LEARNING DISABILITIES AND LITURGY:

The Role of the Cantor in Working with Specific Learning-Disabled Students

BY LAURA BREZNICK

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
Requirements for Master of Sacred Music Degree

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
Debbie Friedman School of Sacred Music
New York, New York

February 1, 2016
Advisor: Rabbi Richard Address DMin

Table of Contents

Thesis Summary

Learning Disabilities and Liturgy:
The Role of the Cantor in Working with Specific Learning-Disabled Students

by Laura Breznick

My thesis was inspired by my own personal background and journey. Growing up with a specific learning disability myself, I felt that it was important for clergy to be able to work with this ever-growing population of students entering our synagogues.

The goal of this thesis was twofold: 1) to raise awareness of the issue of specific learning disabilities, and 2) to adapt the techniques developed by learning consultants and educators working in secular and religious school settings to make them relevant and transferable for cantors (and Jewish clergy in general).

The materials used include current research (books, journal articles, websites) on the topic of learning disabilities, and interviews conducted by myself with specialists in the field (learning consultants, educators, specialized Jewish clergy), as well as with affected students and their families.

The core of the thesis consists of six chapters. It is prefaced by a glossary of terms used in the field of learning disabilities to provide a common language for the uninitiated reader. Chapter one provides the background history of specific learning disabilities in secular and religious education; chapter two discusses the importance of individualized instruction; chapter three analyses the importance of inclusion in synagogue life; chapter four discusses the role of the cantor, rabbi, and the religious school team in making students with learning disabilities feel welcome in our congregations; chapter five features the voices of affected students and their families; and chapter six lays out concrete techniques for Jewish clergy for working with these students. The thesis concludes with several appendices containing sample techniques and a bibliography.

Acknowledgments

- First and foremost, I would like to thank my thesis advisor, Rabbi Richard Address, for encouraging me to take on this topic and for reminding me of its importance throughout the writing process.
- This thesis would not have been possible without the help and cooperation of the following clergy, educators, congregations, and schools: Rabbi Steven Rau, Stacey Levy, and Cantor Deborah Hartman of The Temple, Atlanta, GA; Lisa Friedman and Cantor Emily Pincus of Temple Beth-El, Hillsborough, NJ; Ira Wise of Congregation B'nai Israel, Bridgeport, CT; and Ilana Ruskay-Kidd along with her entire faculty at the Shefa School. The work you all are doing is truly inspired!
- My mentor, Rabbi Paula Feldstein, for encouraging me along the way and keeping my spirits up over a lot of sushi and/or coffee.
- Cantor Faryn Kates Rudnick, Rabbi Edythe Mencher, and Rabbi Marc A. Gruber for letting me bend their ears.
- My parents, Susan and Martin Breznick, for everything they have done to get me to this point.
- Finally, to my fiancé, Stefan Tiwy. Without you, this thesis could not have happened. Thank you for the love and support you show me daily.

The Language of Learning Disabilities

Before moving on to the thesis proper, the following few pages contain some of the key terms from the field of learning disabilities. They are to serve as a glossary for the reader to begin with a common language for a better understanding of the thesis.

Anxiety Disorders: A group of mental disorders characterized by feelings of acute anxiety, followed by ongoing fear. These feelings may cause physical symptoms, such as a sensation of the heart beating too fast or shakiness.[1]

> *Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD):* Students with GAD may worry excessively about a variety of things, such as grades, family issues, relationships with peers. They tend to be overly hard on themselves, strive for perfection, and may frequently seek approval or reassurance from others.[2]

Attention-Deficit (ADD) / Hyperactivity (ADHD) Disorder: Disorders that includes difficulty staying focused and paying attention, difficulty controlling behavior, and hyperactivity.[3] Students with these disabilities have one or more of the following symptoms, which first occur before the age of seven: inattention, distractibility, impulsivity, and hyperactivity.[4] There are three subtypes, each with its own pattern of behaviors:

---

1 Steven H. Rau and Stacey Levy, *Everyone is Welcome: Creating a Culture of Inclusion in Congregational Schools* (New York, NY: URJ Press, 2015), 6.

2 Ibid.

3 "ADHD," Learning Disabilities Association of America, 2003, accessed November 20, 2015, http://ldaamerica.org/type-of-learning-disabilities/adhd/.

4 Steven H. Rau and Stacey Levy, *Everyone is Welcome: Creating a Culture of Inclusion in Congregational Schools* (New York, NY: URJ Press, 2015), 6.

Inattentive Type: Students with inattentive ADD typically have difficulty paying attention to details, maintaining sustained attention, and listening to and following instructions. They tend to be disorganized, distractible, and forgetful.[5] These students do not show significant hyperactive/impulsive behavior.[6]

Hyperactive-Impulsive Type: Students with hyperactive-impulsive ADHD typically fidget and squirm; they have difficulty remaining seated, playing quietly, waiting their turn, and/or waiting in line; they run around, play, and/or talk excessively; they interrupt frequently; they always seem to be on the go; and they may try to answer before a teacher finishes asking a question.[7] These students do not show significant inattention.[8]

Combined Type: Combined-type ADHD is the most common form of the disorder; it involves a combination of inattentive type and hyperactive-impulsive type ADHD.[9]

Auditory Processing Disorder (APD): Students with APD have difficulty making sense of the words they hear. Individuals with APD typically have difficulty distinguishing between similar sounds or words, and they have trouble hearing speech if background noise competes with what someone is saying. This is also commonly known as central auditory processing disorder (CAPD).[10]

---

5 Ibid.

6 "ADHD," Learning Disabilities Association of America, 2003, accessed November 20, 2015, http://ldaamerica.org/type-of-learning-disabilities/adhd/.

7 Steven H. Rau and Stacey Levy, *Everyone is Welcome: Creating a Culture of Inclusion in Congregational Schools* (New York, NY: URJ Press, 2015), 6.

8 "ADHD," Learning Disabilities Association of America, 2003, accessed November 20, 2015, http://ldaamerica.org/type-of-learning-disabilities/adhd/.

9 Steven H. Rau and Stacey Levy, *Everyone is Welcome: Creating a Culture of Inclusion in Congregational Schools* (New York, NY: URJ Press, 2015), 6.

10 Ibid., 7.

Developmental Phonological Disorder (Specific Reading Disability): Delays in phonological awareness (understanding that sentences are composed of words, words are composed of sounds, and so on).[11] Children with these disorders have difficulty dividing words into syllables or phonemes (sounds) and blending sounds together, especially when reading unfamiliar words.[12] This is a common symptom of dyslexia.[13]

Dyscalculia: A learning disability marked by the imperfect ability to perform mathematical functions.[14]

Dysgraphia: A learning disability resulting from the difficulty in expressing thoughts in writing and graphing.[15] A student with dysgraphia may have problems including illegible handwriting, inconsistent spacing, poor spatial planning on paper, poor spelling, and difficulty composing writing as well as thinking and writing at the same time.[16]

Dyslexia: A learning disability marked by impairment of the ability to recognize and comprehend written words.[17] A student with dyslexia may experience trouble with reading fluency, decoding, reading comprehension, recall, writing, spelling, and

---

11 Ibid., 9.
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
14 "Dyscalculia," Learning Disabilities Association of America, 2001/2002, accessed November 4, 2014, http://ldaamerica.org/types-of-learning-disabilities/dyscalculia/.
15 Steven H. Rau and Stacey Levy, *Everyone is Welcome: Creating a Culture of Inclusion in Congregational Schools* (New York, NY: URJ Press, 2015), 7.
16 "Dysgraphia," Learning Disabilities Association of America, 2001/2002, accessed November 4, 2014, http://ldaamerica.org/types-of-learning-disabilities/dysgraphia/.
17 Steven H. Rau and Stacey Levy, *Everyone is Welcome: Creating a Culture of Inclusion in Congregational Schools* (New York, NY: URJ Press, 2015), 7.

sometimes speech and can exist along with other related disorders.[18] Dyslexia is sometimes referred to as a Language-Based Learning Disability.[19]

Dyspraxia: a brain-based condition that makes it hard to plan and coordinate physical movement.[20] Students with dyspraxia tend to struggle with balance and posture and they may appear to be clumsy or "out of sync" with their environment.[21]

Executive Function: this is an aspect of organization that refers to the brains ability to analyze a task and come up with a plan to complete said task.[22]

Individualized Education Program (IEP): The IEP contains information as to why a student should receive special education services as a result of meeting specific eligibility criteria, and the time, frequency, and duration of services provided, goals/objectives, and classroom accommodations.[23]

Language Processing Disorder / Receptive Language Disorder: Terms referring to a learning disorder characterized by difficulty understanding what is said. Students with

---

[18] "Dyslexia," Learning Disabilities Association of America, 2001-2002, accessed November 20, 2015, http://ldaamerica.org/types-of-learning-disabilities/dyslexia/.

[19] Ibid.

[20] "Understanding Dyspraxia," UNDERSTOOD USA, 2014/2015, accessed December 18, 2015, http://www.understood.org/en/learning-attention-issues/child-learning-disabilities/dyspraxia/.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Larry B. Silver, *The Misunderstood Child, Fourth Edition: Understanding and Coping with Your Child's Learning Disabilities* (New York, NY: Three Rivers Press, 2006), 52.

[23] Steven H. Rau and Stacey Levy, *Everyone is Welcome: Creating a Culture of Inclusion in Congregational Schools* (New York, NY: URJ Press, 2015), 24.

receptive language disorder hear and process the sounds in words but have difficulty processing meaningful information, especially when the language is complex.[24] This disorder is considered to be a specific type of Auditory Processing Disorder.[25]

Learning Disability: A neurological disorder that affects the brain's ability to receive, process, store, and respond to information.[26]

Other Health Impairments: A category under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) that refers to having limited strength, vitality, or alertness, including a heightened alertness to environmental stimuli that results in limited alertness with respect to the educational environment. ADD/ADHD falls into this category[27]

Special Education Eligibility Report: The eligibility report explains and classifies the type of disability or disorder and why this is negatively impacting the child in the classroom.[28]

Specific Learning Disability (SLD): A disorder in one or more basic psychological process involved in understanding or using language, spoke or written, which may

---

[24] Ibid., 9.

[25] "Language Processing Disorder," Learning Disabilities Association of America, 2001-2002, accessed November 20, 2015, http://ldaamerica.org/types-of-learning-disabilities/languageprocessingdisorder/.

[26] "Introduction to Learning Disabilities," National Association of Special Education Teachers, 2006/2007, accessed November 4, 2014, http://www.naset.org/2522.0.html.

[27] Larry B. Silver, *The Misunderstood Child, Fourth Edition: Understanding and Coping with Your Child's Learning Disabilities* (New York, NY: Three Rivers Press, 2006), 183.

[28] Steven H. Rau and Stacey Levy, *Everyone is Welcome: Creating a Culture of Inclusion in Congregational Schools* (New York, NY: URJ Press, 2015), 23.

manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations.[29] The term is used by some public school systems instead of terms like dyslexia or dysgraphia.[30]

Visual Processing Disorder: This refers to a hindered ability to make sense of information taken in through the eyes. This is different from problems involving sight or sharpness of vision. Difficulties with visual processing affect how visual information is interpreted or processed by the brain. Common areas of difficulty include: spacial relations, visual closure, object recognition, and whole/part relationships.[31]

Introduction

The role of the cantor has changed significantly and has developed throughout the years. The cantor is no longer just "the singer" of the congregation. We are also lifecycle officiants, pastoral caregivers, and educators – in other words, clergy. As clergy, it is our job to be able to work with and try to understand all of our congregants, including and especially those who have special needs. As clergy, it is our moral obligation to make our congregations warm and welcoming to all who come and seek Judaism at its doors – this is especially true for our religious schools and our work with school-aged children.

The Hebrew word for synagogue, *beit k'neset*, is a reminder to us that the primary role of a congregation is to be a place of "gathering." Even with this knowledge, I have

[29] "Introduction to Learning Disabilities," National Association of Special Education Teachers, 2006/2007, accessed November 4, 2014, http://www.naset.org/2522.0.html.
[30] Steven H. Rau and Stacey Levy, *Everyone is Welcome: Creating a Culture of Inclusion in Congregational Schools* (New York, NY: URJ Press, 2015), 9.
[31] As defined by Lisa Friedman.

seen time and time again that many congregations, including their clergy leaders, unknowingly build fences around their synagogues and education programs, keeping children that have different learning styles and needs away from their communities.

As a society, we are becoming more aware of and knowledgeable about many different learning disabilities and learning styles. It is imperative that congregational communities step up to the plate and recognize the importance of educating all children equally.

My approach for this thesis is not from the perspective of a Jewish educator, but rather, as clergy. Much of the information was gathered from fieldwork, interviews with Jewish educators, clergy, parents, and the students themselves. My goal was to find out the following: 1) What is already happening in our congregations and schools?, 2) How is the cantor involved?, and 3) How can we do better?

In this thesis, I focus on three specific learning disabilities: dyslexia, dysgraphia (language-based learning disabilities), and dyscalculia (math-based learning disability). I chose these three specific learning disabilities based on their prevalence in the secular school community as well as the ability of the students to more easily participate in an "inclusion" model classroom. Often, just looking at these students, you would never be able to tell that they have a learning disability. They are often able to hide or mask it by being the "class clown" or the "trouble maker." These students often get lost in the shuffle, or are labeled as "lazy," "unmotivated," or "stupid." These labels, as hurtful as they are, will often stick with these students until, eventually, our synagogue communities loose these vital members of our community all together.

I should note that this thesis, in addition to the desire to help my colleagues learn more about working with students that have specific learning disabilities, also comes from a very personal place. At the age of three, I was diagnosed with dyscalculia and struggled through school. The one area where I thrived was music. Music is what brought me to Judaism and the cantorate. My childhood cantor, a dear friend and mentor, has dyslexia and has always been open and honest with me about her struggles. But, even with those struggles, she always told me that I could be whatever I wanted to be, including a cantor. Upon arriving at Hebrew Union College and seeing how little my colleagues knew about this subject, and in some cases, how frightened they were by it, is what inspired me to write this thesis.

This thesis is broken down into six chapters, each with a distinct topic: In chapter one, I provide the reader with a history of specific learning disabilities in both secular and religious education. Chapter two lays out the importance behind individualized instruction. In chapter three, I discuss the inclusion movement in both secular and religious education. In chapter four, I talk about the cantor's role as part of the congregational team in working with these students and their families. In chapter five, we hear from the students and the families themselves, their successes and struggles. Finally, in chapter six, I lay out concrete, easy to implement ideas and techniques for cantors working with these students.

In Judaism, we value education as one of our top priorities, and I believe we can all agree that everyone has the right to an education within the walls of our synagogues. The cantor needs to be a vibrant and vocal member of the team, welcoming all who come through the doors of our synagogues.

1. Specific Learning Disabilities – A History

As the educational landscape and realities are changing in the contemporary American Jewish community, we are seeing a rise in the awareness of and programming for children with specific learning disabilities in our URJ congregations. In order for the cantor to be part of this processes, we need to understand where these programs are coming from and the intent behind them. Keeping that in mind, this first chapter is meant to give the reader some basic information on the history of specific learning disabilities. This chapter strives to give you a brief history of specific learning disabilities as well as answer the following questions:

1. What are specific learning disabilities?
2. How and why do they occur?
3. What other medical issues are associated with them?

What is a learning disability?

The term "learning disability" (or LD) has evolved over the past several decades, and yet, as of today, there is no definitive, nationally recognized, definition of what a learning disability is. Currently, there are at least twelve definitions that appear in professional literature on the topic of learning disabilities and this is due to the multidisciplinary nature of the field itself. For the purposes of this thesis, I applied the definition of a learning disability as a neurological brain disorder that affects the brain's ability to receive, process, store, and respond to information.[32]

A student who has a learning disability possesses at least average, often above-

[32] "Introduction to Learning Disabilities," National Association of Special Education Teachers, 2006/2007, accessed November 4, 2014, http://www.naset.org/2522.0.html.

average intelligence (33% of students with LDs are gifted) and yet has trouble acquiring basic academic skills.[33] A learning disability does not stand for a single disorder, but rather it is a term that refers to a group of disorders. Learning disabilities are sometimes referred to as "invisible disabilities," since you often cannot tell, when looking at a student, that they have a learning disability. (Silver, 2006)

What is a specific learning disability?

The term "specific learning disability" (or SLD) means a disorder in one or more basic psychological process involved in understanding or using language, spoken or written, which may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations. Some of the disabilities that fall into this category are dyslexia, dysgraphia, and dyscalculia.[34]

What disorders are not under the category of specific learning disabilities?

Disorders that are not included under the category of specific learning disabilities are learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, of mental retardation, of emotional disturbances, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage.[35]

What causes a learning disability?

It is thought that learning disabilities are caused by differences in how a person's brain

---

[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid.
[35] It is important to note that this thesis will only be covering the topic of specific learning disabilities as well as the "other health impairments" associated with them.

works and how the brain processes information, a central nervous system dysfunction.[36] The brain of a student who has a learning disability is wired differently and when this unusual wiring happens, it is unlikely that only one part of the brain is affected (Silver, 2006). This unusual wiring often happens during the first part of a pregnancy or, for at least 50 percent of individuals with a learning disability, it is the impact of a change in the students genetic code (Silver, 2006).

Can someone outgrow a learning disability?

Even when a person learns to compensate for a learning disability, the differences in the brain processing lasts throughout the person's lifetime, in other words, one can not outgrow a learning disability (Silver, 2006). Dr. Larry M. Silver, author of the many editions of *The Misunderstood Child: Understanding and Coping with Your Child's Learning Disability*, makes it very clear, "learning disabilities are life disabilities" (Silver, 2006, 36). However, with early interventions a child (or adult) with a learning disability has the ability to thrive both academically and in every day life.

How many students in the United States have a specific learning disability?

Currently, almost 2.9 million school-aged children in the United States are diagnosed with a specific learning disability and receive some type of special education.[37] Over half of all children who receive special education have a learning disability.[38] The number of

---

[36] Ibid.

[37] "To Assure the Free Appropriate Public Education of All Children With Disabilities," Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, Section 618. Twenty-Fourth Annual Report to Congress, US Department of Education, 2002.

[38] 24th Annual Report to Congress, 2002.

students receiving special education services increases steadily between the ages of 6 and 9, and the bulk of students served (42%) are between the ages of 10 and 13.[39] A sharp decrease in needs/services is noted between 16 and 21 years of age.[40]

What is the History of Learning Disabilities?

The term "learning disabilities" originated with Dr. Samuel Kirk based on his presentation on April 6, 1963, at the conference on "Exploration into Problems of the Perceptually Handicapped Child."[41]

> I have used the term "learning disabilities" to describe "a group of children who have disorders in development of language, speech, reading, and associated communication skills for social interaction." In this group, I do not include children who have sensory handicaps such as blindness or deafness, because we have methods of managing and training the deaf and the blind, I also exclude from this group children who have generalized mental retardation. (Kirk, 1963, 2)

In 1968, the U.S. Office of Education attempted to create a federal definition for learning disabilities and it was Dr. Samuel Kirk who chaired the committee.[42] The committee's statement consisted of the following:

> Children with special learning disabilities exhibit a disorder in one or more of the basic, psychological processes involved in understanding or in using spoke or written languages. These may be manifested in disorders of listening, thinking, talking, reading, writing, spelling, or arithmetic. They include conditions which have been referred to as perceptual handicaps, brain injury, minimal brain

---

39 "Introduction to Learning Disabilities," National Association of Special Education Teachers, 2006/2007, accessed November 4, 2014, http://www.naset.org/2522.0.html.
40 U.S. Department of Education, 2000; cited in Gargiulio, 2004, 210.
41 "Introduction to Learning Disabilities," National Association of Special Education Teachers, 2006/2007, accessed November 4, 2014, http://www.naset.org/2522.0.html.
42 Ibid.

> dysfunction, , developmental aphasia etc. They do not include learning problems which are due primarily to visual, hearing, or motor handicaps, to mental retardation, emotional disturbances, or to environmental disadvantage.[43]

By the end of 1968, the term "specific learning disability" had become a federally designated category of special education.

In 1969, the "Specific Learning Disabilities Act" was enacted (Public Law 91-230.)[44] This was the first time that federal law mandated support services for students with learning disabilities.

In 1975, Congress enacted P.L. 94-142, "Education for All Handicapped Children," which mandated a free, appropriate public school education for all students (this law eventually became the "Individuals with Disabilities Education Act" (IDEA) in 1990). Under the 1975 version, a specific learning disability was defined as follows:

> A disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding, or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations, including conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. However learning disabilities do not include... learning problems that are not primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, of mental retardation, of emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural or economic disadvantage.[45]

In the 1980s, a coalition of parents and educators came together to form the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (NJCLD). They were unhappy with definition of learning disabilities developed under P.L. 94-142, claiming it included concepts that

---

[43] Special Education for Handicapped Children, 1968.

[44] "Introduction to Learning Disabilities," National Association of Special Education Teachers, 2006/2007, accessed November 4, 2014, http://www.naset.org/2522.0.html.

[45] Education for All Handicapped Children, 1975.

were unclear or difficult to use to identify children with learning disabilities.[46] The NJCLD gave the following definition:

> Learning disabilities is a general term that refers to a heterogeneous group of disorders manifested by significant difficulties in the acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning, or mathematical abilities. These disorders are intrinsic to the individual and presumed to be due to central nervous dysfunction, and may occur across the lifespan. Problems in self-regulatory behaviors, social perception, and social interaction may exist with learning disabilities but do not by themselves constitute a learning disability. Although learning disabilities may occur concomitantly with other handicapping conditions or with extrinsic influences, they are not the direct result of those conditions or influences.[47]

In 1990, the "Individuals with Disabilities Education Act" (IDEA) renamed and changed P.L. 94-142.[48] The term "disability" replaced "handicap," and the new law required transition services for students.

In 1997 and again in 2004, IDEA was reauthorized with key changes such as the addition of ADD/ADHD to the "other health impairment" section as well as identifying the role of a classroom teacher in the IEP[49] meeting.

The IDEA (or Public Law 108-446) of 2004 (the "Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement[50] Act") defines "specific learning disability" as "a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which disorder may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to

---

46 "Introduction to Learning Disabilities," National Association of Special Education Teachers, 2006/2007, accessed November 4, 2014, http://www.naset.org/2522.0.html.

47 National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities, 1994.

48 "Introduction to Learning Disabilities," National Association of Special Education Teachers, 2006/2007, accessed November 4, 2014, http://www.naset.org/2522.0.html.

49 Ibid.

50 The word "Improvement" was added to the title of the 2004 version.

listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations."[51]

Can a student have more then one learning disability?

The simple answer is yes. In many cases, a student who has one learning disability may be diagnosed, or show signs of, another learning disability (Silver, 2006). It is also possible that a student, in addition to having the learning disability, will have what IDEA refers to as "other health impairments," such as ADD or ADHD (Silver, 2006, 8). It is not unusual for a student with a learning disability to also have two, three or four "other health impairments" or "secondary emotional, social, and family problems" (Silver, 2006, 9). It is also possible for a student to have only one diagnosis, but the most recent research shows that this is less likely to occur (Silver, 2006).

What is dyslexia?

Dyslexia is a very common condition that affects the way the brain processes written and spoken language. Dyslexia is also sometimes referred to as a "language processing disorder," "reading disability," or "reading disorder." Given that dyslexia is a "language processing disorder," it can also affect writing, spelling, and sometimes speaking.[52]

The signs and symptoms of dyslexia vary from student to student but the most common ones are[53]:

- The student may read slowly and painfully

[51] IDEA Regulations, Identification of Specific Learning Disabilities, August 14, 2006.
[52] "Dyslexia," Understood U.S.A., 2014-2015, accessed December 16, 2015, http://www.understood.org/en/learning-attention-issues/child-learning-disabilities/dyslexia/understanding-dyslexia/.
[53] "Dyslexia," Learning Disabilities Association of America, 2001-2002, accessed November 20, 2015, http://ldaamerica.org/types-of-learning-disabilities/dyslexia/.

- They may experiences decoding errors, especially with the orders of letters
- The student may show a wide disparity between listening comprehension and reading comprehension of texts
- They may have trouble with spelling
- They may have difficulty with handwriting
- The student may exhibit difficulty recalling known words
- They may have difficulty with written language
- In general, decoding real words is better than nonsense words
- The student may substitute one small word for another

As discussed earlier, learning disabilities, are often linked to a student's brain wiring or genetic make-up, but with dyslexia in particular, researchers have found specific information as to the potential causes.[54] Dyslexia has been shown to run in families, about forty percent of siblings of children with dyslexia will have dyslexia themselves or some other reading difficulties.[55] As many as forty-nine percent of parents with kids who have dyslexia will have it as well.[56] Scientists have also discovered several genes associated with reading and language processing disorders.[57]

In terms of the brain's make-up, it has been found that the *planum temporale*, the part of the brain that helps us to understand language, is the same size on both of the brain's hemispheres in student who have dyslexia. Typically, the *planum temporale* is larger in the dominant hemisphere of the brain.[58] Finally, in students with dyslexia we see a difference in brain activity:

---

54 "Dyslexia," Understood U.S.A., 2014-2015, accessed December 16, 2015, http://www.understood.org/en/learning-attention-issues/child-learning-disabilities/dyslexia/understanding-dyslexia/.

55 Sally Shaywitz, and Bennett Shaywitz, "The Neurobiology of Reading and Dyslexia." *Focus on Basics* 5.A (2001). NCSALL.net. National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy, http://www.ncsall.net/index.html@id=278.html.

56 Ibid.

57 "Dyslexia," Understood U.S.A., 2014-2015, accessed December 16, 2015, http://www.understood.org/en/learning-attention-issues/child-learning-disabilities/dyslexia/understanding-dyslexia/.

58 Ibid.

> To be able to read, our brains have to translate the symbols we see on the page into sounds. Then those sounds have to be combined into meaningful words. Typically the ares of our brain responsible work in a predictable way. But if your child has dyslexia, those areas don't work together in the same way. Kids with reading issues end up using different areas of the brain to compensate.[59]

It is not unusual for students who have dyslexia to also have other related conditions, whether they are other specific learning disabilities or other "health impairments." The most common conditions associated with dyslexia are:

- ADD/ADHD
- Auditory Processing Disorder
- Visual Processing Disorder
- Dysgraphia
- Dyscalculia
- Dyspraxia
- Executive Functioning Issues
- Developmental Phonological Disorder

In addition, students with dyslexia may struggle with certain life skills such as: social skills (making friends), listening comprehension (they are unable to filter background noise and therefore lose focus), memory, navigating (knowing left from right), and time management.[60]

What is dysgraphia?

Dysgraphia is a brain-based condition that causes trouble with written expression. "The term comes from the Greek words *dys* (impaired) and *graphia* (making letter forms by hand)."[61] IDEA does not use the term "dysgraphia" under the category of "specific learning disability," but rather describes it (so it is still considered a specific learning

[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Ibid.

disability and children who are diagnosed are able to receive special education services.)

The signs and symptoms of dysgraphia vary from student to student but the most common ones are[62]:

- The student may have illegible printing and cursive writing
- They may display inconsistencies: mixtures of print and cursive, upper and lower case, or irregular sizes, shapes or slant of letters
- The student may have unfinished words or letters, omitted words
- They may display inconsistent spacing between words and letters
- They student may exhibit a strange wrist, body, or paper position
- They may have difficulty pre-visualizing letter formation.
- Copying or writing slowly or in a labored fashion is not uncommon
- The student may have poor spatial planning on paper
- A cramped or unusual pencil grip is not uncommon.
- The student may display difficulty thinking and writing at the same time (taking notes/creative writing).

Currently, there is not as much research into dysgraphia as there is for dyslexia, and researchers are not sure what causes it. However, it is believed that students with dysgraphia have two steps in the writing processes that consistently go awry[63]:

- Organizing information that is stored in memory
- Getting words onto paper by handwriting or typing them.

The result of these issues being that the student produces a document that is filled with errors and does not properly convey what the student knows.[64] In addition, research shows that orthographic coding[65] in working memory is related to dysgraphia.[66]

---

62 "Dysgraphia," Learning Disabilities Association of America, 2001-2002, accessed November 20, 2015, http://ldaamerica.org/types-of-learning-disabilities/dysgraphia/.

63 "Dysgraphia," Understood U.S.A., 2014-2015, accessed December 16, 2015, http://www.understood.org/en/learning-attention-issues/child-learning-disabilities/dysgraphia/understanding-dysgraphia/.

64 Ibid.

65 Orthographic coding refers to the ability to store unfamiliar written words in working memory while the letters of the word are analyzed during word learning or the ability to create permanent memory of written words linked to their pronunciation and meaning (International Dyslexia Association, IDA).

66 "Dysgraphia," Understood U.S.A., 2014-2015, accessed December 16, 2015,

As with dyslexia, it is not unusual for a student with dysgraphia to have other related conditions, whether they are other specific learning disabilities or other "health impairments." The most common conditions associated with dysgraphia are:

- Dyslexia
- Language Processing Disorder
- ADD/ADHD
- Dyspraxia
- Developmental Phonological Disorder

In addition, students with dysgraphia may struggle with basic skills such as: fine motor skills (buttoning a shirt, making a list, etc.) and may have trouble interacting with students their own age due to communication problems.[67]

What is Dyscalculia?

Dyscalculia is a brain-based condition that makes it hard to make sense of numbers and math concepts. Dyscalculia is not as well-known as dyslexia, but it is now thought to be almost as common. Students who have dyscalculia work hard to learn and memorize basic number facts and they sometimes struggle to understand the logic behind it. Like dyslexia, dyscalculia goes by several different names including "mathematics learning disability," "mathematics disorder," and even "math dyslexia."[68]

The signs and symptoms of Dyscalculia vary from student to student, but the most common ones are[69]:

---

http://www.understood.org/en/learning-attention-issues/child-learning-disabilities/dysgraphia/ understanding-dysgraphia/.

67 Ibid.

68 "Dyscalculia," Understood U.S.A., 2014-2015, accessed December 16, 2015, http://www.understood.org/en/learning-attention-issues/child-learning-disabilities/dyscalculia/understanding-dyscalculia/.

69 Ibid.

- The student may show difficulty understanding concepts of place value, and quantity, number lines, positive and negative value, carrying, and borrowing
- They may have difficulty understanding and doing word problems
- They may struggle with sequencing information or events
- The student might experience difficulties in math operations
- The student might struggle to understand fractions
- They may have challenges with money
- They may have difficulty recognizing patterns
- They may experience trouble putting language to math processes
- The student may have difficulty understanding concepts related to time such as days, weeks, months, seasons, quarters, etc.
- They may have trouble organizing problems on a page and keeping numbers lined up

It is important to note that not all students with dyscalculia (as with any specific learning disability) will have all of the signs and symptoms listed. Rather, some students might, for example, understand the logic behind the math, but the issue will be figuring out where and how to apply that logic to a word problem.[70] The most common problem found with dyscalculia is with "number sense.[71]"

Currently, there is no central database for research on dyscalculia and this makes it very difficult for researchers to know the exact number of students who have been diagnosed."[72] It is estimated that 6 to 7 percent of elementary school children have dyscalculia.[73]

Some of the possible causes of dyscalculia are: genes and heredity, brain development, environmental, and brain injury. Dyscalculia is shown to be more common

---

70 "Dyscalculia," Understood U.S.A., 2014-2015, accessed December 16, 2015, http://www.understood.org/en/learning-attention-issues/child-learning-disabilities/dyscalculia/understanding-dyscalculia/.

71 Number sense is an intuitive understanding of how numbers work and how to compare and estimate quantities on a number line.

72 "Dyscalculia," Understood U.S.A., 2014-2015, accessed December 16, 2015, http://www.understood.org/en/learning-attention-issues/child-learning-disabilities/dyscalculia/understanding-dyscalculia/.

73 Ibid.

in some families and when a student has dyscalculia it is not unusual for a parent or sibling to be diagnosed as well.[74] In terms of brain development, students with dyscalculia have been shown to have differences in the surface area, thickness, and volume in the parts of the brain that are linked to memory, setting up and monitoring tasks, and remembering math facts. Environmentally, dyscalculia has been linked to exposure to alcohol in the womb as well as prematurity and low birth weight. Finally, there are studies that show that injury to certain parts of the brain can bring on what researchers call "acquired dyscalculia."[75]

As with dyslexia and dysgraphia, it is unusual for a student with dyscalculia to have other related conditions, whether they are other specific learning disabilities or other "health impairments." The most common conditions associated with dyscalculia are:

- Dyslexia
- ADD/ADHD
- Anxiety Disorder
- Dyspraxia

In addition, students with dyscalculia may struggle with certain life skills such as: social skills (making friends), having no sense of direction (learning left from right), physical coordination (judging distance between objects and general clumsiness), money management, time management, and following a recipe.[76]

---

[74] Ibid.

[75] Ibid.

[76] "Dyscalculia," Understood U.S.A., 2014-2015, accessed December 16, 2015, http://www.understood.org/en/learning-attention-issues/child-learning-disabilities/dyscalculia/ understanding-dyscalculia

Conclusion

With dyslexia, dysgraphia, and dyscalculia being the most prominent learning disabilities, we as cantors are guaranteed to interact with and teach these students on a daily basis. Now that we know some basic information on these specific learning disabilities, we learn in the next five chapters how to best incorporate these students into congregational life while addressing their unique educational needs.

2. "All your children shall be students of *Adonai*"[77] – The Importance of Individualized Instruction

Maimonides describes the laws of Torah study as follows in his *Mishneh Torah* :

> When a teacher is teaching, and the students do not understand, he should not be angry at them or become upset, but rather he should go over the material again and again – even many times – until they understand... Similarly, a student should not say, "I Understand," if he has not understood. He should ask again – many times if necessary...[78]

In other words, every teacher (and clergy person) is required to do whatever it takes to ensure that all students learn – and the student must take responsibility for the learning as well. Often, students with learning disabilities require different learning techniques or learning tools, or even separate learning spaces, in order to succeed in a congregational education setting. This processes is often refereed to as Individualized Instruction or Differentiated Instruction[79].

---

[77] Isaiah 54:13.

[78] MT: *Talmud Torah* 4:4.

[79] The process of ensuring that what a student learns, how he or she learns it, and how the student demonstrates what he or she has learned is a match for the student's readiness level, interests, and preferred mode of learning.- Diane Heacox, 2002.

Dr. Diane Heacox writes in her book *Differentiated Instruction in the Regular Classroom* that there are three steps to reaching all types of learners[80]:

- Differentiate the Content (What is taught and how it is taught)
- Differentiate the Process (How students learn the content)
- Differentiate the Product (How the students will demonstrate their learning)

When working with students who have learning disabilities, it is first essential to find out: How does this student learn best? It is widely known that the most beneficial learning takes place when the student's individual needs are the focus of the method of teaching (Al Pi Darco, 6). In other words, you should not expect a child who has been diagnosed with dyslexia to learn the same way, or use the same techniques, as one who has been diagnosed with dyscalculia.

In order for cantors to learn about their students, they have multiple resources: religious school director, religious school teachers, parents, and of course the students themselves. Sometimes, there will be documentation of the students' learning differences and learning styles on file,[81] but often, there is not. It is important for the cantor to know that he/she is not alone in working with students who have different learning styles.

In terms of "differentiating the process," this is often done in a religious school setting by having students with learning disabilities in a self-contained classroom[82] or as it is sometimes called, an alternative program. The advantage to this type of learning

---

80 Diane Heacox Ed.D., *Differentiating Instruction in the Regular Classroom: How to Reach and Teach All Learners* (Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing Inc., 2002).

81 Perhaps a students IEP or Jewish IEP – to be discussed in more detail in chapters four and six.

82 A self-contained classroom has only students with special needs and special education teachers. It may have a low ratio of students and teachers and should provide an atmosphere in which a student with special needs can receive ample attention (Al Pi Darco, 20).

environment is the amount of attention and time each student receives, the teaching techniques can be tailored to the individual students by educational professionals who have the know how.

The self-contained classroom or alternative program also tends to be less anxiety-provoking for individual special needs students. Since they are learning material, that is already difficult for them, at their own pace, they can take the necessary time to process the information and allow it to sink in.

Often, students with learning disabilities will think they have mastered material, one week, but then come in the next week, and not understand it, it will be as if the student is seeing the material for the first time.[83]

Let us take the example of a cantor teaching her student the *V'ahavta.* Student A (who has dyslexia) has been working on reading the first three sentences of the *V'ahavta* for a few weeks and finally, there is a breakthrough, the three sentences are perfect. As the cantor, you ask the student to start working on reading the next three sentences. The child comes into her session the next week and not only are the next three sentences not learned, but the sentences you thought student A had mastered over the past few weeks are gone. The cantor asks student A, “Did you review the previous three sentences?” Student A tells her that she worked on the next three sentences, but never reviewed the previous sentences.

From this story we learn two things: First, students with learning disabilities often require very specific instructions, as the cantor did not tell student A to also review the first three sentences of the *V'ahavta*, the student did not do that (in reality, this is a

[83] If you think this is frustrating for the teacher, try being the student.

reminder you should give to all of your students as reviewing is always good); and second, as student A did not actually master these first three sentences of the *V'ahavta*, you need to go back with her and break it down even more.

The example above brings us back to the words of Maimonides: The student was not clear on the material, so it is our job as clergy to review it over and over until it sticks. It is also the student's responsibility to be honest with the cantor, her teacher, to let her know she did not fully comprehend the material and instructions from the previous week.

In terms of the space for this one-on-one work, Rabbi Steven Rau and Stacey Levy in their book *Everyone is Welcome: Creating a Culture of Inclusion in Congregational Schools* suggest creating a "learning lab" (Rau and Levy, 2015, 15). The learning lab is a quiet location where one-on-one work can be done in a private setting. The "learning lab" is a slightly different approach to the self-contained or alternative program as not all of the students with learning disabilities are in the same room. The two approaches can also be used simultaneously,[84] with all of the students starting together in one room, and then dispersing to work one-on-one with different teachers. This way, every student is able to work at their own pace, but still feels a part of the community.

In addition to the processing time, having individualized/alternative instruction allows these, often vulnerable, students to have the chance to learn without the pointing and whispering that sometimes occurs when a student in struggling in a typical or mainstream[85] religious school classroom. As far as we have come in teaching our students the Jewish value that all human beings are created *b'tzelim Elohim*, in the image of God,

[84] As I saw in one congregational school setting, to be described in more detail in chapters four and six.

[85] The placement of students with learning disabilities in regular class settings (Al Pi Darco, 55).

kids will still be kids. Learning disabilities, known as the “invisible disabilities,” still have a stigma of laziness or being stupid attached to them, and are not recognized as the medical conditions that they are.

The majority of the students I interviewed for this thesis preferred being in an alternative program or working with a teacher one-on-one (especially when it came to learning Hebrew) specifically so their friends would not see them struggle. This is not to say that they want to be in the alternative program the entire time, far from it. They want to be included in every aspect of congregational life and be welcomed and supported as Judaism is able to do.

Finally, in showing what each individual student is able to learn (differentiating the product), we allow the students strengths to come through. The bar and bat mitzvah process is an excellent time to differentiate the product (in consultation with your ritual committee of course) and to bring out what makes these students unique.

As cantors, this is a time where our knowledge of music can be used extensively. “Each child is an individual. Each musical moment is an opportunity to teach a new skill, explore a new concept, or reinforce an old one” (Al Pi Darco, 23). Let us return to student A from earlier. We can see that student A is struggling with the Hebrew of the *V'ahavta*, but we did not talk about the trope. In this situation, often students who have dyslexia do better when the Hebrew and trope are taught at the same time. This may seem counter-intuitive because that may seem like a lot of information to give at once but, as will be discussed in more depth in chapter six, students with dyslexia and other language processing disorders, often learn better through music. By introducing the trope at the same time as the Hebrew, you are engaging other parts of her brain, and as a result,

making the learning process more holistic.

In the end, when working with students who have a specific learning disability, it is important to remember that every student is an individual with their own unique way of learning. What works for one student may not work for another and the material needs to be tailored to the student that is in front of you. As cantors, we can be part of the team that works with these students and make the time they spend working with us productive and enjoyable.

3. "Do not separate yourself from the community"[86] – The Importance of Inclusion

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines "Inclusion" as "an act of taking in as part of a whole or the state of being taken in."[87] The word "inclusion" has become a buzzword in the Reform Jewish community, everyone is using it and everyone is talking about it. That in itself is great, but what about putting it to good use? As congregational communities, we are morally obligated to take all students into our programs, whatever their disability may be. The question is: How do we go from *talking* about inclusion to actually *being* inclusive?

Inclusive Education, as defined by Rau and Levy, is "that students with special needs are supported in chronologically age-appropriate general education classes and receive specialized instruction spelled out in their Individualized Education Program (IEPs)" (Rau and Levy, 2015, 2).

[86] *Pirkei Avot* 2:4.

[87] *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, "inclusion," accessed January 1, 2016, www.merriam-webster.com/ dictionary/Inclusion/.

The development of inclusive education in public schools started in the 1970s when special education students were moved from special institutions to special (but separate from their typical learning peers) classrooms within the public school system. This classroom became known as the resource room (Rau and Levy, 2015).

In 1975, Congress passed the "Education of All Handicapped Children Act" (Public Law 94-142), which stated that all students, regardless of their disability, must be educated in the least restrictive environment[88] (LRE) (Rau and Levy, 2015). "The right to education in the least restrictive environment encourages educational settings in which the needs of students with disabilities can be met in a public school setting with peers who are not disabled" (Al Pi Darco, 1999, 52).

In the 1980s, schools began mainstreaming[89] students whom they felt were capable of functioning in a general education classroom (Rau and Levy, 2015). It is important to note that mainstreaming is not the same as full inclusion. "Mainstreaming attempts to move students from special education classrooms to regular classrooms only in situations where they are able to keep up with their typically developing peers without specially designated instruction or support. It provides only "part-time" inclusion, preventing students from becoming full members of the classroom community" (Rau and Levy, 2015, 3).

The newest concept of inclusion came about from "lack of satisfactory academic performance by students with disabilities, combined with growing demands for social

[88] The definition of the least restrictive environment encompasses three components: appropriateness of program and services for meeting students needs, students' involvement with non-disabled peers, and the closeness of school programs to home (Al Pi Darco, 52).

[89] The placement of students with learning disabilities in regular class settings (Al Pi Darco, 55).

equity and civil rights, increasing identification of students requiring services, and ballooning cost of special education" (McLaughlin, Rea, and Walther-Thomas, 2002, 56). Most of the studies conducted concluded that both children with special needs and typical learners do better when they are learning in the same classroom. It allows children with learning differences to observe their typical peers and learn through modeling[90] them. It also has been shown to increase the awareness of the typical students to the needs and acceptance of their special needs peers.

In Reform synagogue life, we only jumped on the inclusion band-wagon in the 1990s (Rau and Levy, 2015). Until then, there were limited attempts towards inclusion including communities in Atlanta, Houston, and San Francisco but even in those cases, the grants they received where for on-site specialists to work with teachers who had special needs students in the synagogue classroom (Rau and Levy, 2015). The teachers in these programs where learning how to teach special needs students Hebrew in a typical religious school classroom however, the idea behind these programs was never "creating a fully inclusive religious school environment" (Rau and Levy, 2015, 3).

A key step towards inclusion in congregational life is the choice of language (Rau and Levy, 2015). A student with a learning disability hears the word "no" so often in regards to their academic accommodations that it often becomes second nature to them. Even more so, the parents of our students have become so accustomed to hearing the word "no" when it comes to their child's learning differences that they may walk into a congregation feeling defeated and already assuming that the congregation will not have the resources available to work with their child.

[90] Demonstrating how a task or behavior is done- this is one way to teach appropriate behaviors or patterns of behaviors and interactions (Al Pi Darco, 55).

As clergy, the word "no" needs to be the first thing to be cut out of our conversations with these students and parents. Often, these parents are coming to us unsure of whether they want to their child to receive a religious education at all. Their child is already struggling so much in secular school, do they really want to force another two to four hours of religious school on their child? In addition, many of these parents have had to fight their local public schools to get their child the accommodations they so desperately need, they do not want to have to fight for their children in the synagogue too. The key word for both the clergy and these families is "yes," it is a sign that you are open to working with them and creates the beginnings of a partnership between the synagogue (clergy and religious school team), the students, and the parents.

The second language change that needs to occur is the removal of certain out-of-date phrases. Phrases that are considered out-of-date or downright offensive to some students and their families are: *remedial instruction*, *behavioral needs*, and *special needs teachers* (Rau and Levy, 2015). Instead, those phrases can be replaced by: *learning support*, *positive reinforcement plan*, and *learning consultants* (Rau and Levy, 2015).

Finally, the most important language change that needs to be put in place is *people-first language*.[91] In people-first language, the student is always named first instead of the special need or disorder, for example, "a child who learns differently" instead of "a special needs child" (Rau and Levy, 12). This reiterates to both the students and their parents that we are able to see the whole child that is in front of us and not just the complications or challenges of their learning disability/difference[92]. It is language that

[91] Please see Appendix A for a full list of people-first language.

[92] Many congregational schools have started using the term *learning difference* instead of *learning disability* so throughout this thesis they are used interchangeably.

promotes both respect and dignity for the students and their families.

When full inclusion is successful in a congregational setting, a stranger walking into a congregation should not be able to tell it is happening. By this I mean, any techniques or special accommodations that are being used in a classroom, Shabbat service, or tutoring session should not be obvious. Techniques should be "camouflaged" into these settings, or in other words, we need to use the strategies in meaningful and universal ways. Lets take an example: The cantor is teaching a sixth-grade trope class. When the cantor asks the students to turn to page three in their books, she will not only say it out loud, but she will write the page number on the board as well. This simple act allows a student who has an auditory processing disorder to see the instructions and gives him/her time to processes them (as well as allows any typical learners who may not have been paying attention to get a second chance to understand and see the instructions).

When a student who has a learning disability is fully included in meaningful ways in congregational life, we are blessed by the many gifts they have to offer to our communities. We are not whole until all of us belong. It is important to remember that we are not doing inclusion *for* these students and their families but rather we are doing inclusion *with* the students and families. It is our job as the clergy to do the "taking in" with open arms, ears, and hearts just as it is the student and their families right to be "taken in" as full members of the community.

In the next chapter, I will be going into more detail as to the role of the clergy, synagogue community, and the religious school team in creating an inclusive environment for students who have specific learning disabilities. It is important to acknowledge that this process is not easy and it does not happen overnight, it takes the

cultural and language changes discussed in this chapter as well as a congregational staff dedicated to making changes happen. But, in the end, it is already mentioned in the words of the prophet Isaiah who leads us to the ultimate inclusion goal: "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples."[93]

4. "Acquire for yourself a teacher"[94] – The Role of the Clergy, Community, and Religious School Team

The cantor plays a critical role in creating an inclusive and functioning synagogue community for children with specific learning disabilities, but he/she can not do it alone. The cantor is a member of the synagogue team. The synagogue team plays a crucial role in developing the program that is right for them. No two programs will look exactly the same and that is to be expected. Every community must decide what is right for them and how they will approach the task of creating their program. In this chapter, I will be giving the reader examples of possible team members as well as explaining what they do and how they can work together. In addition, I will be providing guidance on the use of documentation, synagogue/community resources and finances.

To begin, many congregations will set up an Inclusion Committee.[95] What is an Inclusion Committee? In general, an Inclusion Committee is a group comprised of at least one member of the clergy team, parents, professionals who are involved in disability support, and social action advocates that are dedicated to starting the inclusion

[93] Isaiah 56:5.
[94] *Pirkei Avot* 1:6.
[95] Concrete Steps for developing an Inclusion Committee can be found in Appendix B.

discussion.[96] In addition, I would suggest the addition of religious school students who have a specific learning disability (age range being from *b'nei mitzvah* age to high school) to the committee as these are the students who know best what they need. This allows the students to have a voice and reinforces a "nothing about me without me"[97] approach.

The Inclusion Committee should be approved by the Board of Trustees and have an appointed chairperson, in other words, it should be just like any other synagogue committee.[98] The goal of the Inclusion Committee is to be the organization for resources and information about inclusion in the synagogue.[99] In addition, it can be in charge of the inclusion policies and practices for the congregation.

In addition to the Inclusion Committee, it would be ideal to have a specific team of experts within the field of education in place as part of the religious school team. This group is called the Accommodation Team (Rau and Levy, 2015). Typically, the Accommodation Team consists of the director of the religious school and the learning consultant (Rau and Levy, 2015).

The learning consultant is a facilitator who oversees all programmatic aspects of an inclusion plan in partnership with the religious school director (Rau and Levy, 2015). The main job of the learning consultant is to develop learning plans for all students with different learning needs, to evaluate and record student progress, and to meet with parents (Rau and Levy, 2015). In addition, the learning consultant can serve as a key advisor to the clergy team on all special education accommodations (Rau and Levy, 2015). "The

---

96 Shelly Christensen, "Start an Inclusion Committee," *RJ.org Blog*, February 9, 2009, accessed January 15, 2016, blogs.rj.org/blog/2009/02/09/start_an_inclusion_committee/.

97 Ibid.

98 Ibid.

99 Ibid.

learning consultant does not need to be an employee of the congregation, though that's advisable. Jewish special needs educators, doctors, therapists, or other special needs professionals often enjoy helping children in a religious setting" (Rau and Levy, 2015, 14).

The religious school director and the learning consultant will work together to plan and facilitate workshops for clergy, teachers, and *madrichim*[100] (Rau and Levy, 2015). These workshops will focus on working with students who have different learning needs/styles (Rau and Levy, 2015). The Accommodation Team will also provide resources for developing inclusive congregational programs (Rau and Levy, 2015). The learning consultant does not necessarily need to be present at every religious school session, it depends on the needs of the individual congregation (Rau and Levy, 2015). Often regular visits by the learning consultant are enough to provide the necessary coverage for a congregational school program (Rau and Levy, 2015).

In addition to the director of the religious school and the learning consultant, the Accommodation Team can also consist of additional experts in the field of special education including: physicians, psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers, speech-language pathologists, and special needs teachers (Rau and Levy, 2015). Even if the synagogue does not have the ability to add all of those members to the Accommodation Team, it is important to have a list of professionals available so that the Accommodation Team can consult with a professional should a problem arise (Rau and Levy, 2015).

A key job of the Accommodation Team is to develop and facilitate synagogue staff training workshops on inclusion and learning differences (Rau and Levy, 2015). It is

[100] *Madrichim* are teaching-assistants in the religious school, typically volunteer high school students.

important to remember that “there is a natural fear that comes with teaching nontraditional students” (Rau and Levy, 2015, 14). Before any major cultural changes can be introduced in a synagogue community, there needs to be a “sense of cohesion” for the clergy, the community, and the religious school team (Rau and Levy, 2015, 14). In other words, everyone needs to be on board.

In planning the workshops, the clergy team should play an active roll. The sessions are meant to create a congregational environment where the professionals and lay leaders will come together to do the critical work of creating an inclusive environment and as such, everyone needs to be involved. “Workshops should be designed not only to teach the necessary skills for working with students with special needs, but also to generate empathy and awareness among participants” (Rau and Levy, 2015, 14).

Often, the session begins with a story, a popular one being “Welcome to Holland”[101] by Emily Perl Kingsley. The story is written in the second person and employs a metaphor of excitement for a vacation to Italy that becomes a disappointment when the plane lands instead in Holland. The metaphor is that the trip to Italy is a typical child-raising experience, and that the trip to Holland is the experience of raising a child with special-needs. In the end, we as the reader see that this new “trip” is still well worth it. This story is a nice way to begin because it gives the participants in the workshop a framework for the lives of not only the students they will work with but their families as well.

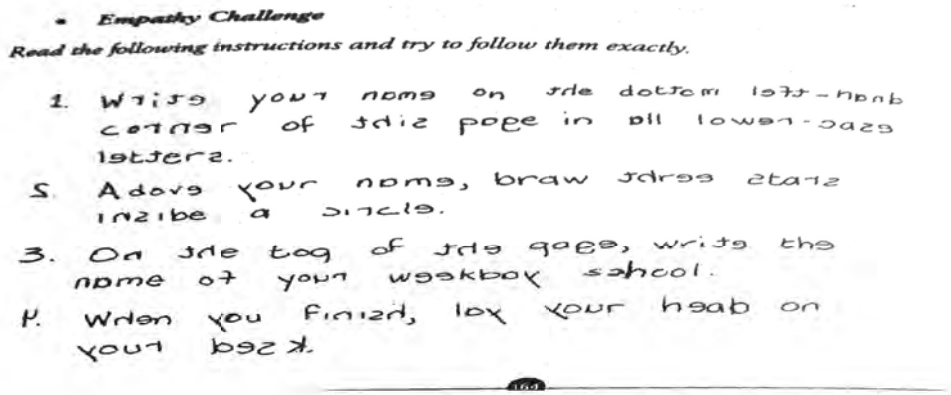
In a telephone interview with Cantor Deborah Hartman, she described “Welcome to Holland” as such, “I really get chocked up even talking about this... This is still good,

[101] For the full text of “Welcome to Holland,” please see Appendix C.

Holland is still good, it's just not what you expected, you have to learn different strategies staying in Holland as opposed to visiting Italy... A different language, different customs, but it is still beautiful" (Hartman, 2015).

In the end, "the ultimate goal of the training session is to create partners" (Rau and Levy, 2015, 14). You want the participants to "buy in" to the concepts being introduced. As we can see from Cantor Hartman's reaction to the story, the lesson stuck.

Later on in the workshop, the participants will have "empathy challenges," exercises to help participants experience what it is like to have a disability. Below is an example of an "empathy challenge" simulating what it is like to read as a student who has dyslexia[102]:



- ***Empathy Challenge***

Read the following instructions and try to follow them exactly.

1. Write your name on the bottom left-hand corner of this page in all lower-case letters.
2. Above your name, draw three stars inside a circle.
3. On the top of the page, write the name of your weekday school.
4. When you finish, lay your head on your desk.

Finally, these workshops are an opportunity to dispel participants misconceptions of students who have different learning styles or needs, for example, a quiz to test someone's ADD/ADHD Knowledge.[103]

Despite all of the research that is available today in regards to learning disabilities, many of these students still get labeled as "lazy," "unmotivated," or "uncooperative" in both regular school and religious school. These workshops should be designed to get rid

[102] Steven H. Rau and Stacey Levy, *Everyone is Welcome: Creating a Culture of Inclusion in Congregational Schools* (New York, NY: URJ Press, 2015), 164.

[103] Please see Appendix D for the full ADD/ADHD Quiz.

of that thinking: These students DO want to learn, they just need to learn differently.

Another key job of the Accommodation Team is to create an easy-to-implement education plan for each student with a learning disability (Rau and Levy, 2015). Once it has been disclosed that a child has a diagnosis of a learning disability, the following documents should be requested: the Individualized Education Program and the Special Education Eligibility Report (Rau and Levy, 22/23). These documents will make it easier for the Accommodation Team to develop an appropriate education plan.

The Individualized Education Program (IEP) contains information explaining why and how a child qualifies to receive special education services as a result of meeting specific eligibility criteria. It also gives the time, frequency, and duration of services provided, the goals and objectives for the student, and the students classroom accommodations. The key areas of the IEP that are necessary for the Accommodation Team to share with the clergy are the following[104]:

- ***The Date of the IEP***: The date should be directly up front and it lets the reader know how current the information is. The IEP typically remains current for a full calendar year in most public school systems however some public schools require a new IEP for every academic year. Even if the IEP the team is provided with is not completely up to date, it is still helpful.

- ***The Diagnosis:*** The student's diagnosis typically appears at the beginning of the IEP. On some forms, a list of all possible diagnoses are provided and a check mark will be seen next to the diagnosis.

- ***Current Level of Performance:*** All IEP's contain a section where the child's current level of performance and progress is detailed. This section describes the student's strengths and weaknesses which is very helpful for understanding the students capabilities and needs.

- ***The Frequency and Duration of Services:*** The IEP details how many hours per week the student spends in a special education classroom and/or receiving

[104] Steven H. Rau and Stacey Levy, *Everyone is Welcome: Creating a Culture of Inclusion in Congregational Schools* (New York, NY: URJ Press, 2015), 25.

special education services. There are thirty hours in a typical school week and if that student is spending the majority of his/her time in a special education classroom that is something the clergy will need to know. Most likely that student will need to have more time to prepare for their bar/bat mitzvah and require extra private tutoring on top of the work with the cantor. In general, these students require a smaller teacher-to-student ratio, as well as multiple strategies to be successful in a congregational school setting.

- ***Classroom Modifications and Accommodations:*** this section includes specific strategies that the child's teachers use in their regular school classroom. These strategies should be shared with clergy and of course, included in the development of the learning plan that is developed by the Accommodation Team.

The Special Education Eligibility Report "explains and classifies the type of disability or disorder and why this is negatively impacting the child in the classroom" (Rau and Levy, 2015, 23). Before the Eligibility Report is written, an educational psychologist, learning disability specialist, behavior specialist, speech-language pathologist, occupational therapist, and/or physical therapist will administer a variety of standardized and informal assessment measures, conduct interviews, and make classroom observations (Rau and Levy, 2015). This is done to help assess the student's levels of functioning in various areas (Rau and Levy, 2015).

The Special Education Eligibility Report is completed every three years so in reading the report, the date is very important (Rau and Levy, 2015). By looking at the date, you will know the age of the student when the report was completed (Rau and Levy, 2015). If you look at the very end of the report, it will let you know what type of learning disability or disorder the student has however reading the entire report can help the reader develop a thorough understanding of the student's strength's and weaknesses (Rau and Levy, 2015).

If the student attends a private school, they may not have an IEP or Specific

Education Eligibility Report, but instead will have a document called a "psycho-educational report" (Rau and Levy, 2015). This report is very similar to the IEP in that it will helps to identify the student's strengths and weaknesses as well as how they learn best (Rau and Levy, 2015). When the Accommodation Team is sharing the psycho-educational report with the clergy they should focus on the following areas of the report:

- ***Background Information:*** Most psychological reports include an extensive amount of background information that will typically include a mapping of family dynamics, including developmental and social history, based on the psychologist's assessment of the student prior to testing.

- ***IQ Testing:*** A full report will include the results of IQ testing. The Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children[105] is the most commonly used test. The results of the students IQ test can give the reader a quick understanding of the students intellectual ability although we know that IQ tests alone is not enough to truly understand a child's strengths and weaknesses.

- ***Results and Summary Section:*** This section includes a summary of the testing results as well as the diagnosis that best fits the student.

- ***Classroom Modifications:*** This section includes the psychologist's recommendations regarding what classroom strategies may be beneficial.

All of the information provided in the documents/testing will be used to create the student's Learning Plan[106] (sometimes known as a Jewish (Education) Learning Plan). In addition, the Learning Consultant and Religious School Director often sit down with the family to learn more about the student from those who know him/her best. Often, the family is asked to fill out an intake form[107] that will often include personal, medical, and behavioral questions (Al Pi Darco, 43). After the meeting, if the student is already

---

[105] *The Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC)* is used for ages six through sixteen, and measures general intelligence. The fourth edition of the test interprets four sub-tests scores – verbal comprehension, perceptual reasoning, working memory, and processing speed – plus the full scale IQ (Silver, 2006).

[106] Appendix E is an example of a Learning Plan (Rau and Levy, 2015, 125).

[107] Examples of intake forms can be found in Appendix F (Al Pi Darco, 42-44).

enrolled in the religious school, the student will be observed in the classroom by the learning consultant (Rau and Levy, 2015).

After all of this is completed, the learning plan will be developed. The learning plan has two main sections:

- A paragraph describing the student's diagnosis, including his or her strengths and weaknesses.
- A list of possible modifications those working with the student can incorporate into into a lesson to set the student up for success.

The learning plan is an excellent resource for all who will be working with students with different learning styles/needs. Clergy in particular should study this document as it will give them invaluable insight into the students they will be working with.

Now that we know the synagogue team players and the game plan, the next question is: How does the synagogue pay for it? Like everything else, the plan the congregation chooses to implement has to be right for that congregation, especially when it comes to finances. It is important to note that an inclusion plan does not necessarily mean an increase to the education budget (Rau and Levy, 2015). Often, it can be about using the resources you already have in a smarter way. However, there are times where a synagogue will need to spend money to make this happen.

In general, the first step is having the religious school director draw up an introductory budget (Rau and Levy, 2015). The first budget should not be huge, as you do not want to change the tuition for the religious school (Rau and Levy, 2015).

The idea of inclusion is for all families to be treated equally and parents of special needs students should not have to pay any additional costs. Therefore, program

> expenses should be included in the general school budget and all families should be reassured that an inclusive program barely affects school tuition. If the inclusion budget is so large that it will make an impact on the overall school budget, consider implementing incremental changes over several years. The goal at this point is to introduce the program in such a way that families become accustomed to it and see its positive impact. Introducing the program with a tuition increase may cause a backlash from parents who do not yet understand the importance of inclusion (Rau and Levy, 2015, 18/19).

The primary expense for the program is often the learning consultant (unless he/she is volunteering their time) and the learning lab coordinator (Rau and Levy, 2015).

> Many schools already have a remedial teacher or a reinforcement teacher on staff. If this is the case in your school, the educator should transition this teacher into the role of learning lab coordinator. The salary should be in line with a beginning Hebrew teacher and the hours should be during regular school hours only. If a program includes both religious school on Sundays and Hebrew school during the week, the educator may choose to have the learning lab coordinator on site only one or two meeting days. In programs with multiple midweek Hebrew school days or locations, it may be most economical for this person to be on site Sunday mornings only, depending on the number of students served. Whether a program has a small or large enrollment, there is no need to hire more than one learning lab coordinator (Rau and Levy, 2015, 19).

The next expense is typically program supplies (Rau and Levy, 2015). The supplies include folders, binders, copies for student records, colored modeling dough, pipe cleaners, flash cards, highlighters, and sometimes technology upgrades (SMART boards and tablets) (Rau and Levy, 2015).

The last expense to be taken into account is food for the workshops (because what Jewish event is complete without food?) (Rau and Levy, 2015). The main workshop

should have a significant meal as it is the longest, while follow-up meetings could be covered by smaller meals (pizza/bagels) or snacks (Rau and Levy, 2015). If the religious school has an active parent group, they may be willing to contribute the food for these meetings in order to cut down on the budget (Rau and Levy, 2015).

In terms of financing, it is always a good idea to reach out to the local Jewish Federation, Jewish Family Service organization, or other Jewish foundations for grant offerings or forms of program assistance (Rau and Levy, 2015). This is also a time where the clergy team in particular can come in handy by starting an endowment fund and reaching out to potential donors for the inclusion program (Rau and Levy, 2015).

It is important to note that many of the congregations I had the pleasure of observing and analyzing were congregations of 600+ members with the financial resources to accomplish the recommendations I have included in this chapter. However, even if you are the cantor at a smaller congregation with fewer financial resources, there are still low-cost and even free ways to make your congregational communities inclusive for the students and families with specific learning disabilities.

Go to your congregational database and look for different specialists who may already be your congregants (therapists, social workers, special education teachers) and see if they are willing to volunteer their time (Rau and Levy, 2015). “Though it may not be evident from a database, there may be parents and teachers who have personal experience with special needs and may be able to help” (Rau and Levy, 2015, 27). By starting with a volunteer program, smaller congregations can get their foot in the inclusion door. A great way to reach those members of the community is a bulletin article, written by the clergy, about learning disabilities, expressing the clergy's deep desire to get

to work on this issue.

In the end, no matter the size of the congregation or budget, it is time to put aside our fear of bringing children who have different learning styles into our synagogue programs. With the cantor as a member of the team, he/she can help guide their congregation through the processes of creating and nurturing an inclusive program for all.

5. "Do not look at the container, but what is in it."[108] – The Students and Their Families

When a child is diagnosed with a learning disability, it is felt by everyone in the family. As a learning disability is a life-long condition that affects the family as a unit, it makes sense that everyone will be affected. It is a daily struggle, a constant battle. For the student, it is trying to understand why their brain works differently. For the parent, it is the constant rotation of testing, tutoring, specialists, and nightly homework battles. For the student it is, do I fit in? For the parent it is, will my child fit in? These questions and concerns from both the students and their families do not go away when they enter the doors of our congregations and often, they are multiplied.

In this chapter, you will read from the perspective of the students that have been diagnosed with a specific learning disability and their families. You will read about the struggles, the pain, and the added pressures. You will also read about the joy, the love of learning, and the love of Judaism. Every student, parent, and sibling I had the pleasure of speaking with has their own unique story. Once we as clergy can understand their stories, we will get to do our job of making the synagogue a warm and welcoming place for all.

[108] *Pirkei Avot* 4:27.

“I can take the bad and say... I proved them wrong!” said one fifteen-year-old student[109]. This young woman was diagnosed with dyslexia and an auditory processing disorder (accompanied with anxiety) in the seventh grade. “All my life I struggled, and I never knew why, my diagnosis was actually a relief,” she said, “there was now a reason, a name for my problems; it wasn't because I was stupid or wasn't trying hard enough.”

These feelings of stupidity are not uncommon in students that have been diagnosed with a specific learning disability. In this case, the diagnosis gave this young woman a reason for her struggles, an answer to the unknown problem. “Hebrew school was a struggle, just like regular school, but once we (the student and her parents) figured out how I learned best, things got easier.”

When the interview shifted to the topic of Hebrew, I was very happily surprised: “Hebrew is actually easier for me to read than English, there are fewer exceptions, the rules are the same, reading Hebrew makes me feel calm.” On the other hand, “When I needed to read Hebrew out loud in the regular (religious school) class, it was scary, I felt like I was being judged, which made me mess up, it gave me anxiety, and the anxiety made me mess up.”

When this student received her diagnosis, she was moved into the Alternative Hebrew Classroom[110] at her congregation. In the Alternative Classroom, “I didn't feel judged, everyone there struggled with something, there were no cliques, I fit in.”

While preparing for her bat mitzvah, the student did not use trope, “Trope was horrendous for me... It was just confusing, my brain couldn't focus on both the Hebrew

[109] Name of student withheld by mutual agreement, interview conducted November 15, 2015.

[110] The Alternative classroom for this congregation is an extra two hours of one-on-one Hebrew instruction after religious school on Sunday morning.

and the trope at the same time." Instead, she used a "dot system" to help with the "music" of her Torah and Haftarah portion (by calling it music instead of trope, it prevented this student from feeling anxious).

Currently, this student is in the Confirmation Academy and she is enjoying the workshops and lessons, but socially, it is awkward for her: "Everyone is with their cliques... I still have trouble fitting in."

One place she has no trouble fitting in however is at the URJ Six Points Sci-Tech Academy. "I love science and math and having a place where I can mix my strengths (math and science) with Judaism is so awesome." In the end, "I just want to be successful... I love being Jewish."

When I asked her what she had learned from the experience of living with a learning disability, her answer was truly inspiring, "I have a level of empathy for others that I know my fellow students lack, when you struggle your whole life, you learn empathy for others... I also learned how to advocate for myself... You need to advocate for yourself and others whether you have a diagnosis or not, if you don't ask for help, you wont get help." This student came out on the other end of her synagogue/religious school experience stronger and happier than when she entered, but that is not always the case.

"I only had my bar mitzvah so my parents would get me a dog" said one sixteen year old student[111]. This young man was diagnosed with dyslexia and ADHD when he was in third grade, "I hated religious school, it was hard and boring."

Currently, this student is in the Confirmation Workshop at his synagogue and recently returned from Washington DC where he participated in the Religious Action

[111] Name of student withheld by mutual agreement, interview conducted October 25, 2015.

Center (RAC) Trip, “The RAC trip was great, I liked being with all my friends and getting to, you know, talk with senators and stuff.”

For this student, the social aspect does not seem to be his problem, “I like conformation class more then Hebrew school because I get to hang out with my friends and I don't have to read anything.”

In his case, it was not only the academic side of religious school that was a struggle, but also his lack of ability to focus. “After having to sit still in regular school all day, having to do more school on Wednesday afternoon and wake up early for school on Sundays just sucked, I couldn't focus or sit still for that long.”

When I asked this student how he felt about being Jewish, his response was, “I don't feel any connection to Judaism, I don't like coming to synagogue because I don't fit, there is no place for me.”[112]

It is students like this young man who we are losing every day. Students who just see religious school as another place where they are set up to fail. Instead of emphasizing the child's strengths, we often insist that they approach life-cycle events (such as *b'nei mitzvah* and confirmation) the exact same way as their typical learning peers. This approach does not always work. There is a difference between lowering standards (which is certainly not what I am suggesting) and adapting them. For this student, an adaption would be perhaps, allowing him to share his favorite Jewish song that inspired him to continue with confirmation, or do an art project based on what he learned in confirmation

[112] This student is choosing not to participate in the confirmation service at the end of this year as he does not feel comfortable speaking in front of large groups of people and he feels incapable of writing the essay necessary for confirmation. The rabbi of the congregation did suggest other ways the student could be involved, but so far, it is the student's choice to not be confirmed.

and have one of his friends share it for him in front of the congregation at confirmation. However, by this point, Hebrew school and religious life in general have already been such a struggle for this child and making these accommodations now may not work. The younger the students are when you are able to start making accommodations, the better.

"I enjoy learning Hebrew and how to chant, it just takes me a bit longer," said one twelve-year-old student[113] as she was working on the *V'ahavta* with her teacher in the Alternative Classroom. This young woman was diagnosed with dyscalculia at the age of six and has only been in the Alternative Hebrew classroom. "Working one-on-one allows me to go at my own pace so I don't get nervous" she said, "I'm excited to become a bat mitzvah and I am working hard."

"When I sing the prayers, they are easier to learn, the music helps" she told me. "It gives the prayers structure, it breaks it down into smaller sections."

"My favorite part of class is at the end of the day when we get up as a group and recite the prayers we worked on for our classmates, it is good practice...I like to show what I know."

I asked this student how she feels about being Jewish and her response was heartwarming: "I love being Jewish because there are so many different ways to be Jewish, not everyone has to do it the same way." That seems to be the key, making Judaism big enough so that everyone can make their own version.

In addition to speaking with students, I also spoke with several parents. In general, many parents are nervous to reveal that their child has a learning disability when they are enrolling them in religious school. "Families in our congregations are often

[113] Name of student withheld by mutual agreement. Interview conducted November 15, 2015.

battle weary and want our synagogues to be a safe haven and a refuge of normalcy."[114] As mentioned in chapter three, many of these parents who are approaching our institutions are already angry and tired and are trying to decide whether they want their child to receive a supplemental Jewish education at all. Is it worth it?

Parents, in general, are walking into our congregations under the assumption that we will not be able to help their children and are often happily surprised when they find that synagogues have programs in place to address their child's learning disabilities.

For one mother,[115] there was never a question in her mind as to whether or not her daughter would receive a supplementary Jewish education: "I always knew that I wanted Amy[116] to receive a religious education, there was never a doubt in my mind."

For others, this is a harder question to answer. "Because there is a stereotype that all Jewish children are intelligent, parents often feel that revealing a child's special needs will tarnish this reputation. Therefore, they may try to hide these needs from their friends and congregational communities" (Rau and Levy, 2015, 21). This sense of shame or disappointment for their child's situation is not uncommon. "The issues are real... I encourage parents of children with learning issues like dyslexia to meet with their congregations clergy and religious school director to help them find a way to work with their child... In addition, the clergy needs to promise confidentiality."[117] It is a very hard reality to live with and, as clergy, we need to make it clear that our door is always open

---

[114] Marc A. Gruber, "Attitudes are the Most Challenging Barriers," *Torah at the Center* Volume 14, No. 2 (Winter 2011): pg. 13, accessed December 2015.

[115] Name of parent withheld by mutual agreement. Interview conducted December 7, 2015.

[116] Name has been changed to protect privacy.

[117] Interview with Rabbi Edythe Mencher, LCSW. Interview conducted December 17, 2015.

for parents to talk in confidence about their child's struggles and needs. In addition, it is a good idea to have a list of educational professionals (doctors, therapists, lawyers) in our contacts so that we have names to provide to parents who are new to this world of learning disabilities.

In some cases parents are simply “tired of fighting... It was a fight to get him to do his homework for regular school, how was I going to get him to do the extra work for religious school? I hate watching him struggle, it kills me as his mom, it's already so hard for him... I don't want to make it harder.”[118] This feeling of not wanting to add to the other home struggles is also very common. There may be constant battles going on between these students and their families, and if there is a way to reduce the stress at home, most parents will. Unfortunately, a religious education is often the first thing to get dropped.

Oftentimes, these parents are coming out of long battles with their public school districts who refuse to pay for the necessary services for their children: “The superintendent's answer to us when I told him what our child needed was: You'll never get that as long as I am here.”[119] In many cases, parents are forced to bring in lawyers: “My wife and I hired an attorney, we were able to fight for half of the tuition (for a special school) and we left the money on the table... The attorney said: That is a lot of money. And I (the father) said: It's not about my kid, it's about every kid that will come after him... In the end they (the school district) wanted to avoid going to court and they gave us everything.[120]” With battles like that, it is understandable that parents would want

[118] Name of parent withheld by mutual agreement. Interview conducted October 25, 2015.
[119] Name of parent withheld by mutual agreement. Interview conducted December 16, 2015.
[120] Ibid.

to avoid another battle in the synagogue.

Many of the parents I spoke with did not want to force their child to have the same terrible religious school experiences they had. “I was raised Catholic and went to Sunday school and constantly struggled. I converted to Judaism when I got married and did not want my daughter to struggle through her religious education as I had. I was thrilled when I read that the synagogue had a program in place for students like my daughter.”[121]

In showing that religious schools not only have the resources, but also the desire to work with students that have different learning styles and needs, we are making Judaism not only more accessible for the students themselves, but also for their parents.

Other parents, once they see there is help available, are more open to the idea of revealing their child's learning differences: “Initially it was hard, the Hebrew in particular, she liked learning about the cultural stuff, more so than the Hebrew... Comprehension in particular was hard... But Lisa[122] made it all possible, religious school, the bat mitzvah, everything, it would not have happened without her.”[123]

In addition to the students and the parents, I also spent time with the siblings. The siblings do not go untouched by their brother's/sister's diagnosis. When a child receives a diagnosis, it affects the entire family unit. Parents' attention often shifts to one child, and the other children run the risk of feeling left out.

---

[121] Name of parent withheld by mutual agreement. Interview conducted October 25, 2015.

[122] Referring to Lisa Friedman, Director of Education at Temple Beth-El in Hillsborough, NJ.

[123] Name of parent withheld by mutual agreement. Interview conducted December 7, 2015.

"I feel abandoned," said one fifteen-year-old older brother.[124] "They (parents) have to spend so much time with my sister helping her with homework or driving her to things, that I don't get to spend time with them."

"He gets so much attention... The screaming and the yelling, it's hard to live with," said one thirteen-year-old sister.[125] "My bat mitzvah is coming up and I am left on my own to study. I am happy that I am able to work on my own and I know my brother needs more help, but it is hard for me, too."

As clergy, we cannot forget to address the family as a unit when a child receives a diagnosis. In addition, since every member will be affected differently, it is also good to work with the family members on an individual basis. As we saw with the story "Welcome to Holland," this is not the journey these families expected to be taking. However, in the end, with guidance, patience, and a listening ear we can travel, as partners, with these families on this journey and help them to adjust to their new reality.

6. "Educate each child according to their way"[126] – Techniques for Teaching Students

In this last chapter, I will be introducing the reader to potential techniques that can be used when working with students that have a specific learning disability. In addition to focusing and working with the problems directly associated with the disabilities themselves, I will also be looking at ways to work through the other "health

[124] Name of student withheld by mutual agreement. Interview conducted October 25, 2015.
[125] Ibid.
[126] Proverbs 22:6.

impairments" associated with the learning disabilities. The techniques will be applied to four common synagogue settings where the cantor will have the most interactions with these students including: *b'nei mitzvah* tutoring, the religious school classroom, services, and junior choir. To review, the specific learning disabilities we are focusing on are: dyslexia, dysgraphia, and dyscalculia.

In general, there are four basic teaching techniques that are helpful when working with a student that has a specific learning disability, and they are[127]:

- Break down every assignment/task into the smallest possible series of steps. Give demonstrations/examples of each step along the way.
- Divide the tasks into smaller, short-term, achievable goals.
- Use positive reinforcement. Praise the student often for appropriate behavior as well as successful attempts and eventually completion of work.
- Make modifications to tasks or prepare them in a different manner. Emphasize the student's strengths.

These four steps can be modified and geared towards an individual student (such as in a tutoring session) or as part of a larger class (such as a 6th grade cantillation workshop). As I break down the specific techniques for the individual disabilities, the reader should see aspects of these steps woven throughout.

When working with a student who has a language based learning disability, such as dyslexia and dysgraphia, it is important to combine different types of learning styles, which is called multi-sensory approach (Rau and Levy, 2015). By using a multi-sensory approach, using different forms of instruction to engage more than one sense at a time, you are able to help students approach material from multiple angles (Rau and Levy, 2015). Multi-sensory techniques are mostly used to help students who have reading and

[127] Adapted from Al Pi Darco, pg. 27.

language difficulties. However, this approach also works well with students who are typical learners (Rau and Levy, 2015).

By using a multi-sensory approach, you are able to capture the student's attention by using the approach that works for that student's learning style (make modifications). An example of this type of modification would be using a recording of prayers to help a student learn them by ear in addition to seeing them written on the page. Often, we as cantors do this with our typical learners as well, but the difference is in the way you approach the material with the recording (preparing in a different manner).

For a student with dyslexia who is struggling to learn Hebrew, having them look at a prayer in Hebrew first is a waste of time. You want to divide the learning process into smaller, manageable steps (breaking down and dividing). Have the student listen to the recording, with nothing else in front of them. If this student who has dyslexia also happens to have ADHD (other health impairments), it is not important that the student be sitting still, in fact moving around may help. Often, these students learn best while moving around, and you can use this to both your and the child's advantage (emphasizing the strengths).

Here is a concrete example of a multi-sensory approach to working with a student who has both dyslexia and ADHD in a *b'nei mitzvah* tutoring environment: The goal of the session is for the student to learn the first sentence of the *V'ahavta*, both the Hebrew and the melody. You start by having the student listen to the first four words (breaking down). If the student is having trouble sitting still, you ask them to move their hand whenever the melody does something different (perhaps their hand moves up on the "*ah*" of *V'ahavta* and up and down again on "*ta*"). You can have the student pick out the hand

motion or movement that works for them. In the end, the key is for the student to remember what you are teaching them, and if they have a say in their learning process, it will stick. You continue breaking down the sentence into smaller, manageable sections until you have made it through the first sentence.

Once you feel the student understands the the Hebrew pronunciation and melody, then you put just the first sentence of the *V'ahavta* (enlarged and in an easy-to-read font) in front of them. Start by singing a word from that first sentence of the *V'ahavta* for the student and ask them to identify, on the page, the word you just sang. Make sure that the student knows that they can take all the time they need during this process. For students with a reading-based learning disability, just putting a piece of paper with writing on it in front of them and asking them to read it, may cause an anxiety attack. They may freeze up or act out as a defense mechanism. Remember, you are asking them to do something that they know they struggle with. You, as the cantor, need to reassure them that your office is a judgment-free zone, you are there to help them, and they can take all the time they need.

Once you see they are able to identify individual words on the paper when they hear it, you reverse the processes and alter it. Ask the student, using his or her finger, to point at a word and sing it. At this point, we are not looking for the student to go in order, or for you, the cantor, to pick the word. Again, by letting the student pick the word, they will hopefully pick words they know very well. This not only reinforces the learning process, but also allows the student to be in control and receive positive reinforcement and feedback from the adult in the room (the cantor). In general, these students are not used to positive feedback, as so much attention is often given to what the student is doing

wrong or, even worse, what is “wrong”[128] with the student. Before this step concludes, the student should be able to identify every Hebrew word in the sentence and be able to sing/ pronounce it properly.

The next step in the learning processes is putting the sentence in the proper order and for the student to understand the flow of it. For this, you go to a different piece of paper. This paper has the first sentence of the *V'ahavta* (enlarged and in an easy-to-read font) along with the “dot system.” The “dot system”[129] is an alternative method to use instead of trope (a modification). It give the student a guide for where the melody is going in the sentence without giving the student too much material or too many distractions on a page. Eventually, the student will learn the entire blessing. This system can also be used while teaching the student their Torah and Haftarah portions.

In this example, the cantor used all four techniques, he/she broke down the assignment, then divided the task while constantly using positive reinforcement, and finally the material was modified to fit the student's needs.

The next example is a student with dyscalculia. For this student, less is more. Like the student who has dyslexia, the learning processes should be broken down, just in a different way. It is important to remember with a student who has dyscalculia, patterns are going to be difficult to identify, as well as differences in the Hebrew (a *shin* versus a *sin*). In learning to chant the *V'ahavta*, a student who has dyscalculia may have trouble with the following: decoding the Hebrew and merging the different trope patterns. If the student is an auditory learner, a recording of the prayer will be very helpful. To clarify:

[128] As you read in previous chapters, there is nothing wrong with the student, their brain works differently, but unfortunately, many of these students are often told there is something wrong with them.

[129] For an example of the “dot system,” please see Appendix G.

When teaching this student the individual trope patterns, you may not see a problem, the problem will most likely occur when you ask the student to use the trope pattern within the *V'ahavta* itself.

In this example (as a reminder, the lesson is the first sentence of the *V'ahavta*), your first step is to have the student slowly sound out each word, paying attention to subtle differences in pronunciation. During this processes it might be helpful for the student to have access to a sheet with Hebrew letters (organized by letters that look alike),[130] this will help with the decoding. Once you and the student feel he/she understands it, you add on the trope markings (again, two separate pieces of paper, large and clear font). For someone who has dyscalculia, I would avoid the "dot system" as the dots may be too close to a letter and make the student think a letter is different from what it actually is. The trope markings, on the other hand, are different enough that it should not cause confusion.

Once you introduce the trope, I would have the student highlight the different trope phrases, focusing on the colors instead of the patterns should alleviate any anxiety that may come up for the student. Allowing the student to choose which color goes with each trope pattern allows him/her to take control of the learning processes.

As mentioned earlier, the transitions from section to section may be a struggle for a student with dyscalculia. With trope, you often teach students to look ahead for the next trope marking to see where the pattern is going but for a student that has dyscalculia, I would avoid that at all costs. For a student with dyscalculia, focusing on multiple items at once is often a struggle, so trying to think ahead often causes anxiety. Have the student

[130] For an example of a "Hebrew Letters (organized by look-alikes) sheet", please see Appendix H.

focus on individual tasks and slowly bring them together, the key word being slowly.

With all learning disabilities, one needs to eliminate the time factor. It is going to take a student who has a learning disability longer to learn and comprehend topics so the more time you have to work with him/her, the better.

Often, it is not uncommon for a student with a learning disability to have signs and symptoms of anxiety and/or minor depression (health impairment). This anxiety/depression is caused by the years of struggling with learning and the frustration that comes from everyone else around them just "getting it." Like the student with dyslexia or dysgraphia, this process may not come easily to them and many of them will feel anxious before the learning processes even starts. Again, it is important to remind the student that you are here to support them in their learning, and that this is a team effort. It is important for the student to know that he/she is not alone.

When it comes to the *b'nei mitzvah* tutoring processes, it is easier to individualize it to the student's needs as it is often done one-on-one. However, before students come to see the cantor for one-on-one tutoring, they are often involved in a trope class with the cantor. On the next few pages, we will go over some basic classroom modifications and teaching techniques to help the cantor work with students with different learning styles.

In a classroom setting, it can be hard to teach/reach every student at every moment, whether they have a learning difference or not. By using the following techniques listed below,[131] this task will become easier:

- As discussed earlier, using a multi-sensory approach in the classroom is particularly helpful as it allows the teacher to addresses different styles of learning at once.

[131] Many techniques adapted from Al Pi Darco, pg. 27.

- Give concrete examples of concepts you introduce, for example, when you are teaching a trope pattern, make sure to include examples of where the patterns comes up in different Torah/Haftarah portions.
- Provide immediate feedback and encouragement.
- Divide the tasks into smaller more manageable units and write them on the board. This is especially important for a student who, in addition to the language-based disability, has an auditory processing disorder. By writing the tasks and instructions down on the board, it gives that student more time to digest the instructions and material.
- Write the day's schedule, in the same spot, every class in big/clear letters. This gives everyone a sense of that day's schedule and helps to keep everyone on track.
- Reduce and remove any distractions from the room. You do not need a lot of posters or other items on the walls.
- Record every class and post it to a website like SoundCloud so that all of your students can accesses the class anytime online. In addition, create a podcast with the key concepts and post it to the same SoundCloud so that it is easier for students to take in the main concepts of each class.
- Ask your religious school director to provide you with a *madrich*/*madrichah* for your classroom. Having an extra pair of eyes and someone else to go around and offer everyone help is never a bad idea.
- Continually monitor and evaluate student progress.
- Before class begins, try to find a minute or so to pull aside the students with learning disabilities individually and ask them if they feel comfortable answering a question in class that day. If they say yes, tell them specifically which question you are going to be asking them so that they can prepare. This should help alleviate some anxiety for the student. (Silver, 2006)
- If you see a student starting to have trouble in class, have everyone stand up and stretch or stand up and take a deep breath. By taking a mental health break, you can prevent that student from being a distraction to others.
- Make sure all handouts are typed using a clear and large font.

- If possible, try and have the table for the class be in a U-shape so that every student can see the board and the instructor at all times.[132]

By making these small changes to a classroom, it will be easier for everyone to have a productive and enjoyable learning experience.

Services, from High Holy Day to family services, can be a very hard time for a student with a learning disability. During services, there are many potential challenges for students who have specific learning disabilities, the main challenges being reading (both Hebrew and English), maintaining focus, and remaining engaged by the material.

I would start by using a multi-sensory approach to be able to reach as many students as possible. Here is an example of multi-sensory approach in a Rosh HaShanah family service. Instead of only talking or reading about the apples and honey, you pass around an individual apple for each child. You ask the child to smell, touch, see, and eventually taste the apple. By having the apple in front of them, they are able to physically hold the item that is being discussed. This allows them to make the connection between what is being said from the *bimah* and the item that they have in their own hands. By using an approach that should help everyone, you are able to disguise it into the service, hence creating a fully inclusive activity.

When it comes to reading in the service, both Hebrew and English will be a challenge for some of our students. When choosing prayerbooks, have large-print ones available as well as ones with and without transliteration. For some students with dyslexia, having only the Hebrew in large print may be easier for them. Students that have dyslexia are often easily distracted and cannot have too many items per page. In

[132] This classroom layout was observed at the Shefa School of NYC.

addition, the large print makes it easier for them to see. For a student with dyscalculia or dysgraphia who is having trouble decoding the Hebrew, they may want the option of having the transliteration in front of them. Specifically, a student with dysgraphia is more likely to have trouble distinguishing inconsistencies in fonts of different sizes and styles [133] so the clearer the prayerbook is, the easier it will be. In the end, the more options you can offer (within reason) for prayerbooks, the more likely you will be able to help all students.

During the service itself, it would be great to have a whiteboard on the *bimah* where you can write down the page number you are on in addition to announcing it. This will help those with auditory processing issues to have a place to look to know where you are in the prayerbook. You can also use the whiteboard to write down key concepts of the prayer you are on.

If possible, it would be great to have a service or two in a separate area outside of the sanctuary where the clergy has accesses to a video screen or a SMART board. Often, having services as a PowerPoint can reduce the difficulties that come with using a prayerbook. It eliminates transition issues for students as they only need to focus in one direction, and it allows the clergy team more mobility to interact with the congregation.

It is widely known that holistic learning stays with a student, and as cantors, we have a wonderful holistic approach we can use during services – our music. Music can be experienced on many levels and in many different ways. It can be instrumental, vocal, or simply movement. Music has the ability to enter into the Jewish spirit like nothing else can, it can be calming or exciting, it can set the mood for the prayer. Whether it is

[133] For a guide on usable type, please see Appendix I.

clapping during the *Bar'chu*, humming quietly during the *Sh'ma*, or shaking a tambourine during *Mi Chamochah* – can transform a service through the use of music.

In addition to music being engaging for worship, it is also a great way to teach Hebrew. A great opportunity to merge the two is the junior choir. Often, for students with a language-based learning disability, music is a great way to help with memorization. In addition, rhymes are a great tool for working with students.

When it comes to making the junior choir accessible for all students, we can start with the song sheet. The song sheet should be written using a large font with plenty of space between each word. The less-is-more approach works best when it comes to the number of songs per song sheet. Focus on only one or two new songs per rehearsal.

Next, keep the rehearsal time short, a half-hour at most. If you see students beginning to drift in the middle of a rehearsal, move on to a different song or have the children physically move around (moving from the seats to the *bimah* can be a productive use of energy). Keep your directions short and clear. In addition, speak slowly and loudly (without shouting). You can also use the whiteboard you had for services to write out the rehearsal schedule.

For a student with dyslexia, it is not uncommon to flip words or letters when they are looking at them on a page. In order to help that student, you can speak the words in time and have everyone repeat them. As in the *b'nei mitzvah* tutoring setting, hand motions and clapping often help children with learning differences understand subtle differences in melody lines or rhythmic patterns.

When it comes to deciding whether or not to have the students use Hebrew type or transliteration, there are a few things to consider in general: What is the Hebrew skill

level of your choir? If you have a younger junior choir, have they started Hebrew in religious school yet? Will transliteration be more confusing? In the end, it depends on who is in your choir.

Finally, for the junior choir, I would set up a “buddy system” where older choir members serve as mentors for younger choir members. Try and pair up an older child who has a learning disability with a younger child who has similar difficulties. Having a mentor can go a long way in helping children who have recently been diagnosed with a learning disability. If they can be helped by someone who is like them, someone who shares their language and struggles, it can go a long way. It also gives the older students the chance to model correct behavior for their buddy. It is important that the cantor acknowledges the appropriate behavior and thanks them for their hard work.

In the end, the cantor (as part of the larger synagogue community) has the ability to either make or break Judaism for children that have learning disabilities. From those early years at Tot Shabbat to the *b'nei mitzvah* preparation process, the cantor is a vital component to making sure these students are able to have meaningful and memorable Jewish experiences. As we learn from Proverbs 22:6, “Educate each child according to their way, and even when he is old, he will not depart from it.”

Conclusion

There is a famous midrash in the Jerusalem Talmud:

> Rabbi Yochanan said: "Each of the forty days that Moses was on Mount Sinai, God taught him the entire Torah. And each night, Moses forgot what he had learned. Finally, God gave it to him as a gift. If so, why did God not give the Torah to him as a gift on the first day? In order to encourage the teachers of those who learn in a non-traditional manner."[134]

In this midrash, Moses has the ultimate teacher. Yet, even God has to modify the way God taught Moses. In turn, Moses then becomes the great teacher of the Jewish people.

The instruction Moses received is considered a "gift" from God. Often, I think of my decision to become a cantor as a "gift" from God, the ability to use my voice (in song, educating, and caregiving) to make the Jewish community a more open and welcoming place. As cantors, we have an obligation to share our "gifts" with all of our students, both those with learning disabilities and those who are typical learners.

When we read *V'shinantam l'vanecha* ("you shall teach your children")[135] in the *V'ahavta* section of the service, this means ALL of our children. Our Jewish institutions have a moral and ethical obligation to provide a quality Jewish education for all, and I hope that this thesis has given my colleagues some basic tools and techniques to help them get started on the path of including all students.

In examining the great work that has already been done to help include all students in our religious institutions, I have gained great insights into what is in store for the future of our movement and the future of the Jewish people. We have come far, but

---

[134] JT, *Horayot*, end.
[135] Deuteronomy 6:7.

we still have a long way to go.

As times change, so do the needs of each individual Jewish community. Whether it is a fully inclusive model or small steps, every Jewish community needs to decide what is right for them. The important thing is that communities are taking the steps. They are inviting these children into their schools, helping their clergy and teachers welcome them, and bridging the gap between typical and special needs learners.

Our Jewish heritage is filled with texts of inclusion, but until we take the lessons to heart and see them as a call to action, we will never truly understand the lessons of our forefathers. It is written in Sanhedrin 91b, "Anyone who deprives a student of being taught Torah is as if he robs him of his father's legacy."[136] As cantors, we need to make the material we teach accessible to all, no matter what. Every child who walks into our office has the right and the obligation to learn from us, it is up to us to help keep this legacy going.

These children have such gifts to offer. In addition to us teaching them, there is much they can teach us. Lessons of empathy, patience, and loving-kindness. Every student is unique, an individual, and every individual has something to offer our Jewish communities.

Our communities are not complete until we are able to welcome everyone into them. Once we have accomplished this, we can truly sing out the words: *Hinei mah tov umah na-im, shevet achim gam yachad* ("Behold, how good and pleasant it is when all people live together as one.")[137]

[136] BT *Sanhedrin* 91b.
[137] Psalm 133:1.

EXAMPLES OF PEOPLE FIRST LANGUAGE

BY KATHIE SNOW; VISIT WWW.DISABILITYISNATURAL.COM TO SEE THE COMPLETE ARTICLE

Remember: a disability descriptor is simply a medical diagnosis;
People First Language respectfully puts the person before the disability;
and a person with a disability is more *like* people without disabilities than different!

SAY:	INSTEAD OF:
People with disabilities.	The handicapped or disabled.
He has a cognitive disability/diagnosis.	He's mentally retarded.
She has autism (or a diagnosis of...).	She's autistic.
He has Down syndrome (or a diagnosis of...).	He's Down's; a mongoloid.
She has a learning disability (diagnosis).	She's learning disabled.
He has a physical disability (diagnosis).	He's a quadriplegic/is crippled.
She's of short stature/she's a little person.	She's a dwarf/midget.
He has a mental health condition/diagnosis.	He's emotionally disturbed/mentally ill.
She uses a wheelchair/mobility chair.	She's confined to/is wheelchair bound.
He receives special ed services.	He's in special ed.
She has a developmental delay.	She's developmentally delayed.
Children without disabilities.	Normal or healthy kids.
Communicates with her eyes/device/etc.	Is non-verbal.
Customer	Client, consumer, recipient, etc.
Congenital disability	Birth defect
Brain injury	Brain damaged
Accessible parking, hotel room, etc.	Handicapped parking, hotel room, etc.
She needs... or she uses...	She has problems with...has special needs.

Keep thinking—there are many other descriptors we need to change!

Excerpted from Kathie's People First Language article, available at www.disabilityisnatural.com.

Appendix B

Steps to Developing an Inclusion Committee

Adapted from Temple Israel Inclusion Committee Minneapolis, MN

Completed	Steps to Develop Your Accessibility and Inclusion Committee
	1. Speak with your rabbi/executive director about the need for an Inclusion Committee.
	2. Speak with your Board president about the need for an Inclusion Committee. Request to be on the agenda for the next board meeting for a brief presentation on the establishment of an Inclusion Committee.
	3. Contact your organization's staff for information regarding its bylaws pertaining to the requirements for establishing committees.
	4. Select individuals to make a presentation to your Board of Trustees. Whether or not you will need approval by the Board to start the committee, you will want to inform them of the need for the Inclusion Committee as well as the approval by your rabbi/executive director, Board president/executive committee. Share information about the Community Inclusion Guide initiative with them.
	5. Get Board approval, if required.
	6. Contact members of your organization who would be interested in joining the Inclusion Committee. Your committee should include individuals with disabilities, family members, clergy, educational leaders and staff, youth group leaders, board member(s), people who are professionally involved in providing services to people with disabilities (i.e. education specialists, psychologists, architects.) Seek as broad-based support of members as possible.
	7. Insist that administrative staff and/or clergy be liaison to the committee and attend all committee meetings.
	8. Set a first meeting with as much publicity as possible.

	9. Establish a Mission Statement for the committee. (This is more important than it seems. It will get the new members focused as a group on the overall goals of the committee); *It might be helpful to have a facilitator run the first few meetings*

	10. Submit Mission Statement to the Board for its approval (if necessary).
	11. Schedule a 2-hour visioning meeting to initiate the Community Inclusion Guide Process. The Community Inclusion Program Manager will facilitate the visioning meeting to help you set goals and priorities.
	12. Collaborate with other committees from your organization - You will find that almost all the committees will be connected to your Inclusion Committee - i.e., Social Action, Building, Education, Youth, Worship, Membership, etc.
	13. Funding can be a key concern (and major obstacle). See if there are any endowments or funds in existence that could be accessed. Try to contact members who might fund initial costs. Regardless of the funding resources, proceed with your plan. Often funds become available as needs are identified.

Welcome to Holland

I am often asked to describe the experience of raising a child with disability - to try to help people who have not shared that unique experience to imagine how it would feel.
It is like this...

When you're going to have a baby, it is like planning a fabulous vacation trip - to Italy. You buy a bunch of guidebooks and make your wonderful plans. The Coliseum. The Michelangelo David. The Gondolas of Venice. You may learn some handy phrases in Italian. It is all very exciting.

After months of anticipation, the day finally arrives. You pack your bag and off you go. Several hours later the plane lands. The stewardess comes in and says, 'Welcome to Holland'. 'Holland? ' you say. 'What do you mean Holland? I signed up for Italy! ! ! I am supposed to be in Italy. All my life I have dreamed of going to Italy! '.

But there has been a change in flight plan, they have landed in Holland and there you must stay. The important thing is that they have not taken you to a horrible, disgusting, filthy place, full of pestilence, famine and disease. It is just a different place.

So you must go out and buy new guidebooks. And you must learn a new language. And you will meet a whole new group of people you would never have met before. It is just a different place. It's slower paced than Italy. It's less flashy than Italy. But after you have been there for a while and you catch your breath, you look around and you begin to notice that Holland has windmills, Holland has tulips, and Holland even has Rembrandts.

But everyone you know is busy coming and going from Italy and they are all bragging about what a wonderful time they had there. And for the rest of your life you will say, 'Yes, that is where I was supposed to go, That's where I had planned'.

And the pain of that will never, ever go away, because the loss of that dream is a very significant loss, but if you spend your life mourning the fact that you didn't go to Italy, you may never be free to enjoy the very special, the very lovely things about Holland.

son with dyslexia can often adjust to the problems, and with appropriate training, make the compensations necessary for coping with these special needs.)

LEARNING DISABILITIES

- Participants can, to a limited extent, "experience" dyslexia reading the following message: OTDYA IS A PSECIAL YAD NO WIHCH TO PERXECEINE HSIWEJ LAVUES. Oversimplification is always a problem in simulation, but this exercise does demonstrate how complex a simple reading task becomes when the brain's "switchboard" requires reprogramming.

ADD/ADHD

- TEST YOUR SPECIAL EDUCATION I.Q.

TRUE OR FALSE?

1. All children with ADD/ADHD demonstrate symptoms that include impulsiveness, hyperactivity, and inattentiveness. T/F
2. The most consistent cause of ADD/ADHD is a hereditary predisposition. T/F
3. Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder occurs most frequently in boys. T/F
4. Most children with ADD/ADHD do not have problems until they come to school. T/F
5. Quiet, controlled children do not have attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. T/F
6. Most children with ADD/ADHD will outgrow their problems by the time they reach adulthood. T/F
7. The preferred treatment for attention deficit disorder is medication. T/F
8. All children with ADD/ADHD should be in "typical" classrooms. T/F
9. ADD/ADHD is often paired with another disability. T/F
10. The effects of ADD/ADHD may be felt as strongly outside the classroom as in it. T/F

ANSWERS:

1. **False.** Although some children demonstrate the entire range of symptoms, many are inattentive and impulsive without being hyperactive; others are hyperactive without inattentiveness; and still others are impulsive but neither hyperactive nor inattentive.
2. **True.** The most consistent cause of ADD/ADHD appears to be a hereditary predisposition. Estimates that it is hereditary range from 30% to 50% of people with ADD/ADHD in published studies, to 70% to 80% observed in private practices.
3. **True.** Three to four boys carry the diagnosis for every girl. The most underdiagnosed group is girls who have ADD but are not hyperactive.
4. **False.** Preschoolers, and even infants and toddlers, can manifest symptoms of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.
5. **False.** Many children with ADD are quiet and controlled. They may be overlooked by teachers and parents who think that all ADD children must be hyperactive.
6. **False.** People do not outgrow attention deficit as was once believed. However, they can learn to cope with the symptoms and compensate for their weak areas.
7. **False.** Treatment for ADD/ADHD requires a multimodal approach involving a team of parents, teachers, physicians, and behavioral and/or mental health professionals. No single treatment approach is

sufficient; medication, while helpful, should be combined with therapy, behavior management, and educational interventions.

8. **False.** Inclusion in "typical" classes should be attempted when appropriate. In some cases, it is not in the child's best interest, at a given time, to include him or her in mainstream classes.
9. **True.** Approximately half the time ADD/ADHD occurs coincidentally with learning disabilities, obsessive-compulsive disorder, Tourette's syndrome, and oppositional defiant disorder.
10. **True.** Children with ADD/ADHD have difficulty with social situations at home or at play. Unstructured time can be very challenging because of their poor impulse control, disorganization, difficulty with abstract reasoning, low tolerance for frustration, and poor social judgement.

This section is from the Auerbach CAJE Special Education T/F Q&A

GENERAL

- Individuals with special needs often need to be challenged to think creatively. Ask workshop participants to try this process by writing paragraphs that describe how they might personify a sacred time/Jewish celebration. The following could be discussed as samples of this process:
- I am *Simchat Torah.* I possess a treasure. Torah demands that I accept *mitzvot,* obligations. I am an advocate for Torah and its prophetic teachings.
- I am Shabbat, the Sabbath. The world was created for me. I have the responsibility to celebrate life. I can learn to separate the sacred from the ordinary.

DISCUSSION OPTIONS

- Discuss Jewish textual sources that raise the issue of inclusion. (See the Jewish Support section of this manual.)
- Review and discuss *The Language of Disabilities* (found in The World of Special Needs section of this handbook). Examine the origins of terms and why and how society has changed its language.
- Discuss the writings of people with special needs, their parents, and others involved in concerns related to disabilities (See the chapter on B'nei Mitzvah Reflections in this manual, p. 40.)
- Help sensitivity workshop participants share their feelings as they become more aware of differences between themselves and people with disabilities. Differences often cause people discomfort or surprise and sometimes they respond with staring, giggles, cruel comments, and other examples of nervousness. Consider a lack of information as the primary reason most people are insensitive. Review data related to people with different disabilities.
- Moderate a discussion between a group of sensitized individuals without special needs and individuals with special needs, so that deeper levels of awareness can be promoted.

These activities have been adapted from the Liheyot *Manual of 1989.*

More Sensitivity Training Ideas

- **Discrimination activity** By plugging their ears, removing their glasses, or tapping their hands, classroom teachers can simulate the experience of students with hearing, visual, or physical impairments. Such simulations make teachers more sensitive to the needs of students with disabilities and more receptive to alternative instructional approaches.

Appendix G

Sample Learning Plan for Haim Rosen Academic Year 2011–2012

Information for the Teacher

Haim has been diagnosed with mild dyslexia, a learning difference in the area of reading. Haim becomes very embarrassed reading out loud, due to his delays in reading. Haim also has ADHD (attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder); however, he takes daily medication to manage this. Due to poor auditory processing skills, listening proves challenging for him.

Suggestions for the Teacher to Be Implemented in the Classroom

1. The learning consultant or *tzadik* will take portions of his text and provide visual cues for syllable divisions (using alternating colors to show where the divisions occur).
2. Haim should not be asked to read out loud in class unless he volunteers to do so.
3. If Haim is reading one-on-one with the teacher, or if he is reading out loud to the class, try to use color-coded portions of the text to help Haim.
4. Be sure that Haim always uses his finger to point to the syllable/word he is reading.
5. Keep directions short and simple, and speak slowly. Repeat directions as needed. Use gestures when providing directions.
6. Provide preferential seating for Haim.
7. Give breaks often. If Haim seems to be having problems focusing, allow him to take a break. Having him run an errand for the teacher is a good way to accomplish this. Try to keep all the students moving.
8. Use a positive reinforcement behavior management system for the entire class (charts, displays, or secret systems). Establish and enforce rules with the input of the students, if possible. The fewer rules, the better. Al-

ways state rules in the positive and be sure to post expectations in the classroom.

9. If hyperactivity is an issue, simply ignore Haim if he is moving around or squirming in his seat.
10. Comment on Haim's positive behaviors as much as possible. Use nonverbal cues to stop inappropriate behaviors.
11. The teacher and Haim's parents will call the learning consultant at any time during the school year if problems arise, or if additional strategies seem necessary.

APPENDIX A

Sample Registration Forms for Religious Schools

Sample 1

POSITIVE STUDENT PROFILE

This form, to be filled out by the parent, provides a "snapshot" of your child that should be reflected in his/her IEP.

1. Who is _____? (Describe your child, including information such as place in family, personality, likes and dislikes.)
2. What are _____'s strengths? (Highlight all areas in which your child does well, including educational and social environments.)
3. What are _____'s successes? (List all successes, no matter how small.)
4. What are _____'s greatest challenges? (List the areas in which your child has the greatest difficulties.)
5. What supports are needed for _____? (List supports that will help your child achieve his/her potential.)
6. What are our dreams for _____? (Describe your visions for your child's future, including both short-term and long-term goals.)
7. Other helpful information. (List any pertinent information, including health care needs, that has not been detailed elsewhere on this form.)

This sample form has been adapted from Collaborative Teams for Students with Severe Disabilities: Integrating Therapy and Educational Services

Sample 2

REGISTRATION FORM FOR STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

- Please describe any special needs your child has.
- Does your child receive any special education services at school? If yes, please describe.
- Does your child have an IEP (Individualized Education Plan) at his/her school?
- If yes, please describe how we can best implement the plan in our program.
- Would you allow the school to provide us with a copy of the IEP?
- Is there someone at school with whom we could be in contact?
- Are there any special medical concerns? (allergies, medications, seizures, etc.)

- Please indicate which services your child utilizes at his/her school:
  - ___Resource Room Program
  - ___Special Education Class
  - ___Other (describe)
  - ___Speech and Language Assistance
  - ___Instructional Aide

This form was adapted from a form provided by the BJE, San Francisco, CA

Sample 3

JEWISH IEP (INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PLAN)

PERSONAL DATA

- Full name of student — Hebrew name
- Nickname — Date of birth
- Parent(s) name(s) — Home phone
- Parent's work phone — Other parent's work phone
- Address — City, State, Zip
- Other members of the household, relationship, age
- Emergency contact other than parents, name, relationship to student, phone
- Student's school, grade, address, placement
- Prior religious education

MEDICAL DATA

- Doctor's name, address, phone, allergies
- Does your child take any regular medication? If yes, please list and state the purpose.
- Describe student's general health.
- Describe student's abilities and limitations, including any information pertinent to school planning.
- Does your child have seizures? If yes, please describe how you would like school personnel to handle this kind of event if it should occur in school.
- Does your child receive any professional guidance or any type of therapy?

BEHAVIORAL DATA

- How does your child behave when unhappy or confused?
- What behavioral approaches do you find useful?
- Are you using any particular strategies that you would like the school to use?
- Please list any things that you see as motivation for your child.
- Is your child

  ___Aggressive ___Impulsive ___Self-abusive ___Withdrawn

- Does your child

  ___Have tantrums ___Respond to limits

- Can your child use the bathroom independently?
- How does your child communicate?

Speaks distinctly?	___Yes ___No
Verbally expressive?	___Yes ___No
Uses one or two words?	___Yes ___No
Communicates with gestures?	___Yes ___No
Able to use sign language?	___Yes ___No
Nonverbal?	___Yes ___No

- Comments:

EDUCATIONAL DATA

- Please describe your goals in enrolling your child in religious school.
- Will your child be able to attend religious school regularly?
- Would it be possible for the religious school to receive copies of relevant medical, psychological, and educational evaluations and individualized educational plans?
- Is the student able to read?
- Is the student able to comprehend what he/she reads?
- Is the student able to comprehend what he/she hears?
- Is the student unable to write or print?
- Is the student able only to print?
- Please describe the student's best mode(s) of learning, including any successful teaching strategies, particularly in the areas of listening skills, specific task directions, concept building, and group discussion skills.
- Please share your opinion as to what types of service delivery is appropriate for the student (e.g., ability to manage integrated settings), as well as the support services that will be needed.
- Other comments or suggestions:
- Parent(s) signature, date

This sample questionnaire was adapted from the Student Registration/Skill Summary Form of Mount Zion Temple, Minnesota.

29 וַיְהִי | בַּחֲצִי הַלַּיְלָה וַיהוָה הִכָּה כָל־בְּכוֹר בְּאֶרֶץ
מִצְרַיִם מִבְּכֹר פַּרְעֹה הַיֹּשֵׁב עַל־כִּסְאוֹ עַד בְּכוֹר הַשְּׁבִי
אֲשֶׁר בְּבֵית הַבּוֹר וְכֹל בְּכוֹר בְּהֵמָה: 30 וַיָּקָם פַּרְעֹה
לַיְלָה הוּא וְכָל־עֲבָדָיו וְכָל־מִצְרַיִם וַתְּהִי צְעָקָה גְּדֹלָה
בְּמִצְרָיִם כִּי־אֵין בַּיִת אֲשֶׁר אֵין־שָׁם מֵת: 31 וַיִּקְרָא
לְמֹשֶׁה וּלְאַהֲרֹן לַיְלָה וַיֹּאמֶר קוּמוּ צְאוּ מִתּוֹךְ עַמִּי
גַּם־אַתֶּם גַּם־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וּלְכוּ עִבְדוּ אֶת־יְהוָה כְּדַבֶּרְכֶם:

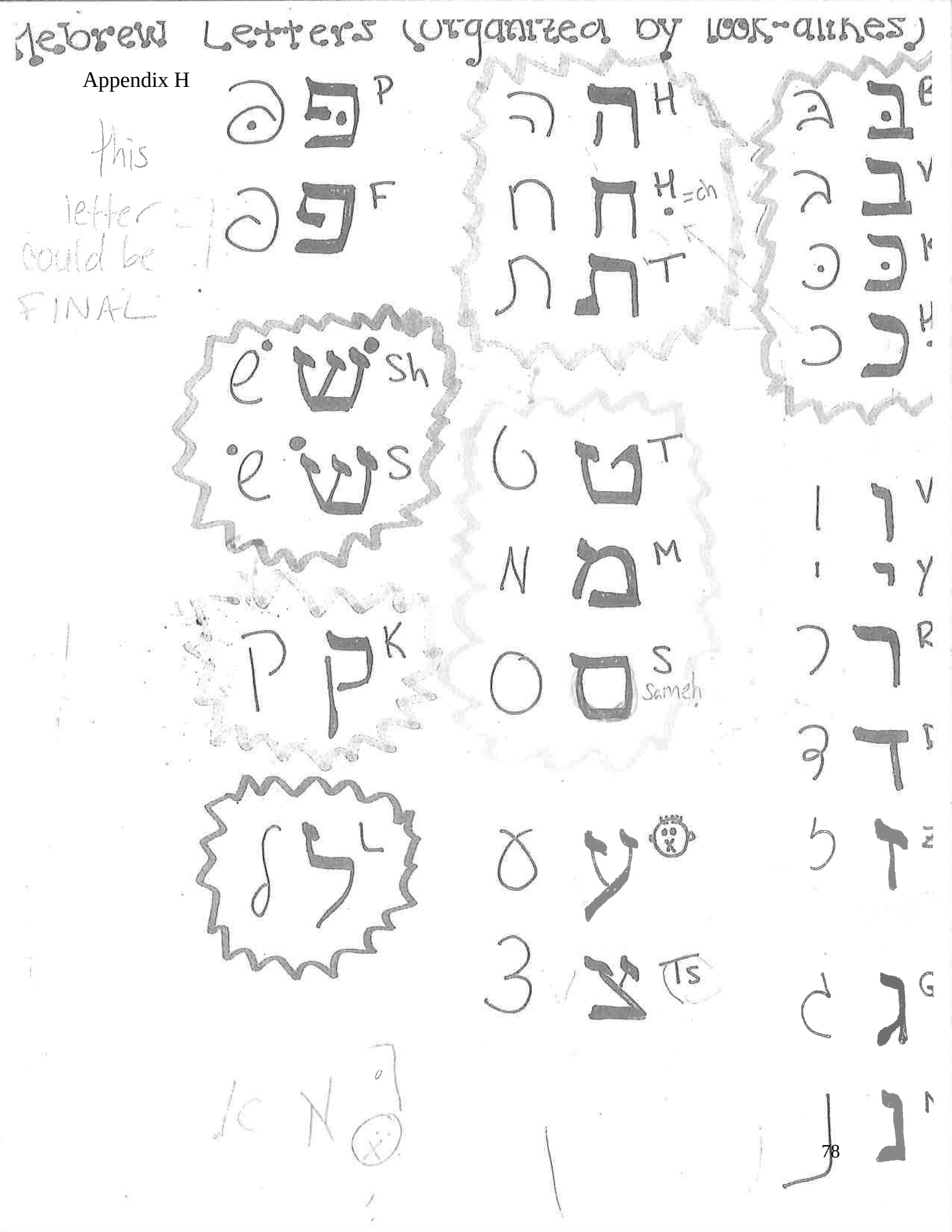
32 גַּם־צֹאנְכֶם גַּם־בְּקַרְכֶם קְחוּ כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתֶּם וָלֵכוּ
וּבֵרַכְתֶּם גַּם־אֹתִי: 33 וַתֶּחֱזַק מִצְרַיִם עַל־הָעָם לְמַהֵר
לְשַׁלְּחָם מִן־הָאָרֶץ כִּי אָמְרוּ כֻּלָּנוּ מֵתִים: 34 וַיִּשָּׂא הָעָם
אֶת־בְּצֵקוֹ טֶרֶם יֶחְמָץ מִשְׁאֲרֹתָם צְרֻרֹת בְּשִׂמְלֹתָם
עַל־שִׁכְמָם:

35 וּבְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל עָשׂוּ כִּדְבַר מֹשֶׁה וַיִּשְׁאֲלוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם
כְּלֵי־כֶסֶף וּכְלֵי זָהָב וּשְׂמָלֹת: 36 וַיהוָה נָתַן אֶת־חֵן הָעָם
בְּעֵינֵי מִצְרַיִם וַיַּשְׁאִלוּם וַיְנַצְּלוּ אֶת־מִצְרָיִם: 37 וַיִּסְעוּ
בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵרַעְמְסֵס סֻכֹּתָה כְּשֵׁשׁ־מֵאוֹת אֶלֶף רַגְלִי
הַגְּבָרִים לְבַד מִטָּף:

38 וְגַם־עֵרֶב רַב עָלָה אִתָּם וְצֹאן וּבָקָר מִקְנֶה כָּבֵד מְאֹד:
39 וַיֹּאפוּ אֶת־הַבָּצֵק אֲשֶׁר הוֹצִיאוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם עֻגֹת מַצּוֹת
כִּי לֹא חָמֵץ כִּי־גֹרְשׁוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם וְלֹא יָכְלוּ לְהִתְמַהְמֵהַּ
וְגַם־צֵדָה לֹא־עָשׂוּ לָהֶם: 40 וּמוֹשַׁב בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר
יָשְׁבוּ בְּמִצְרַיִם שְׁלֹשִׁים שָׁנָה וְאַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה:

Hebrew Letters (Organized by look-alikes)

Appendix H



Appendix I

Usable Type

Prepared by USCJ's Committee on Commission On Inclusion
November 2006

Many programs and events rely heavily on printed information, both as part of the advertising campaign and during the event itself. The design of type and how it is applied should be considered, among other avenues, for **newspaper ads**, **board minutes**, **budget information**, **fliers**, **event programs**, **name badges**, **schedules**, **maps**, and **exhibit descriptions**.

The following are some general parameters that will help you design printed pieces to make them more usable to the general population as well as people with vision disabilities.

People with limited vision need printed material that is...

- Easy to read, especially if the information is to be read quickly, and in less than ideal circumstances, such as while walking, at night, or at distance.
- Type should be simple and contrast highly with the background.
- When graphics are included, they should be clear and not overprinted onto type.

To make printed materials legible for the largest percentage of the population, they should be prepared...

With content that

- Uses clear, on-technical English in the active voice.
- Has limited sentence length of fewer than 25 words. If possible, keep each sentence to one thought only.
- When in the form of instructional text, it is formatted in either a bulleted or numbered list, usually limited to three or four items per list.

With type design that

- Uses sans-serif or simple serif type faces. Limit the number of typeface varieties to two or three. Examples of sans serif typefaces include Helvetica, Univers, Arial, and Futura. Suggested simple serif typefaces include New Century Schoolbook and Palatino.
- Uses bold face type for single-page fliers that are posted, for example on a bulletin board.
- Is presented in 16-point type size when possible so most participants read it easily.

Examples of Sans-serif Typefaces

Helvetica
Verdana

Examples of Simple Serif Typefaces

New Century Schoolbook
Palatino

Source: **Accessible Temporary Events: A Planning Guide**, published by the Center for Universal Design under subcontract with the Southeast Disability and Business Technical Assistance Center. To order a copy of the Planning Guide, contact your DBTAC by calling 1-800-949-4232 (v/tty)

Do Not Use the Following Type Styles

Script type

Condensed type

Extended type

Light type

Ornate italic type

- A use line spaces of one and one-half spaces or is double spaced
- Uses lower case letters with initial capitals.
- Avoids underlining except in headings
- Justifies text on left side only. Type that is justified both left and right hinders legibility because it introduces awkward spaces between words that people do not recognize, making text more difficult to read.
- Where narrow columns of text are used, provides at least an inch of white space between columns.

With type and background that

- Contrast with each other. 9characters contrast with background by at least 70%). Avoid combinations such as yellow on gray.
- Are opaque with the use of non-glossy colors and materials. A medium with a matte or other non-glare finish should be used for both the background and the text.

You should strive to produce all printed materials in at least 16 or 18-point type to be readable both by people with low vision and by sighted people. This can be accomplished by using a photocopier to enlarge existing type if this provides good ink coverage or by using a computer / word processor. Even the most rudimentary computers often have the capability of generating type in different fonts, sizes and weights.

The symbol for large print is 'Large Print' addition to indicating that large print and **programs** are available, you may use **membership forms** to indicate that print print. Sans serif or modified serif print recommended, and special attention spacing.

printed in **18 Point** or larger text. In versions of **books, pamphlets, guides** the symbol on **conference** or materials may be provided in large with good contrast is highly should be paid to letter and word

16-point type

16-point bold type

ALL CAPS ARE HARD TO READ IN CONTINUOUS TEXT

Use of Initial Caps in Headlines is Preferred

Source: **Accessible Temporary Events: A Planning Guide**, published by the Center for Universal Design under subcontract with the Southeast Disability and Business Technical Assistance Center. To order a copy of the Planning Guide, contact your DBTAC by calling 1-800-949-4232 (v/tty)

Bibliography

"ADHD," *Learning Disabilities Association of America*, 2003, accessed November 20, 2015, http://ldaamerica.org/type-of-learning-disabilities/adhd/.

Al Pi Darco. *According to their Ways: A Special Needs Educational Resource Manual.* UAHC Department of Jewish Family Concerns: 1999.

"Dyscalculia," *Learning Disabilities Association of America*, 2001-2002, accessed November 20, 2015, http://ldaamerica.org/types-of-learning-disabilities/dyscalculia/.

"Dyscalculia," *Understood U.S.A.*, 2014-2015, accessed December 16, 2015, http://www.understood.org/en/learning-attention-issues/child-learning-disabilities/dyscalculia/understanding-dyscalculia/.

"Dysgraphia," *Learning Disabilities Association of America*, 2001/2002, accessed November 4, 2014, http://ldaamerica.org/types-of-learning-disabilities/dysgraphia/.

"Dyslexia," *Learning Disabilities Association of America*, 2001-2002, accessed November 20, 2015, http://ldaamerica.org/types-of-learning-disabilities/dyslexia/.

Gruber, Marc A. "Attitudes Are the Most Challenging Barriers," *Torah at the Center* 14, no. 2 (Winter 2011): 13.

Heacox, Diane. *Differentiating Instruction in the Regular Classroom: How to Reach and Teach All Learners.* Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing Inc., 2002.

"Introduction to Learning Disabilities," *National Association of Special Education Teachers*, 2006/2007, accessed November 4, 2014, http://www.naset.org/2522.0.html

Rau, Steven H. and Levy, Stacey. *Everyone is Welcome: Creating a Culture of Inclusion in Congregational Schools.* New York, NY: URJ Press, 2015

Rea, P.J., McLaughlin, V.L. and Walther-Thomas, C. (2002). "Outcomes for Students with Learning Disabilities in Inclusive and Pullout Programs." *Exceptional Children* 68, no. 2 (January 2002): 203-222.

Shaywitz, Sally and Shaywitz, Bennett. "The Neurobiology of Reading and Dyslexia." *Focus on Basics* 5.A (2001). NCSALL.net. National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy, http://www.ncsall.net/index.html@id=278.html.

Shelly Christensen, "Start an Inclusion Committee," *RJ.org Blog*, February 9, 2009, accessed January 15, 2016, blogs.rj.org/blog/2009/02/09/start_an_inclusion_committee/.

Silver, Larry B. *The Misunderstood Child, Fourth Edition, Understanding and Coping with Your Child's Learning Disabilities.* New York, NY: Three Rivers Press, 2006.

"Understanding Dyspraxia," *UNDERSTOOD USA*, 2014/2015, accessed December 18, 2015, http://www.understood.org/en/learning-attention-issues/child-learning-disabilities/dyspraxia/.