated. As part of the study, participants were asked to respond to one moderated post each day as well as contribute at least one comment to someone else’s post in the group daily. Imposing this minimum level of participation really encouraged the participants to actively engage with one another. They saw this requirement as a true minimum and many participants engaged in multiple, lively conversations each day. Participants asked questions, shared challenges and offered support to one another. The participants did express that they would have liked the Challenge community to be a bit larger and more diverse to allow for more robust interactions. But, nevertheless, the community created through the challenge group was of significant importance to the participants’ experience.

**engagement.** The level of Jewish engagement shared through the Shabbat Challenge was exceptional. It must be noted that the term engagement here is used to connote religious engagement and not cognitive engagement. Religious engagement refers to meaningful interaction with Jewish ideas and practices whereas, cognitive engagement refers to how a student expresses their interests and exerts effort towards learning (Fredericks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004). As a scholar/ practitioner, I was thrilled to be able to support these families in a manner I had not previously been able to in my role as Director of Education. Jessica’s family had their first Shabbat dinner ever in their home. This family had a child approaching Bat Mitzvah, and are members of a congregation, but they had never had a Shabbat dinner in their home because they believed that Shabbat could only be done one way, an ideal they did not feel they were capable of achieving. Terra recited the children’s blessing over her children for the first time and her eldest thanked her for the experience. Sara realized how much she had allowed her idealized version of Shabbat get in the way of actually having Shabbat for her family. Rachel decided to do Shabbat without the aid of her parents. All educators hope to inspire such
transformational experiences in their learners but rarely do such clear examples of Jewish engagement occur. Seldom do educators feel like the experiences and learning provided lead directly to enhanced Jewish engagement.

Throughout the Challenge, participants encountered different ways to observe Shabbat; pizza for dinner, in your pajamas, video conferencing a spouse who could not be home, etc. Learning about these different options was freeing and empowering. The learning and community created provided participants permission to “try on” Shabbat dinner and other Jewish rituals and traditions. I believe this “permission,” this opportunity to see how others do it, is something many Jewish adults unconsciously need. Whether they have preconceived ideas of what Shabbat must be or they are encumbered with an idealized childhood version, so many people express that they do not, or cannot, observe Shabbat. Other Jewish practices could also be inserted into this sentence. I frequently hear, “No, we just don’t do that” or “No, we are not that religious/observant.” When in reality, once someone feels they have permission to re-envision the Jewish ritual, to fit into their families’ needs and values, these same people find meaningful significance in enacting the ritual. Attending a Shabbat dinner or taking a class on how to create Shabbat for your family at a synagogue or other institution rarely leads families to enjoy the experiences they were able to create enacting Shabbat at home. The Shabbat Challenge left the families wanting to engage more with Shabbat.

**autonomy.** One participant, who was previously engaged in a robust Friday night Shabbat practice, felt that this experience was some of the best adult education she had been involved in recently. She felt the community support and engagement helped her deepen her Shabbat dinner practice for herself and her family. Her feelings highlight a key component of Jewish family engagement created through a Connected learning framework, autonomy. I have
been working with Jewish Family engagement for thirteen years. I have created numerous programs, classes and opportunities for families within synagogues. Some have been successful, some have failed, but overall, I always felt like something was lacking. I had this troublesome thought; really what difference did the program make in the participants’ lives. The programs allowed people to come together and have a good time. But was that enough? Was that true engagement? In all of those previous experiences, I, as the educator, was the content creator. At times I partnered with lay leaders to discuss what they were interested in learning and experiencing but in the end, I was still the one orchestrating the participants’ experiences and predesigning the learning opportunities. The Shabbat Challenge had no preconceived learning goals. The only part curated was the framework for the Challenge and the daily moderated posts. Participants were asked to have a Shabbat dinner in their home on a specific date, but they had complete autonomy in defining their Shabbat dinner. How each participant chose to plug into the experience, what they choose to share, ask, and try out was completely determined by each individual.

When personal interests are involved, the learning is stickier (Gladwell, 2002). Sticky learning makes an impact on behaviors and is learning that stays with the individual after the initial learning experience. The autonomy offered in the Shabbat Challenge led to higher levels of engagement, significant engagement. The participants were excited, engaged, and involved in the learning because their personal interests were activated. Never in my thirteen years as a Jewish educator has a parent walked into my office and said, “My family is thinking about including the Friday night blessings in our Shabbat meal, can you teach them to me.” Rarely did a family approach me after a family education program asking for more information on the topic. Yet this happened multiple times during the two weeks of the Shabbat Challenge. These requests
occurred both online, in the Challenge group and in person. Participants walked into my office and engaged in these conversations. The ability to be the creator of one’s learning allowed the participants to engage, at a deeper, more meaningful level than previously experienced.

**mindfulness/intentionality.** The participants in the Shabbat Challenge viewed having a Shabbat dinner in their home as a value, something they believe would be positive for their families, something they previously attempted or aspired to do on a semi-regular basis. However, competing schedules and values often conflicted with this goal. Participating in the Shabbat Challenge created a space of mindfulness around the participants’ own view of Shabbat, even amongst those participants that did not previously have a Friday night Shabbat practice in their home.

This mindfulness was mentioned at both the six week and six month interviews. Increased mindfulness led to a reported increase in Shabbat dinner practice in their homes, then prior to the Shabbat Challenge. The intentionality participants brought to their Shabbat dinner practices led to goal setting for some participants. Others found the mindfulness not only affected how they engaged with Shabbat but also other Jewish practices. This was seen when participants began sharing how they were approaching preparations for Passover, the Jewish holiday immediately following the Shabbat Challenge. They reported increased involvement with their family in Passover preparations, intentionally living their Jewish values with their children. The space of the Shabbat Challenge and the community support the group provided allowed the majority of participants to adopt a mindfulness attitude which allowed them to achieve their personal goals related to their Friday night family Shabbat dinner. This experience offered them the opportunity to align their hopes and values concerning Shabbat dinner with their families’ reality.
The increased consciousness of personal Shabbat goals led participants to include their spouses in the process, something that had not initially occurred. Shabbat Challenge participants entered the Shabbat Challenge as individuals, they saw themselves as the creators of Shabbat for their family. At the same time, they viewed their participation in the Challenge as something for them, as an individual, and not necessarily something they were doing with their partner or children. Six months after the Challenge, several of the participants had included their partner and/or children in the process of and preparation for creating Shabbat and holidays, turning the experience into something that was created with the family and not for the family. In this way, the learning from the Challenge moved from the individual to the family.

Over the course of this research, and the intervening seven years, I have changed my thinking about Family Education. I now prefer the term Family Engagement over Family Education. My goal as an educator is to engage families in their Jewish life. I no longer believe families need to learn more; I want them to engage more. I want to assist families in their engagement in Jewish life, its rituals, practices and values, in a manner that is personally meaningful for their family. I also no longer believe that all family engagement has to involve the whole family. Only one parent, a mom in the case of this study, were the direct participants in the Shabbat Challenge, but six months after the Challenge the entire family had benefited from the experience.

**complex emotions.** Religious practice is laden with complex emotions for many people. A person’s beliefs and practices, or lack thereof, are often illicit complex, even contradictorily emotions. Childhood memories, parental expectations and community norms all affect a person’s religious practice. The Shabbat Challenge offered the opportunity for participants to explore and break through their emotions, fears and guilt associated with Friday night Shabbat dinner.
For some of the families, challah became a symbolic representation of the authentic Friday night Shabbat dinner experience. Without challah, participants did not feel like they had achieved a Shabbat dinner experience and frequently the acquisition of challah, making it, purchasing it, et cetera, was laden with much more meaning than the actual bread, challah became the representation of whether or not the family had achieved the Shabbat experience they desired.

Sharing Shabbat with others was another emotionally laden topic. None of the participants choose to invite guests to their Shabbat dinner during the Challenge, although all of them believed that including guests could add to their Shabbat experience. There was a lot of anxiety surrounding the idea of inviting guests, even among people who expressed that they have a regular Shabbat presence in their home. Participants feared they might do something wrong or they were concerned that others might judge them for engaging in too much or too little concerning the rituals. Participation in the Shabbat Challenge helped the participants rethink their emotion driven concerns and exposed them to the idea that there is not a strict right or wrong way to have a Shabbat dinner.

Almost all of the participants believed that their family “did more” when it came to Shabbat then the other participants. Even though ranking or discussing their Shabbat observance vis-à-vis other participants was not asked in any of the interviews, almost every interviewee volunteered that they felt that they were at the more “observant” end of the group. I believe that this self-reporting mostly stemmed from insecurity or guilt. It was a way to assuage feelings of guilt and inadequacy that these women may have been feeling concerning their family’s Shabbat observance.
In order to overcome these insecurities and feelings of guilt, the participants needed to acknowledge the tensions and stress of daily life and accept how that affects their desire to create a family Shabbat dinner experience. Participants adopted a “making it work” mentality. They let go of preconceived ideas of Shabbat, rituals and observance. Others let go of ideas of Shabbat from their childhood or an idealized vision of the perfect family dinner in favor of something that worked for them in a week-to-week situation. Adopting this “making it work” mindset was both liberating and empowering for the women of the Challenge. This realization, the permission that “I am allowed to do what works for my family, in my particular situation and that this is an authentic Shabbat experience” may have been the most poignant realization for many of the participants in the Challenge. The Challenge allowed the space and knowledge to put aside childhood memories, parental expectations, and preconceived notions about what Shabbat should be like, thoughts that were preventing participants from actions, and allowed participants to create a vision of what Shabbat could be like for their family.

**in-between place of Shabbat.** Another struggle many of the participants experienced was what could be termed the in between place of Shabbat. None of the participants were observant, *Shomer* Shabbat, Jews in a traditional sense. Meaning, the participants did not observe Shabbat out of an acceptance of commandedness, nor did they feel the need to follow all the of the rules of Shabbat. Participants were looking for a connection to Judaism and a continuation of rituals for their children, but in a manner that fit into their lifestyle. They wanted a Shabbat dinner ritual that was based in tradition, yet also meaningful and accessible for their family. Participants wrestled with questions such as, “if Shabbat is one of many values my family holds, where does Shabbat fall in the list of priorities? What do you do when you have other family values competing with Shabbat? Is Shabbat more than simply family time?”
Participants reported the Shabbat Challenge aided them in transforming their thoughts and values concerning Shabbat into family Shabbat experiences in which their family could engage. They reported how including guests in their experience elevated the evening from a social event with friends to a meaningful, shared Jewish experience. Participants also shared that with the tensions and stresses of daily life, adopting a “making it work” mentality was both liberating and empowering. The Shabbat Challenge began to address the in between place of Shabbat for many of the participants.

**structure of Challenge.** Participants, reflecting on the learning, community and support system the Shabbat Challenge provided, expressed that the structure of the program was manageable and convenient. They enjoyed the Facebook platform as a convenient space they were already visiting regularly. The asynchronous structure allowed participants to “plug in” when and where they wished, rather than at a specific time and place like traditional family engagement or adult education opportunities, which oftentimes is not convenient especially for busy parents. Several participants also commented on the semi-anonymous structure, which allowed them to feel part of a community and support system while at the same time comfortable asking questions or sharing struggles and concerns they might not have asked in person.

Many commented that the in-person meeting, following the online Challenge was nice, but they were not sure if the meeting added to their overall experience. Participants believed that a strong connection to the community was created simply through their online participation. Overwhelmingly, the participants spoke of the experiential piece, as well as the on-going support and commitment to the group, as leading to actual change in their family’s behaviors in a manner in which other adult education or family engagement programs had not. This commitment of time, of participating not just once, and not just passively, such as in a lecture or even more
actively in a hands-on family program, but rather the personal creation of content, in the group, and the individualistic approach to what each person chose to give to and take from the Shabbat Challenge experience, led to the belief that the Challenge had a significant impact on each participant. The experience allowed for ideas to become part of daily life because it was, in fact, occurring in daily life, not at a separate time labeled adult or family education within a synagogue or other institution. Additionally, the fact that the Challenge happened over the course of a two-week period was very important for the feedback loop to help participants build on their learning. Participants commented that although the short time commitment was appealing when signing up for the challenge, they believed that three to four weeks, with the opportunity to have multiple Shabbat family dinners, would have allowed for strong habits to form.

**interplay of virtual verses in person.** We, as a society, have moved from not being comfortable talking online to being extremely comfortable and facile at creating an online community. Today many people have robust and meaningful friendships and belong to supportive, knowledge sharing communities completely online. We have moved from using the internet as a source of information (Web 1.0) to a place to share about ourselves (the early years of Web 2.0) and now we are in a phase of creating supportive, engaging relationships and robust communities online. There has been a boom of online community support groups for everything from moms discussing parenting to people fighting cancer. Why not create Jewish community online as well?

The participants in the Shabbat Challenge generally expressed that the in-person meeting, following the challenge was unnecessary. They reported that meeting in person did not enhance their Shabbat Challenge experience while at the same time they reported that the Shabbat Challenge was a comfortable and intimate community. A community formed, in which the
participants felt comfortable asking questions, sharing challenges, gaining support and testing out new behaviors. In certain instances, participants shared that they were, in fact, more comfortable being honest, or sharing more, due to the semi-anonymous structure. I also experienced the participants interacting with me, as the moderator of the Shabbat Challenge, in ways that parents frequently do not interact with me as the Director of Education at their synagogue. Yet, the relationships built online in the Challenge moved seamlessly from the virtual space to the in-person space both between me and participants and amongst participants themselves.

The Process of the Research Project

The process of discovering the Shabbat Challenge was a long and challenging process, but one that sheds important light on the idea of creating communities online. In 2011, while taking a class on 21st Century Jewish Education, I read the following quote in Curriculum 21 (Hayes Jacobs, 2010):

The curriculum is predicated on the belief that all students should graduate from high school with the knowledge, skills, and behaviors to be fit, healthy, and active for life. The program is a K-12, activity-based program designed to teach the principles of health and fitness while continually improving the fitness level of students. The goal is to build a fascination with how habits and choices can have a direct and observable effect both physically and mentally. (Hayes Jacobs, 2010, p. 46)

I shared with my advisor that this is what I wanted to create for Jewish education. I wanted to create programs, which allowed learners to gain the knowledge, skills, and behaviors to live a full Jewish life. My goal remains the same, “to build a fascination with how habits and choices have a direct and observable effect” on one’s life. To put it another way, to help people develop
an everyday, a Quotidian Judaism. (Weissman, 2011) I felt that focusing on the family, since
much of Jewish life is home-based and family driven, was the best option to achieve this goal.
This planted the seed of what would eventually evolve into the Shabbat Challenge. I created
what I came to see as a pilot program based on similar ideas, Shabbat4U;). The original
description of the program was,

Shabbat4U;) will focus on experiencing, engaging and enacting Shabbat on Shabbat.

This model of experience, engage and enact hopes to transform your families
understanding of and relationship with Shabbat by offering the opportunities and tools to
really dwell in Shabbat both in the synagogue and in your home. The program will have
five core components: 1) Mini-Chavurot (small group learning), 2) Shabbat experiences,
3) Parallel learning, 4) Family enactment and 5) Reflection. (Synagogue advertisement,
2010)

The reflection component of this Shabbat program was designed to occur online in a private
Facebook group. This program was my first experience with blended learning, probably before I
had even come across the term. Before 2000, there was little mention of blended learning in the
scholarly research. However, by 2006, Masie (2006), Massy (2006) and Ross and Gage (2006),
all believed that blended learning will replace traditional learning in the future. In 2011, when I
created the online Shabbat4U;) group, it was described as “A forum for discussion, reflection,
sharing and questioning as we move through our year of learning together.” The Shabbat4U;) face-to-face learning and programs were enjoyed by the participants. The Shabbat experiences
we assisted families in creating were more successful for some families and less successful for
others. The online group, however, did not prove to be a success. The majority of the posts came
from the program professional, who by design was also a parent in the group. Rarely did
participants post to the group, and when they did it was always a statement. Never were the posts
an attempt to engage in a dialogue, but rather a question or request for help or support. Both the
moderator and the participants’ posts were often met with silence. At the time I could not
understand why the online group had not worked as I had envisioned. Several years later I came
to understand that people were not ready to embrace “talking” online in 2010-2011. The idea of
creating an online community was still a concept in its infancy for most people. Web 2.0, the
ability of consumers to create content on the internet, rather than simply view a preloaded page
started to occur as early as 1999, but really did not fully enter most users’ experiences on the
internet until 2005. Six years later, in 2011, when Shabbat4;) was piloted, although some of the
families were comfortable making comments on social media, these comments were statements
of fact, such as “Thank you Rosenberg Family for hosting a colorful, delicious and fun Havdalah
experience!!! The flaming scotch @ the end was an added BRIGHT touch!” (Shabbat4;) Facebook Post, 2011). The participants were simply not ready to engage in conversation and
community creation online.

After this initial pilot, I spent several years looking for existing programs utilizing
blended learning, specifically in the field of Jewish education and engagement, in the hope that I
could study a preexisting program. I found few. None in the field of family engagement and none
that would open their program up for outside research. For years, it was as if the Jewish world
was unaware of the merits of blended learning. Slowly, blended learning appeared, first in Day
Schools, but this was always in relation to students and not families. Finally, after years of
searching, I realized that if I wanted to continue with this line of research, the value blended
learning could hold for Jewish Family education, I would have to create a program of my own.
In the spring of 2016, while I was interviewing for a new position, I had a conversation with
some of the active lay leaders at the synagogue over lunch. They had already asked me about my dissertation and then the conversation drifted into talking about the 21 Day Fix, a popular eating and exercise program whose hallmark is the coach, a person who you buy your products through but also hosts a Facebook group for questions and on-going support. And there it was, what if I took my idea of blended learning for family engagement and the idea of the 21 Day Fix Facebook group and merge them. Thus, the Shabbat Challenge was born.

Interestingly, in the intervening years from when I first started down this path, inspired by a quote about physical education to 2016 when I started the Shabbat Challenge, we as a society have moved from not being comfortable talking online, to being extremely comfortable and facile at creating online community. Today many people have robust and meaningful friendships and belong to supportive, knowledge sharing communities completely online. We have moved from using the internet as a source of information, (Web 1.0) to a place where we can share about ourselves (the early years of Web 2.0) and now we are in a phase of creating supportive, engaging relationships, and robust online communities. There has been a boom of online community support groups for everything from moms discussing parenting to people fighting cancer. Why should Jewish communities not be created online as well?

The participants in the Shabbat Challenge generally expressed that the in-person meeting, following the challenge was unnecessary. They reported that meeting in person did not enhance their Shabbat Challenge experience, while at the same time they reported that the Shabbat Challenge was a comfortable and intimate community. A community where they felt comfortable asking questions, sharing challenges, gaining support, and testing out new behaviors. In the future, I recommend the Shabbat Challenge remove the blended learning component and simply follow the Connected learning framework. Seven years later, we are very
willing and able to create the community experience I was hoping to create during Shabbat4;) without needing to blend the learning experience.

**Connection to Theoretical Framework**

A theoretical framework offers a lens through which the researcher can examine and interpret the research, data, overall findings and conclusions of the study. The framework offers guidelines and boundaries to help explain the situation examined. Given that this research is interested in how families bring Jewish learning and practice into their home, and that blended learning offers many educational advantages concerning learning and community development, this research was best framed by the ideas of Connected learning.

Connected learning is “when a young person is able to pursue a personal interest or passion with the support of friends and caring adults and is in turn able to link this learning and interest to academic achievement, career success or civic engagement” (Ito, et al., 2013, p. 4). Connected learning draws from sociocultural learning theory and builds on a Vgotskian tradition. Sociocultural learning theory values learning found within meaningful practices, supportive relationships, and a multiplicity of pathways to form knowledge and increase expertise (Ito, et al., 2013). Vygotsky posited that knowledge blends into other knowledge; learning happens when engaged in practical activities mediated by the surrounding culture (Vygotsky, 1978). The design principles of Connected learning include learning that is based on individual interests, linked to practice, involving strong relationships, both peer relationships and intergenerational relationships, and offering a multiplicity of pathways to meaningful and valuable learning.

The Shabbat Challenge epitomized Connected learning; demonstrating that Connected learning is an excellent framework for Family Engagement. The Shabbat Challenge tapped into personal interests, allowing participants to think about, learn, and practice in their everyday
spaces, with a supportive group of peers and mentors, and offered a strong feedback loop allowing participants to experiment and deepen their learning and practices.

**personalized engagement.** The Shabbat Challenge occurred when and where participants wanted to plug in. This means that the learning, thinking and experiences were happening in their homes, but it was also happening when they were at work, running errands, or sitting in the carpool lane. The Shabbat Challenge was part of their daily life, and their daily thoughts for those two weeks. It was not a stand-alone class or experience. The online platform allowed the engagement to became Quotidian, daily, and it ultimately created family engagement as envisioned by Weissman and Weinberg (nd) and Woocher and Woocher(2013). The ability to plug in when and where participants wanted, eliminated the question of transferability raised by many scholars. (Vygotsky (1978), Schiff and Botwinik (1988) Himmelfarb (1974), Bock (1977) as cited in Reimer (1991), Wolfson (1985) and Merhaut (2007). It aided participants in seeing the value of Judaism in their everyday lives (Weissman, 2011). The Challenge addressed Peter Berger’s ideas of Plausibility Structures. (Berger, 1967) A person has great difficulty imagining themselves engaged in something they have not personally experienced, it is simply not in their realm of possibility, and it is not plausible. When someone attends a Shabbat program at a synagogue or other institution they have not created a plausibility structure of their family observing Shabbat, or whatever the intended learned behavior is, in their home. Only through seeing themselves observing Shabbat in their home, is someone able to add observing Shabbat in their home to their plausibility structure. The Shabbat Challenge created a family engagement system, which positively affected the participants’ families in their concept of Shabbat.

**linking learning to practice.** When learning is linked to practice, learners highly value the knowledge gained as well as the relationships involved. “Learning (in Connected learning) is
highly relational and tied to shared purpose and activity” (Ito, et al., 2013, p. 47). Personal interests, relationships, and shared activities or goals are the primary reason for the engagement in Connected learning situations. During the Shabbat Challenge participants spoke positively about the community that was created. Participants enjoyed the interaction with a community of peers involved in common activities and with shared goals. This space allowed them to feel comfortable and able to engage with their challenges and meet their personal Shabbat goals. A community was created where the participants felt comfortable asking questions, sharing challenges, gaining support, and testing out new behaviors. Since the learning was linked to practice, the participants reported high rates of behavioral changes within their families, both during the Challenge and over the six months following the Challenge. The ideas and learning of the Challenge stuck with them and changed their families’ involvement with Shabbat.

**mentors.** Mentors, or experts, keeping in mind that expert refers to a level of skill and knowledge attained and not a chronological age, are invaluable in the Connected learning process. Participating in interest driven networks offers opportunities to learn from expert participants and, therefore, allows learners to develop new thinking skills (Rogoff, 1990; Vygotsky, 1978). Participants in the Shabbat Challenge shared how others within the Challenge served as mentors for them. The experts were participants with a child at a future stage of development who others could learn from, or someone who was more actively engaged in weekly Shabbat dinners, sharing their tips and tricks. Participants became mentors to each other based on their skill level and knowledge. Additionally, in the role of moderator, I was able to serve more as a mentor and less as a traditional educator. Once I was not attempting to orchestrate the participants’ experience, I was actually able to be more effective as an educator serving in the role of mentor. Mentors were able to be both mentors and participants
simultaneously. Those who others labeled as mentors reported how much they were able to benefit from participation in the Challenge. A culture of reciprocity of learning was created within the group.

**multiple pathways and feedback loop.** The final component to Connected learning is the presence of multiple pathways to participation with a strong internal feedback loop. “Environments that exemplify Connected learning are characterized by low barriers to entry and a multiplicity of roles, ways of participating, and improving and gaining expertise” (Ito. et al., p. 61). Participants in the Shabbat Challenge chose how and when they wished to participate. Once they did begin to engage, a feedback loop was immediately activated. Participants were able to gain support, have questions answered, and were able to see that their challenges were the same challenges others shared. The feedback from the group allowed each individual to improve and refine their current skills, and critically think and build a new set of skills and develop a better understanding as they continued their participation. In Connected learning situations, the feedback loop is supported by informal yet practical assessments that are essential to the learning process (Cornwell & Cornwell, 2006). The Shabbat dinner, as well as any time a participant tried out a new behavior or tested an old assumption, served the function of practical assessment in the Shabbat Challenge. By offering multiple pathways to learning, learners felt comfortable participating at the level and in the style of their choosing. The feedback loop supported their continued growth and development. This combination allowed for voluntary participation in the learning and an accommodation of a variety of learners.

The commitment of time, of participating not just once and not just passively, such as in a lecture or even more actively such as in a hands-on family program, but rather the personal creation of content, in the group, the feedback loop and the individualistic approach to what each
person chose to give to and take from the Shabbat Challenge experience allowed the Challenge to have a significant influence on each participant. Participants felt the Shabbat Challenge provided them with meaningful and personal options, as well as opportunities for support and growth. Ultimately, the Shabbat Challenge allowed for sticker learning that the participants were able to apply directly to their life.

**Implications & Recommendations**

The personal narratives collected illuminate how the field could best move forward concerning the use of Connected learning to empower families to actively engage in their Judaism, particularly in their homes, making Judaism relevant to their daily lives. So many families “do Jewish” only when they are in the synagogue or other Jewish institutions. My goal in this research was to see if I could create a program of family engagement that could aid families in understanding that Judaism has a lot to offer no matter where they are, or what issue they are facing.

The Shabbat Challenge format offers much potential for adult and family education, both within Synagogues as well as in other institutions. In fact, the Connected learning framework modeled in the Shabbat Challenge could be applied to any number of groups looking to connect and engage with their Judaism in a supportive and semi-autonomous environment. A Challenge could address a wide variety of topics: holidays, values (*Tikkun Olam* (social justice), *Tzdekah* (charity), *Derek Eretz* (appropriate behavior), *Lashon Harah* (gossip), etc.), parenting or elder care, and life stages or dealing with challenging times. This model could be applied to other faith-based groups, as the method is not inherently Jewish and other faith-based groups confront similar issues of religious and spiritual engagement and meaningfulness. Additionally, the Shabbat Challenge allowed members access to study with Synagogue staff at a time and location
that matches people’s lifestyles, and at a low cost of operation to the institution. But the Challenge model is not dependent on a synagogue or traditional institution for success.

This study also demonstrated that individuals can find meaningful religious and spiritual engagement in a virtual space and can create community in both virtual and blended spaces. Wolfson (1985) and Reimer (1991) discussed how the practices of family education during the 1980’s and 1990’s did not aid families in creating meaningful engagement with Judaism in their home life. Programs created in the synagogue focused on learning about Jewish practices only allowed families to engage within the Synagogue space but did not help the families to transfer their learning to their home environment. Robinson, in the tradition of Vygotsky, shared “education does not work if the life toward which one is being educated is not being regularly and powerfully experienced by the learners” (Robinson, 2016). Many family education programs today have not changed significantly since the programs Wolfson and Reimer discussed.

We live much of our life online. Most people fifty and under, and many of those over fifty as well, are very comfortable interacting in virtual spaces. We pay our bills online, watch our favorite shows online, shop online, and build our communities online. The organized Jewish community has been very slow to embrace the online space. As mentioned previously, while I was searching for a program to research, I was not able to find one. Social media offers the opportunity to bring Judaism into peoples’ daily lives in a manner which was unimaginable before the advent of social media. Now, people can find meaningful engagement with spiritual and religious practice online but only if the opportunities exist. There are valuable Jewish learning options available online currently. If you want to learn to read Torah, there is an app for that. If you want to know what day of the omer it is, when Passover is or other factual
information about Judaism, you can find that. There are podcasts about Torah study and Jewish parenting. Although slow to develop, the organized Jewish community, especially those groups and organizations that operate on the fringe or have come into existence in the past twenty years, are much more adept at including web-based tools for their constituents. The next opportunity, as seen by this study, is moving from the static creation of Jewish content, to an active, learner directed approach.

The participants’ narratives about their experience in the Shabbat Challenge illuminated that there is potential for families to change and grow their practices with and connections to concerning Jewish rituals. There is a desire amongst many individuals to connect to their Judaism, to provide valuable and meaningful Jewish experiences for their families, but often times these same individuals do not know how to act upon their desires. Entering a Synagogue or becoming involved with another Jewish institution may offer them some of the things they are searching for but frequently these institutions miss the mark in truly connecting and helping people reach their personal goals concerning their family’s Jewish experiences. The Shabbat Challenge meets those families searching for connection, searching for learning and engagement on their own terms, in the time they have available and in a supportive environment. More research is needed to determine if more emphasis needs to be placed on blended learning, or if the challenge group model, without the in-person experience is sufficient. The Shabbat Challenge was able to offer the participants the opportunity to learn and grow in their families Friday night Shabbat behaviors, offering meaningful religious and spiritual engagement. This model offers much potential for creating Jewish family engagement systems.
Recommendations for Future Research

The Connected learning model, through the Shabbat Challenge and other such programs, has the potential to meet the needs of the increasing number of young and middle age adults (22-60) who are proudly Jewish, but are not affiliating with traditional institutions. Research shows that the Jewish community is growing. People report being proud of and engaged in their Judaism. At the same time there is a significant decrease in institutional involvement, particularly when membership is required (Boxer, Brookner, Krasner Aronson, & Saxe, 2018; Krasner Aronson, Boxer, Brookner, Kadushin, & Saxe, 2016; Krasner Aronson, Brookner, Boxer, & Saxe, 2018). A second significant group that could benefit from participation in similar Challenges is the majority of American Jews who report celebrating holidays in their home as their major Jewish identification. A future conversation should occur discussing ways to harness the power of the Shabbat Challenge to offer those individuals, proud and engaged with their Judaism, as well as those whose Jewish involvement focuses mainly around home-based holiday rituals and traditions, to further explore their Jewish practices and involvement. Additionally, the Shabbat Challenge is perfect for synagogue and other institutional members who could be interested in a new type of adult education, one that they see as more engaging, accessible and applicable to their lifestyle and age demographic.

Another area for future research is examining how participants in a Shabbat Challenge or other similar challenge could be empowered to become facilitators of future challenges. In this way a cohort of facilitators, essentially newly minted Jewish engagement specialists, could create unique and meaningful content. Finally, the in between place of Shabbat that many of the participants alluded to is an area ripe for research and examination, especially among
practitioners. Many Jewish people do not observe Shabbat out of an acceptance of commandedness nor do they feel the need to follow all of the rules. Yet, at the same time, people are looking for a connection to Judaism and a continuation of rituals for their children in a manner that fits their lifestyle. It is possible that this is more of a challenge for those individuals who identify with the Conservative movement or come from a more traditional background but do not find Halakah (Jewish Law) a binding practice.

Area of Study Vulnerability and Limitations

Finding participants for the Shabbat Challenge was harder than anticipated. Perhaps due to the fact that there are not any similar programs out there, I had a hard time clearly advertising what the program encompassed. Potential participants struggled to understand the opportunity. This difficulty of recruitment led to the Challenge having fewer participants than anticipated. There were eleven people in the Shabbat Challenge online group with about eight of those accounting for the active participants. An ideal participant number would be 15-20 people. Additionally, I believe that a few of the participants initially signed up as a favor to me. Although this smaller participant pool did not directly affect the participants’ experience, nor did it affect the number of participants interviewed for the research, I do think with a more robust and diverse group, people’s experiences would be enhanced.

If I were to plan this study again, I would choose to implement a Case Study rather than a narrative study. While the narratives of those interviewed were rich, descriptive, and offered an important window into their experience participating in the Shabbat Challenge, as a Jewish educator and moderator of the Challenge, I noticed several things during the course of the Challenge group that participants did not choose to reflect upon, or notice, and, therefore, are less present in the research. Additionally, the first round of interviews did not produce enough
material. Planned for 40-60 minutes, most of the initial interviews were concluded in 10-30 minutes. In order to help bolster the data, I choose to do a second round of interviews six month later with three of the five participants. This second collection of data proved to greatly enhance the study, offering much insight into participants’ longer range of thinking concerning the Shabbat Challenge, as well as the opportunity to reflect upon their behavioral changes that occurred in the six months following the Challenge. This second round of interviews, capturing participants’ narratives after a significant interval of time, although not originally in the research design, aided in strengthening the overall study.

It must also be noted that I was the education director of Shaare Tikvah, the synagogue where the majority of the participants belonged. My position in this community, as the Jewish education professional, may have influenced people’s comments, particularly their comments concerning how their family observed Shabbat on a weekly basis. It is quite possible that practices were slightly exaggerated. Finally, as with any narrative study, this study had a small number of participants. The in-depth interviews conducted over a period of time, serve to counterbalance the limited number of viewpoints. However, the small scale of both the participants in the Shabbat Challenge and the number of participants interviewed might serve as a limitation of this study.

Self-Reflection

Research and learning have always been passions of mine. I feel privileged to have been able to spend the past seven years of my life engaged in deep, scholarly study during this process of becoming a scholar practitioner. It has truly been a labor of love. This was my first interaction with qualitative research and I have been pleasantly surprised with the richness of the data and the rigor of the study. I believe qualitative research will continue to aid me in my career. When
working with families, being able to understand their stories, understanding their lived experiences is more beneficial than conceptualizing them as numbers or counting the number of times a certain behavior is performed. Being able to understand people’s stories, without judgment, and yet at the same time be able to make observations of patterns allows me, as a scholar/practitioner, to better advance the field of Jewish family engagement.

Over the course of this research my thinking about family education has evolved. I now prefer the term family engagement over family education. My goal as an educator is to engage families in their Jewish life. I am no longer looking for families to learn more, I want them to engage more. I want to assist families in their engagement in Jewish life; it’s rituals, practices and values, in a manner that is personally meaningful for their family. I also no longer believe that family engagement must involve the whole family. Only one parent, moms in the case of this study, were direct participants in the Shabbat Challenge, but six months after the challenge the entire family had benefited from the experience.

Another area in which I have experienced personal growth is in the realization that everyone is on their own path. As an educator, I do not wish to be the creator of the learning experiences but rather I aim to be the guide in their experience, helping them to create their own learning which allows them to transform their lives. The Shabbat Challenge allowed the space and knowledge to put aside childhood memories, parental expectations and preconceived notions about what Shabbat should be like, thoughts that were preventing participants from actions, and allowed participants to create a vision of what Shabbat could be for their family. I hope to be able to continue to support families in such transformational experiences and I believe the perspective I will bring as a scholar practitioner, grounding engagement opportunities in rigorous scholarship will allow me to do so.
I plan to take the learning gained from this dissertation process and attempt to turn the Shabbat Challenge into a national program of Jewish family engagement. I plan to continue to work on virtual programs, based on the tenants of Connected learning. I also wish to continue to explore how blended learning can offer a unique and powerful pedagogy for Jewish engagement. I hope to create family engagement systems that allow families to incorporate Jewish learning and behaviors into their daily lives through the support and empowerment of a community of peers.

Conclusion

Jewish family education attempts to educate and engage the entire family in Jewish knowledge, practice, and community. The programs, activities and classes are designed with the explicit goal of having the families transport the experiences and the learning out of the location of delivery and apply them to their families’ lives through the creation of a community of engaged practitioners. The purpose of this research was to explore how blended learning could offer a unique and powerful pedagogy for Jewish family engagement, allowing families to incorporate Jewish learning and behaviors into their daily lives through the support and empowerment of a community of peers. Specifically, the research aimed to illuminate the narratives of participants in a challenge group created to empower participants to incorporate Shabbat dinner into their families’ week. An effort was made to describe the participants’ interactions with blended learning as a tool to aid families in incorporating Jewish learning, behaviors, and community into their daily lives.

Participants felt that the Shabbat Challenge was a unique and powerful pedagogy which altered their families Shabbat practices. Participants expressed increased intentionality or mindfulness concerning Shabbat at both six weeks and six months following the Shabbat
Challenge. This increased mindfulness led to increased Shabbat dinner practices in their homes than prior to the Shabbat Challenge. Participants also reported goal-setting behaviors concerning Shabbat behaviors and practices they wished to incorporate in future Shabbat experiences.

Participants shared that they were motivated to continue to create a weekly Friday night Shabbat dinner experience, both directly following the Challenge and in the future. Moreover, this mindfulness and intentionality influenced holiday and lifecycle celebrations for the participants. Overall participants reported feeling that the Shabbat Challenge had a lasting impact on their families’ Shabbat awareness and practices. The Challenge allowed the space and knowledge to put aside childhood memories, parental expectations and preconceived notions about what Shabbat should be like, thoughts that were preventing participants from actions, and allowed participants to create a vision of what Shabbat could be like for their family.

The Shabbat Challenge offered community creation, education, and support in a semi-autonomous environment. Participants in the challenge were able to experience Quotidian, daily Judaism. The Shabbat Challenge, utilizing the design principles of Connected learning was based on individual interests, linked learning to practice, involved strong relationships, and offered a multiplicity of pathways to meaningful and valuable learning.

Ultimately, the results of this study are encouraging. As supported by the problem of practice, research questions, theoretical framework, and research methodology, this narrative study provides a description of participants’ experiences in a Shabbat Challenge. The Shabbat Challenge is an innovative, Connected learning based family engagement system. While contributing to the existing body of literature, I hope to inspire further research to discover how blended learning, Connected learning, and challenge groups help support families in their attempts to create meaningful Jewish experiences.
References


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Appendix A: Facebook Message Call for Participants

Do you want to have Friday night Shabbat dinner with your family but find the thought overwhelming? On Friday afternoon do you ever wish you had planned and prepared Shabbat dinner but now it’s too late, so you just order a pizza? Do you sit down to dinner on Friday and wonder how you can make it more of a Shabbat experience? Are you looking for simple steps and tools to help you have a family Shabbat meal, steps that are manageable even with your busy schedule? I am looking for 10-15 people who are interested in participating in an eight-day Shabbat challenge. Please contact me by sending a private message or by emailing me at Newfeld.j@husky.neu.edu if you are interested in learning more. This student research has been approved by Northeastern University’s IRB, #CPS16-06-07.
Appendix B: Consent Form

Northeastern University, Doctor of Education
Name of Investigator(s): Dr. Karen Reiss Medwed (Principal Investigator), Jennifer Newfeld (Student Researcher)
Title of Project: Shabbat Challenge Narratives: Examining the use of blended learning in family engagement

Request to Participate in Research
We would like to invite you to take part in a research project. The purpose of this research is to give insight into the experiences of participants in a Shabbat Challenge using blended learning.

You must be at least 18 years old to be in this research project.

The study will take place online and at one in-person group gathering at a local café (location tbd). If you decide to take part in this study, we will ask you participate in eight days of the challenge. This includes one intake phone interview (5-10 minutes) prior to the start of the challenge, checking in with the Facebook group at least twice each day for eight days, responding to the moderated prompt at least once each day, as well as responding to at least one of your fellow participants’ comments once each day. You will be asked to have a Friday night Shabbat dinner in your home with your family on the Friday of the Challenge and attend an in-person gathering within seven days following the Friday night dinner.

There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to you for taking part in this study.

You will benefit by gaining the tools and experience of creating a Friday night Shabbat dinner in your home. Additionally, your participation may help us learn more about the use of the Shabbat challenge as a family engagement tool.

Your part in this study will be handled in a confidential manner.

Only the researchers and other participants will know that you participated in this study. Any reports or publications based on this research will only use pseudonyms and will not identify you or any other participant as being part of this project.

The decision to participate in this research project is up to you.

You do not have to participate, and you can refuse to answer any question. Even if you begin the study, you may withdraw at any time.

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Jennifer Newfeld (Tel: 917-573-9872, Email: Newfeld.j@husky.neu.edu) the person mainly responsible for the research. You can also contact Dr. Karen Reiss Medwed (Northeastern University, Boston, MA, Email: k.reissmedwed@neu.edu) the Principal Investigator.
**If you have any questions about your rights in this research**, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617.373.4588, Email: irb@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

You may keep this form for yourself.

Thank you.
Jennifer Newfeld
Appendix C: Signed Consent Form

**Northeastern University, Doctor of Education**

**Name of Investigator(s):** Dr. Karen Reiss Medwed (Principal Investigator), Jennifer Newfeld (Student Researcher)

**Title of Project:** Shabbat Challenge Narratives: Examining the Use of Blended Learning in Family Engagement

**Request to Participate in Research**

We would like to invite you to take part in a research project. The purpose of this research is to give insight into the experiences of participants in a Shabbat Challenge using blended learning.

**You must be at least 18 years old** to be in this research project.

The study will take place online and at one in person group gathering at a local café (location tbd). If you decide to take part in this study, we will ask you participate in eight days of the Challenge. This includes one intake phone interview (5-10 minutes) prior to the start of the Challenge, checking in with the Facebook group as least twice each day for eight days, responding to the moderated prompt at least once each day as well as responding to at least one of your fellow participants’ comments once each day. You will be asked to have a Friday night Shabbat dinner in your home with your family on the Friday of the challenge and attend an in-person gathering within seven days of the Friday night dinner. Additionally, you agree to participate in one 60-90 minute in-person interview with the student researcher to discuss your Shabbat Challenge experience, review the interview transcription for accuracy, and participate in a second follow up interview to clarify anything that was said during the first interview if necessary.

**There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to you for taking part in this study.**

There are no direct benefits to you.

**Your part in this study will be handled in a confidential manner.**

Only the researchers and other participants will know that you participated in this study. Any reports or publications based on this research will only use pseudonyms and will not identify you or any other participant as being part of this project.

**The decision to participate in this research project is up to you.**

You do not have to participate, and you can refuse to answer any question. Even if you begin the study, you may withdraw at any time.

**If you have any questions about this study,** please feel free to contact Jennifer Newfeld (Tel: 917-573-9872, Email: Newfeld.ji@husky.neu.edu) the person mainly responsible for the research. You can also contact Dr. Karen Reiss Medwed (Northeastern University, Boston, MA, Email: k.reissmedwed@neu.edu) the Principal Investigator.
If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617.373.4588, Email: irb@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

You must be 18 years old to participate.

I agree to take part in this research:

__________________________________________  ______________________
Signature of person agreeing to take part                Date

__________________________________________  ______________________
Printed name of person above                      Date

__________________________________________  ______________________
Signature of person who explained the study to the participant above and received consent  Date

__________________________________________  ______________________
Printed name of person above                      Date
Appendix D: Transcriber Confidentiality Statement in a Research Study

Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies
Jennifer Newfeld

Title: Shabbat Challenge Narratives: Examining the use of blended learning in family engagement

Transcriber Confidentiality Statement in a Research Study

I am asking you [name] to take part in a research study. The research collected will be one-on-one interviews. Every interview will be audio recorded using the AudioMemos application on the Student Researcher’s iPhone to capture accuracy in recording the responses. The use of a recording device is justified in this study because the details of thought and language used by the participants are critical to data analysis.

You are responsible to transcribe the audio-tapes to ensure accurate reporting of the information provided. You will not discuss any item on the tape with anyone other than the researcher. No one’s name will be asked or revealed during individual interviews. The audio-tapes will be stored in a locked file before and after being transcribed. Tapes will be destroyed within 2 weeks of completing the transcriptions.

Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?

Jennifer Newfeld (Student Researcher), 118 New Mark Esplanade Rockville, MD 20850 (c) 917-573-9872 newfeld.j@husky.neu.edu

Karen Reiss Medwed (Principal Investigator), Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115 k.reissmedwed@neu.edu

Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?

If you have any questions, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University Boston, MA 02115 tel. 617-373-7570, email: irb@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

Will I be paid for my participation?

No

I agree to take part in this research
Signature of person agreeing to take part  Date

Printed name of person above
Appendix E: Interview Protocol Form: Intake Call

Interview Protocol

Institution: Northeastern University; 360 Huntington Avenue; Boston, Massachusetts 02115

Interviewee:

Interviewer: Jennifer Newfeld

Date:

Location of Interview:

************************

Intake Call

Thank you for expressing interest in this study. My name is Jennifer Newfeld, and I am a doctoral student at Northeastern University. This research is being conducted as my doctoral thesis project. The goal of the study is to explore the use of a Shabbat Challenge as a tool for Jewish family engagement. I am a Jewish educator who believes that blended learning, connecting people on-line and in person, is a powerful tool for Jewish Family engagement. I have created the Shabbat Challenge as a way to see if I can help provide families with a simple, and easy to use structure for creating Shabbat dinner in their homes while connecting them to a group of other families, also looking for ways to bring Shabbat into their homes.

As the Student Researcher, I am also the person who will be conducting the interviews as well as the intake calls, like the one we are doing right now.

Today, I’d like to ask you just a few criteria-based questions, to determine if you qualify as a participant, and if so, I’ll give you a more detailed explanation as to the scope of this project. At that point, if you’re interested in proceeding, we can talk about setting you up in the Challenge. Sound good?

Can you please share your age?

Would you describe yourself as an individual within a family unit?

Are you Shomer Shabbat?

Do you currently have a family Friday night dinner most weeks of the year?

Are you interested in participating in a challenge group to give you tools to create a Shabbat dinner in your home?
Thank you. I’m happy to say that you meet all of the criteria in regard to participation in this study. Now I would like to tell you a bit more about the scope of this project.

This is a Narrative Study. The main question being asked is ‘What are the experiences of the participants in a blended learning Shabbat Challenge?’ with a sub focus on ‘What do the participants believe the blended learning Shabbat Challenge brought to their family life?’ and ‘What do the participants believe the community of peers brought to their Shabbat Challenge experience?’ Narrative studies are interested in the participant’s lived experiences, which means how you experience the Shabbat Challenge.

As a participant in the Shabbat Challenge you will be asked to check in with the Facebook group at least twice each day for eight days. I will ask you to respond to the moderated prompt each day, as well as respond to at least one other participant’s comment once each day. You will need to have a Friday night Shabbat dinner in your home with your family on the Friday of the challenge and attend an in-person gathering within seven days of the Friday night dinner.

That is a very brief overview of the study. Do you have any questions in regard to the research itself?

With that said, are you interesting in proceeding as a participant in this study?

Great, additionally I am looking for Shabbat Challenge participants who agree to be interviewed about their experience in the Challenge. This involves one in person interview (60-90 minutes), reading over the transcription of the interview to make sure you were properly recorded and if necessary participate in a second clarifying interview. You will also have the opportunity to read and comment on the data as it is being coded and analyzed.

Would you like to be an interview participant?

Fantastic, what I’d like to do now is add you to the Facebook group challenge which will begin on February 10, 2017. Do you agree? Good. Please share your Facebook name with me so I can invite you to this closed group.

I have already emailed you an electronic copy of the Consent Form (Appendix B & C) which tells you a bit more about the study and answers some common questions people often have in regard to research. Can you please have Consent Form (B or C, depending on if the person will be interviewed or not) in front of you for us to review?

To meet our human subjects’ requirements at the university, participants have to read and verbally agree to the Consent Form that I sent you. I’d like to go over this form with you now. The Consent Form for this study, titled ‘Shabbat Challenge Narratives: Examining Blending Learning in Jewish Family Engagement,’ states that all participants must be at least 18 years old. You are being asked to participate in an eight day Shabbat Challenge (and one or two in-person interviews focused on your experience in the Shabbat Challenge) There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to you for taking part in this study, and there are also no direct benefits to you for participating in the study. Your part in this study will be handled in a
confidential manner. Only the researchers and other participants will know that you participated in this study (and only the researcher will know that you participated in the interviews). Any reports or publications based on this research will only use pseudonyms and will not identify you or any other participant as being part of this project. The decision to participate in this research project is up to you. You do not have to participate, and you can refuse to answer any question. Even if you begin the study, you may withdraw at any time. If you have any questions about this study, contact information for me as well as the Principal Investigator is listed, and contact information is also listed for the Director of Human Subject Research Protection at Northeastern University should you have any other questions about your rights in this research (and you can call that person confidentially if you wish).

Do you have any additional questions or concerns about the Shabbat Challenge or this form?  Do you give your verbal consent?  Great, thank you.

If you are agreeing to be an interview participant, I will review this consent form once again at the beginning of our first interview and ask you to sign it at that time. Is that okay with you?

Thank you for agreeing to be a participant in the Shabbat Challenge, I will be enrolling you in the Challenge group and the challenge will start on February 10, 2017.
Appendix F: Interview Protocol Form: First Interview

Part 1: Introductory Protocol

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for this research study. The goal of the study is to understand the stories of people’s experience during the Shabbat Challenge. It is hoped that these stories will add to the literature on the usefulness of blended learning as a tool for Jewish family engagement.

Because your responses are important, and I want to make sure to capture everything you say, I would like to digitally record our conversation today. Only a professional transcriptionist and I will be privy to the audio files. The transcriptionist will have signed a confidentiality statement and will also only be provided with the recording labeled by pseudonym, meaning they will never even know your name, to maintain confidentiality. The audio files will be destroyed within two weeks after they are transcribed. I can assure you that all responses will be confidential and only pseudonyms will be used when quoting from the transcripts. Only your pseudonym will be attached to the transcript.

I would like to begin recording this session now, is that alright with you? OK, the recording has begun.

To meet our human subjects’ requirements at the university, participants have to read and verbally agree to the Consent Form that I sent you. I’d like to go over this form with you now. The Consent Form for this study is titled ‘Shabbat Challenge Narratives: Examining the use of blended learning in family engagement.’ There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to you for taking part in this study, and there are also no direct benefits to you for participating in the study. Your part in this study will be handled in a confidential manner. Only the researchers will know that you participated in this study. Any reports or publications based on this research will only use pseudonyms and will not identify you or any other participant as being part of this project. The decision to participate in this research project is up to you. You do not have to participate, and you can refuse to answer any question. Even if you begin the study, you may withdraw at any time. If you have any questions about this study, contact information for me as well as the Principal Investigator is listed, and contact information is also listed for the Director of Human Subject Research Protection at Northeastern University should you have any other questions about your rights in this research (and you can call that person confidentially if you wish).

Do you have any additional questions or concerns about the interview process or this form? Do you give your verbal consent? Can you please sign the form as well? Great, thank you.

This is the first interview. We have planned for this interview to last between 60-90 minutes. Following this interview, you will have a chance to review the transcription for accuracy. If necessary, we may schedule a second, shorter interview simply to clarify something discussed today. Do you have any questions at this time?
Part II: Background Questions

1. What is your age?
2. Please describe your family configuration (married, partnered, same sex, children, number, ages)
3. Please describe your connection to the Jewish community (synagogue membership, community affiliations)
4. Please describe your children’s current (for the past three years) Jewish education

Part III: Shabbat Challenge

5. Tell me about what you enjoyed most and what was a challenge for you during the Shabbat Challenge?
6. Please tell me the story of your families’ Friday night dinner?
7. Why did you choose to participate in the Shabbat Challenge?
8. Can you share how you found the interaction with the Facebook group?
9. You shared this on the Facebook group (insert what you wish to discuss), can you please share your thinking during this interaction?
10. How would you describe your participation in the group? (Lurker, major participator, did what was asked of me, etc.)
11. Can you please share a conversation that occurred in your home due to the Shabbat Challenge?
12. How was the Shabbat Challenge experienced by your children? Your spouse/partner?
13. What was your level of engagement (comfort) with the other participants? Do you have a story to share about an interaction with another participant?
14. Tell me about your experience during the in-person meeting?
15. Share with me how you think your experience in the Shabbat Challenge will affect you/your family going forward?
16. Anything else you would like to share about your experience during the Shabbat Challenge?

I want to thank you so much for sharing your experiences. I have really enjoyed speaking with you today and learning about your experience. End Recording.
Appendix G: Interview Protocol Form: Second Interview

Part 2: Follow up Protocol

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for a second time. Just to remind you, the goal of the study is to understand the stories of people’s experience during the Shabbat Challenge. It is hoped that these stories will add to the literature on the usefulness of blended learning as a tool for Jewish family engagement.

Because your responses are important, and I want to make sure to capture everything you say, I would like to digitally record our conversation today. Only a professional transcriptionist and I will be privy to the audio files. The transcriptionist will have signed a confidentiality statement and will also only be provided with the recording labeled by pseudonym, meaning they will never even know your name, to maintain confidentiality. The audio files will be destroyed within two weeks after they are transcribed. I can assure you that all responses will be confidential and only pseudonyms will be used when quoting from the transcripts. Only your pseudonym will be attached to the transcript.

I would like to begin recording this session now, is that alright with you? OK, the recording has begun.

Just to remind you, to meet our human subjects’ requirements at the university, participants have to read and verbally agree to the Consent Form that I sent you. I’d like to review this form with you again. The Consent Form for this study is titled ‘Shabbat Challenge Narratives: Examining the use of blended learning in family engagement.’ There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to you for taking part in this study, and there are also no direct benefits to you for participating in the study. Your part in this study will be handled in a confidential manner. Only the researchers will know that you participated in this study. Any reports or publications based on this research will only use pseudonyms and will not identify you or any other participant as being part of this project. The decision to participate in this research project is up to you. You do not have to participate, and you can refuse to answer any question. Even if you begin the study, you may withdraw at any time. If you have any questions about this study, contact information for me as well as the Principal Investigator is listed, and contact information is also listed for the Director of Human Subject Research Protection at Northeastern University should you have any other questions about your rights in this research (and you can call that person confidentially if you wish).

Do you have any additional questions or concerns about the interview process or this form? Do you give your verbal consent again? Great, thank you.

This is the second interview. We have planned for this interview to last between 10-30 minutes. Following this interview, you will have a chance to review the transcription for accuracy. Do you have any questions at this time?
1. We did the Challenge in February. We did our first interview in April and now it is August, so it's been six months. I was curious if the Challenge has had any additional impact on you or your family since we last spoke in April.

2. Think about other family education programs you've been to, and how would you compare and contrast the Shabbat Challenge to those programs?

3. Think about other adult education you have been involved with, and how would you compare and contrast the Shabbat Challenge to those programs

4. Do you have any goals you are working on right now for your Shabbat experience? I remember when we talked last your goal was ______________.

5. Are there any ways that I, or someone else at the synagogue could help support you in your Shabbat goals? Is there any material you would want or class you would like to see offered or anything that would be helpful to you? And you should know, just because you mention something it does not mean that I am committing you to it. I am just looking for ideas you might have for continued support.

6. I am going to read you a quote, and now that you've been through the Shabbat challenge, I just want to hear what you think of the quote. The quote is from Achad Ha’am, a 20th century Jewish philosopher. "More than the Jews have kept Shabbat, Shabbat has kept the Jews." What does that quote mean to you?

I want to thank you so much for sharing your experiences. I have really enjoyed speaking with you today and learning about your experience. End Recording.