AN EVALUATION OF ADOLESCENTS' RELATIONSHIP WITH PRAYER AND

PEDAGOGICAL METHODOLOGIES FOR TEACHING PRAYER IN A

JEWISH MODERN-ORTHODOX HIGH SCHOOL FOR BOYS

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BENJAMIN N. LEIBOWITZ

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APPROVED: _____
                   Kenneth Schneider, Ph.D.

                   _____
                   Jeffrey Segal, Psy.D.

DEAN: _____
                   Francine Conway, Ph.D.

TEACHING PRAYER IN JEWISH MODERN-ORTHODOX HIGH SCHOOLS FOR BOYS

ABSTRACT

Jewish law mandates that three times daily male adults gather in a synagogue to pray (Berakhot, p. 4:1) in a quorum of at least ten males who reached the age of thirteen (Karo, 1563, p. 90:9; Talmud Berakhot, p. 8a). However, a 2017 study indicates that only 33% of American Jewish modern- orthodox (JMO) males between the ages of 18-54 attend weekday morning services, and only 21% attend weekday afternoon and night services. Additionally, only 82% indicate that they find prayer either somewhat or fully meaningful (The Nishma Research Profile of American Modern Orthodox Jews, 2017). Despite the rising communal awareness of this struggle, as indicated by increased newspaper entrees and academic Judaic articles, insufficient scientific research has emerged that focuses on how JMO students are taught about prayer in school, the effectiveness of current teaching methodologies, or how JMO students, adolescents, or adults relate to prayer. This study surveyed 32 ninth-grade JMO male students and four ninth-grade Judaic teachers from one JMO boys' high school in the metropolitan New York area to evaluate (1) how prayer was taught (2) how students related to prayer and (3) what curricular suggestions could be offered to the school based on teacher feedback and current research in curriculum design. All four teachers indicated that prayer was not taught formally and varying attention was provided to teaching prayer informally. Every student reported that they prayed at least once on non-school days with 84% indicating they prayed three times on those days. Despite praying regularly, 41% of students indicated they could translate and extract meaning from only 0-25% of the prayer text. Fifty percent of students indicated that they either sometimes of never feel a close connection with God even *twice in a week* while they pray. Overall, students regularly prayed inside and outside of school but with limited understanding of the prayer text, there was limited prayer education offered in the school, and 90% of students indicated interest in

improving the quality of their prayers. Research-driven curricular recommendations are

presented that are consistent with teacher suggestions and student needs.

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INTRODUCTION

Peer-reviewed literature dedicated to effective pedagogical methodologies for teaching religion in general, no less teaching prayer in particular, is sparse. In the United States, where religious involvement is fairly high, far more people engage in personal prayer than in other religious activities such as bible study or attending formal religious services. Researchers have dealt with prayer in limited ways (Wuthnow, 2008). Religion and religious practices including prayer, are typically taught with tradition-based methodologies that are unaccompanied by empirical support, or taught by unscientific heuristics of "what works."

Religious institutions and groups, however, often struggle to teach prayer effectively. In an article titled *Religious Education Between Aspirations and Reality*, a Christian priest and educator described the historical evolution of how prayer was and is taught to Christians and the modern perils that emerge from teaching religion as a subject like any other without didactic indoctrinations that have proven effective (Ene, 2015). Similarly, in a 2007 study cited in Ziden & Rahman (2013) Nik Rosila Yaacob discovered that students are becoming less interested in Islamic education, with 40-48% of students having zero to limited interest. The authors surmised that this lack of interest was likely due to ineffective teaching methodologies in Islamic schools (as cited in Ziden & Rahman, 2013).

Judaism, too, has limited scientific studies for teaching prayer education to children. As there is no data that indicates if, when, or how prayer is taught in orthodox Jewish schools, standardization of pedagogical approaches among orthodox schools, or even among teachers within any one particular orthodox school is an unexplored area. Quantified comparisons of

various pedagogical approaches are nonexistent and there is no available data on which elementary, middle, or high school grades teach prayer or the content area covered. As a result, the effectiveness of current teaching practices, as they relate to prayer, are unknown. Referencing the observed challenge of teaching Jewish orthodox students to meaningfully engage in prayer, an article of Judaic academia articulated that "we simply do not have enough empirical information about what spiritual development means in modern-orthodox adolescents either in qualitative or quantitative terms" and suggested that the very goals of educators for teaching prayer are often opaque (Goldmintz, 2009). In the past ten years, countless Jewish journals, newspapers, and magazine articles have been published regarding the need for strengthening the methodologies of how prayer is taught in orthodox Jewish schools, and rabbis and lecturers have increasingly created platforms to address this need within the Jewish orthodox educational system. Articles that have emerged are titled "*Can School Do a Better Job of Teaching Tefillah [Prayer]?*" (Lipman, 2013), "*Teaching for Prayer*" (Yeres, 2018), "*Engaging the Teenage Soul: Introducing the NCSY Siddur*" (Brenner, 2013), and "*The Power of Jewish Prayer*" (Sacks, 2009).

Across religions, there appears to be a need for scientifically supported methodologies for teaching prayer as noted above regarding Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. For modern-orthodox Jews, an empirical evaluation of current teaching methodologies provides a basis for understanding the strengths and shortcomings of current prayer education and provides data necessary to present recommendations for hybrid teaching methodologies. To address the considerable non-scientifically observed and noted deficiencies in the quality of Jewish modern-orthodox adolescents' prayer, as noted above, this study investigated what pedagogical

methodologies teachers utilize to teach prayer, how students relate to prayer, and what curricular recommendations could be offered based on research and teacher feedback.

Purpose of the Study.

The focus of this dissertation was to conduct a needs-assessment in a Jewish modern-orthodox boys' high school to assist in developing prayer curricula. The principal of a leading Jewish modern-orthodox boys' high school in the New York metropolitan region expressed interest in examining how teachers currently approach teaching prayer and what methodologies could be recommended to improve the efficacy of teaching prayer. The following are evaluation questions that the investigator addressed:

1. How is prayer currently taught to ninth-grade students in Jewish modern-orthodox high schools?

2. How do male ninth-grade Jewish modern-orthodox high school students relate to prayer?

3. Based on student needs and current research in curriculum design, how may teachers most effectively teach prayer?

This study included a topographic analysis of how prayer was taught to Jewish modern-orthodox male adolescents in a private high school setting in the New York metropolitan area and how students identified their understanding and ability to extract meaning from prayer. Additionally, this study provided recommendations for teaching prayer based on teacher feedback and current research relating to principles of curriculum design.

Chapter II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

I.   Prevalence of Prayer.

With close to 76% of American's identifying with a religious group (Keeter, McGeeney, & Mercer, 2015) and many more praying at times of despair and crisis (Barnes, Powell-Griner, McFann, & Nahin, 2004), perhaps it is not surprising that research indicates that 90% of Americans pray at least occasionally (McCullough & Larson, 1999). Prayer may be defined as "every kind of inward communion or conversation with the power recognized as divine" (James, 1963). Ostensibly, prayer often includes a meditative process shared with a higher being that involves focus of thoughts and sustained concentration. The practice of praying can have many forms depending on an individual's religion and culture. "Broadly, it can be experienced inwardly emphasizing self-examination, outwardly focusing on human-to-human connections, and upward centering on human-to-divine relationship" (Ladd & Spilka, 2002).

II.   Significance of Prayer: Orthodox Judaic Perspective.

In orthodox Judaism, prayer is a central pillar of faith, as rabbinic text states "the world stands on three pillars: (study of) Torah, (prayer) service, and kind actions (Ethics of Our Fathers - Pirkei Avos, p. 1:2)." Three times every day orthodox Jews are mandated to gather in a *shul* (synagogue) to pray (Berakhot, p. 4:1) in a quorum of at least ten males who reached the age of thirteen (Karo, 1563, p. 90:9; Talmud Berakhot, p. 8a). While prayers are typically communal and said in Hebrew to ensure that there is unity among the congregants with regard to reciting

the same text in the same language and at the same pace, the prayer service contains ample room for adding personal prayers providing the practitioner with an individualized praying experience. In fact, the Hebrew word for praying is "*li-heet-pallel*," (להתפלל), which translates to self-inspect, or to be introspective, an act that is individualistic in nature (Pădure, 2013). Beginning at age thirteen, all orthodox Jewish males are mandated by rabbinic law to pray three times daily (Karo, 1563, p. 89:1) and there is no shortage of extrinsic forces driving them toward this practice including religious law, parental pressure, teacher pressure, and school requirements. However, as prayer is a "worship of the heart" (Talmud *Taanis*, p. 2a), a supplicant's religious obligations appear to go beyond mechanical participation and include concentration and a search for personal meaning. In describing the necessity of an emotional experience that one should encounter in prayer, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, affectionately referred to as "The *Rav*" in the Jewish modern-orthodox community, writes that "It is impossible to imagine prayer without, at the same time, feeling the nearness and greatness of the Creator… We cling to Him as a living God, not as an idea, as abstract Being. We are in His company and are certain of His sympathy. There is, in prayer, an experience of emotions which can only be produced by direct contact with God." In the introduction to *Worship of the Heart*, a book based on Rabbi Soloveitchik's lectures on prayer, Rabbi Shalom Carmy describes the Rav's analysis of the Jewish prayer text stating that "it is important to learn from these texts too, for the prayer book is not only the statutory articulation of our relationship to God but our training in that relationship as well." He further presents Rabbi Soloveitchik's postulation that "studying the laws governing prayer and understanding the ideas expressed in prayer and the structure of the liturgy are essential in order to relate properly to the act of prayer" (Soloveitchik, 2003).

This philosophy toward Jewish prayer appears to highlight the importance of an engaged prayer experience that incorporates mindfulness, self-awareness, and introspection as a means to form and build upon an individual's relationship with God. However, to achieve this, one must gain familiarity with the laws, structure, and meaning of the words of prayer.

III.   The Modern-Orthodox Jew.

Modern-orthodoxy is a branch of orthodox Judaism that adheres to religious and spiritual requirements while also engaging in the modern secular world (Lamm, 1990). Like all sects of orthodox Judaism, modern-orthodox Jews believe in the divinity of the Torah laws and the accompanying oral law of interpretations passed down through the generations from Moses at Sinai. Modern-orthodoxy is a social label employed to categorize a population of orthodox Jews who value and immerse themselves in both the Judaic religious and secular worlds. Modern-orthodoxy is a broad social label that contains a wide spectrum of religiously adherent Jews and the 'homogenous' student sample is naturally representative of this spectrum.

A 2013 Pew Research survey indicates that there are 6.7 million Jews residing in America, with "Jews" defined by having at least one Jewish parent or being raised in a Jewish home[1]. Of the 6.7 million Jews, 10% identify as orthodox, and 3% identify more specifically as modern-orthodox (Pew Research Center, 2013), yielding an American Jewish modern-orthodox population of approximately 201,000 people. In a nationwide survey of Jewish-school enrollment across the United States, Schick (2009) found that approximately 29,400 students

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[1] According to *halakha* (orthodox Jewish law) one is Jewish only if his or her mother is Jewish or if he or she undergoes a conversion under orthodox Jewish auspices. Such a definition would reduce this number.

were currently enrolled in Modern-orthodox schools, with approximately 6,510 of those students enrolled on the high school level (Schick, 2009).

In a 2017 study by Nishma Research, 3,903 individuals between the ages of 18-54 living in the United States and self-identifying as modern-orthodox Jews were evaluated via web-surveys regarding their perspectives on a wide range of religious-based issues. The results of this study indicated that 84% of modern-orthodox Jewish males between the ages of 18-54 attended Sabbath morning prayer services, 33% attended weekday morning prayer services, and 21% attended weekday afternoon and night prayer services. Of the combined modern-orthodox men and women who attended Sabbath morning prayers, 82% agree fully or somewhat that prayer was a meaningful experience (Nishma, 2017). These results indicate that while the majority of modern-orthodox males attended prayer services every Sabbath (and the majority of those find services to be at least somewhat meaningful), 16% of male modern-orthodox adults were not attending Sabbath services regularly, and the vast majority, 67% of modern-orthodox Jews were not attending weekday prayer services even once a day[2].

IV.   Adolescence: A Critical Developmental Age and Stage.

Piaget, considered by some writers as the grandfather of research on children's intellectual functioning (Broderick & Blewitt, 2015), developed a four-stage model spanning from birth to adolescence that outlined how humans progress through the development of cognitive maturity. Despite being the single theory that has had the greatest impact on developmental psychology, Piaget's Cognitive Stages of Development theory has been

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[2] While this study indicates the percentages of modern-orthodox Jews who attend prayer services in a synagogue, it does not report percentages of modern-orthodox Jews who pray regularly in venues outside the synagogue.

questioned by many researchers (Lourenco & Machado, 1996). Some researchers suggest that his projected age norms are disconfirmed by more recent data, and that children typically develop faster than Piaget initially theorized (Lourenco & Machado, 1996; Flanagan, 1984). Piaget's research concerning developmental stages, however, reflects the prevailing social science attitude of his time and decades afterward as indicated by the countless theorists who based their research on Piaget's work (Elkind, 1996). Piaget's cognitive development stages are as follows;

- Stage 1: Sensorimotor Stage (Birth – 2 years) – An infant knows and understands the world through movement and sensation. Behavior is reflexive and automatically triggered by stimuli. They learn the beginning stages of language and communication, as well as how to walk. By the end of this stage an infant will learn that items exist even when they cannot be seen.

- Stage 2: Preoperational Stage (2 – 6 years) – Children in this stage learn to think symbolically, an important factor in reading, language, and pretend play. Thought is typically focused on one salient bit of information at a time, and as a result, thought is generally not yet logical.

- Stage 3: Concrete Operational Stage (7 - 11 years) – Children are able to consider multiple bits of information at a time and can consider logical relationships between and among these pieces of information. Their logic is best displayed with information that can be demonstrated in the concrete world.

- Stage 4: Formal Operational Stage (12- adulthood) – Children's logic extends to abstract thought allowing for moral and philosophical reasoning (Piaget, 1968, as cited in Broderick & Blewitt, 2015).

Piaget's fourth stage, the formal operational stage, suggests the development of a child's capability to think abstractly as it relates to spiritual development. With the onset of formal operational thought, adolescents are able to consider possibilities of the unknown future and plan accordingly, grapple with and make decisions based upon moral considerations, imagine themselves in alternate realities such as different roles, contemplate solutions to intangible large-scale problems such as world hunger, and meaningfully consider spiritual concepts (Good & Willoughby, 2008). They can move beyond concrete childhood impressions of religion to reflections on issues and concepts that are embedded in existential and transcendental realms. For example, "adolescents face multiple questions that confront them about existence, such as, Who am I? What is my purpose in life? And Is there a God? These kinds of questions serve as catalysts for adolescent pursuits for deeper meaning of themselves and the world around them" (Markstrom, 1999). This stage appears to be a pivotal period in a child's religious development as it completely shifts the way a child thinks about and relates to religion. Critics of Piaget's theory postulate that Piaget's developmental stages are oversimplified and underestimate children's competency (Lourenco & Machado, 1996).

In 1982, David Elkind, a firm believer that Piagetian developmental psychology should be one of the basic sciences that serve professional practice, introduced his multi-stage theory of religious and spiritual identity based on Piaget's stages of cognitive development (Elkind, 1982). Elkind's multi-stage theory was based on an aggregation of data from 700 comprehensive interviews of Jewish (Elkind, 1961), Catholic (Elkind, 1962), and Protestant (Elkind, 1963) children and preadolescents in the United States. Elkind's theory postulates that children's beliefs, practices, and methods for differentiating between religious groups, undergo gradual changes that can be categorized into developmental stages. Elkind found that, consistent with

Piaget's Cognitive Stages of Development, children experienced four broad stages of religious and spiritual development. Despite researchers questioning Piaget's key claims of developmental age differences, the foundational assumption beneath Elkind's theory, as well as researchers questioning Elkind's theological assumptions of religious thinking being synonymous with the scientific and mathematical thinking of children that Piaget had studied (Francis, 2006 as cited in Gottlieb, 2006), concerning the area of religious educational discourse, Piagetian developmental stages became commonplace in both Europe and North America. Elkind's studies, based on the research of Piaget, are still widely regarded to have established the existence of cognitive stages in the development of religious thinking (Gottlieb, 2006). Piaget and Elkind's theories were selected because of their high frequency of citations in the literature and their historic significance. Elkind's stage theory of religious and spiritual development is as follows:

- Stage 1, Ages 5-7: At this stage, children engage in categorical thinking about groups but are unable to verbalize what differentiates groups. Children believe that a person could belong to only one group, such as "Jewish" or "Christian," but they cannot explain what differentiates a Jew from a Christian, or why a Jew cannot also be an American.

- Stage 2, Ages 7-9: At this stage, children develop a concrete understanding of group differences and can distinguish between religious groups based on customs, dress, and religious activities.

- Stage 3, Ages 10-12: At this stage, children can conceptualize "religion" and factors that distinguish religious groups based on variant beliefs and thoughts, rather than actions and dress. Children are also capable of understanding that people can belong to multiple categories such as a "Jewish American."

- Stage 4, Ages 13 and above: At this stage, children move beyond the rigid conceptual understanding of their religion's laws and beliefs, and can now access a deeper abstract outlook to further explore their religious convictions (Elkind, 1978).

Based on Piaget and Elkind's research, adolescence appears to be a critical time to help children safely and comprehensively explore their religious beliefs and convictions. Elkind (1999) cogently articulates the religious shift that adolescents experience;

> Many parents and religious leaders were, and are, concerned that once they reach adolescence, many young people seem to turn away from the church or synagogue. This is true, but this turning away is not because young people are rejecting religion as a whole. Rather, it is because they now differentiate between institutional and person religion… young adolescents are intensely religious but that their religion is of a very personal, private kind. God is seen as a confidant, one whom you can confide in and still be assured that he or she will not broadcast your innermost thoughts and feelings. Young adolescents, then, do not shift from religion to no religion, but rather from institutional religion to personal religion. (Elkind, 1999)

Within this conceptual framework, high school teachers appear to have the potential to play a pivotal role in guiding students to explore avenues to make prayer a personal and meaningful experience that promotes and builds upon students' newly developed capacity to comprehend their religious belief in the abstract domain.

V. Principles of Curriculum Development.

Developing an educational curriculum for students to understand and relate to difficult subject matter is challenging. In addition to presenting content clearly in a conducive environment, teachers need to ensure that students are engaged, motivated, and receptive to the subject matter (Brock, Nishida, Chiong, Grimm, & Rimm-Kaufman, 2008). To teach effectively, teachers must carefully consider how to convey information in a classroom setting to ensure information is stimulating, relatable, and purposeful.

Concept-based teaching, based on concept-based curricula, focuses on the development of complex and critical thinking skills and has existed for more than 50 years (Baron, 2017). In an article focused on curriculum reformation for nursing students, Baron relates the need for those in the medical profession to shift from memorization-focused training to training focused on application of information. She noted that the curriculum approach of concept-based teaching, developed by Hilda Taba, was popular in the 1960s and early 1970s in the United States, but was replaced in the mid-1970s by an educational movement that promoted objective testing for absolute evaluation. Skills and segments of information became the focus of education, while creativity, complex-thinking, and problem-solving became secondary (Baron, 2017). Taba postulated that these forms of tests are designed to measure the mastery of factual knowledge but do not measure more complex and creative forms of mental activity and therefore "there is a need to broaden the base of the observation by employing evaluative procedures which go beyond the usual pencil and paper testing (Taba, 1962; Costa & Loveall, 2002)." Despite her critics, Taba's concept-based teaching has resurfaced and gained popularity in schools and across fields of specialized education (Baron, 2017; Parry, 2000) and there is a push for her curriculum

theory to be more widely used in 21st century educational systems (Laanemets & Kalamees-Ruubel, 2013). Taba is recognized as a significant influence in educational thought throughout the world and her legacy continues to live on (Costa & Loveall, 2002).

Though there are cutting-edge advances in how teachers can convey information in a classroom setting, many of the principles of modern curriculum development are based on the conceptual framework developed by Taba (Hunkins & Hammill, 1994; Laanemets & Kalamees-Ruubel, 2013; Riafadilah & Mukhidin, 2017; Trezise, 1972). Renowned for reconceptualizing curriculum development to incorporate cognitive development as a primary focus, Taba advanced the notion of teaching students *how* to think, by helping them codify information into conceptual patterns, recognize and verbalize relationships between fragments of data, make inferences and informed generalizations on the basis of data, and by becoming sensitive to analogous relationships such as cause-and-effect and similarities and differences (Trezise, 1972). For Taba, teaching was not limited to a mere transfer of facts, but was, rather, the means of developing students' thinking skills, which she understood to be active and reciprocal between the child and subject matter (Laanemets & Kalamees-Ruubel, 2013). In describing the profound significance of teaching student to approach information analytically, she cogently wrote the following;

> One scarcely needs to emphasize the importance of critical thinking as a desirable ingredient in human beings in a democratic society. No matter what views people hold of the chief function of education, they at least agree that people need to learn to think. In a society in which changes come fast, individuals cannot depend on routinized behavior or tradition in making decisions, whether on practical

every day or professional matters, moral values, or political issues. In such a

society, there is a natural concern that individuals be capable of intelligent and

independent thought. (Taba, 1962)

Taba's work is viewed as foundational for building curricula as it focuses on practical

goal-oriented strategies to employ rather than vague theoretical generalities that are often

difficult to translate into a classroom setting (Baron, 2017; Parry, 2000). Taba developed a

seven-step formula for designing curricula as well as a teaching methodology that included novel

strategies aimed at accomplishing four fundamental goals. The seven-step formula of curriculum

design is portrayed below, followed by the strategies employed to accomplish her four

fundamental teaching goals;

Curriculum Design.

Step 1. Diagnosis of needs: The teacher (or curriculum designer) begins the process by

identifying the students' needs for whom the curriculum is to be planned.

Step 2. Formulation of objectives: The teacher (or curriculum designer) selects those

specific objectives that require attention consistent with the identified needs. These

objectives allow a precision to the process and enable curriculum makers to view learning

as an observable outcome that could be measured.

Step 3. Selection of content: From the objectives selected, one can determine the subject

matter of the curriculum that best meets the needs of the delineated objectives.

Step 4. Organization of content: After selecting the content to include, this step requires

teachers or curriculum designers to organize how the content should be presented to

attain expected results.

Step 5. Selection of learning experiences: Based on the selection of content material, educational learning experiences should be planned in advance.

Step 6. Organization of learning experiences: Once the learning experiences are selected, they are placed into a sequence to optimize student learning.

Step 7. Evaluation and means of evaluation: Prior to implementing the curriculum, the curricular planner must determine how students can demonstrate that they have achieved mastery of the stated objectives (Taba, 1962; Hunkins & Hammill, 1994; Laanemets & Kalamees-Ruubel, 2013).

The Four Goals of Teaching.

Of the four fundamental goals in teaching, three of Taba's goals are cognitive and one is affective. The four goals are as follows;

(1) **Concept development**: Teachers elicit data from the students with general questions such as "what happened in the story you read?" This first step warms up class discussion, gets students involved, and allows for clarification of facts.

(2) **Interpretation of data**: Teacher elicits inferences, meaning, and purpose of data through questions that focus on the "why" of data and underlying rationales of data. Perspective taking is also a common method of allowing students to better grasp information from a realistic viewpoint.

(3) **Application of generalizations**: Teachers elicit student generalizations about significance of data and what impact it may have on oneself and others.

(4) **Interpretation of feelings, attitudes, and values**: Teachers elicit responses that allow students to relate data to their own lives by asking questions such as "Has anything like this ever happened to you?" or "How did you feel when you read xyz?" (Trezise, 1972).

Beyond the strategies that involve utilizing thought-provoking questions as detailed above, Taba also developed some general guidelines to help teachers keep their classes engaged and productive. Some of these guidelines include introducing information through open, yet focused student discussions where all opinions are heard and considered. Teachers were not to present closed-questions or present verbal or facial judgment on any student response. Rather, student ideas and thoughts were presented to the class for consideration and reaction. Students are constantly challenged to clarify and expand their thoughts and opinions and relate them to those of others. When applicable, expansive student discussions are followed by activities that challenge students to transform their conceptual understanding into practical application (Trezise, 1972).

The National Research Council's Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education presents key practices that current research supports for teachers to incorporate in their curriculums to achieve deeper learning, or the capacity to take learned material from one setting and apply it to a new situation as a means to gain expertise in a subject area. Some of these practices include;

(1) **Use of multiple and varied representations of concepts and tasks:** Use of diagrams, animations, and concrete objects to represent abstract concepts in teaching how a system or model works can help increase student performance on tests that involve transfer of knowledge or problem-solving.

(2) **Encouraging elaboration, questioning, and self-explanation:** In accordance with research from Hilda Taba, this technique requires students to actively engage material to attain the ability to process content in their own words rather than memorizing information as presented in class. This can be accomplished by asking students to explain a text in their own words aloud, ask students questions about material they just read such as *why*, *how*, *what if*, and *so what*, having students discuss questions with each other, and have students summarize what they learned in writing.

(3) **Feedback:** Research is clear that receiving feedback is critical to acquiring skills. Explanatory feedback is a form of feedback that focuses on explaining why a particular practice is incorrect or insufficient rather than simply flagging errors and is proven as the most effective form of feedback. Asking students to solve challenging problems while providing explanatory feedback along the way promotes deeper learning.

(4) **Prime student motivation:** Students learn most deeply when they are interested in the subject-matter, they believe they are capable of achievement, and they attribute their performance to effort rather than to ability. This can be accomplished through observing peer-demonstration of success and positive encouragement. (National Research Council, 2013)

Two important aspects to consider regarding the teaching of prayer are alignment of teaching style to the student's strengths in modalities of learning, and of content-relevance to a child's developmental stage as seen in the research that follows. Fleming (2016), in a study focused on implementing an interactive system for teaching Islamic Prayer, presented four modalities of learning styles: visual, aural, read/write, and kinesthetic preferences. Farsi & Munro (2016) posited that students with visual modality strengths will best learn in the form of graphical or pictorial representations. Students with aural modality strengths will best learn in the format of listening and participating in discussions and lectures. Students with read/write modality strengths will best learn in the format of reading and writing texts and words. Lastly, students with kinesthetic modality strengths will best learn in the format of active participation in lesson plans. Although the program effectiveness was not measured, the authors of this study developed a virtual interactive system for teaching Islamic prayers called the interactive Islamic Prayer system that was designed to address all four modalities of learning (Farsi & Munro, 2016).

Similarly, Azidah Ziden and Muhammad Rahman (2013) developed and evaluated the effectiveness of a computer-based system for teaching Islamic education. This system included text, graphics, audio, and animation, the four abovementioned modalities of learning, in a method referred to as the 'experiential design method.' Their method, which utilizes multimedia and visual simulation was found to be more effective than a control group that was taught with a direct teaching mode and no use of PowerPoint or multimedia-based visual simulation applications (Ziden & Rahman, 2013). These studies present compelling technological-based strategies to increase student engagement in religious studies as a means to teach in a fashion that is aligned with student modality of learning.

In addition to developing a teaching format that addresses "how" to effectively teach religious studies, it is important to consider "when" to teach various aspects of prayer. One such layout of developmental age-appropriateness for teaching prayer is presented by Ene (2015), a Christian priest and educator who was concerned about Christian schools producing students who knew how to pray but lacked the ability to develop meaningful connections with a spiritual entity while engaged in prayer. Ene presented a basic design for what teachers should focus on while teaching religion and prayer. He posited that in primary school the educational focus should be basic liturgical reading skills where students learn how to pray, and character development where students show respect to their parents and others. In secondary school, the focus of teachers should be on Christian history, the New and Old Testament with emphasis on the latter, and a conceptual understanding that being a Christian means being in a love partnership with God that begins by forming such partnerships with peers. The author postulated that goals at the secondary-school stage are to acquire skills, behaviors, and meaningful inner-state connections with these actions. An example is lighting the Christ-as-Light candle as an inner-state expression of faith rather than as a habit. Ene posited that on the high school level, the Christian way of life should be addressed more thoroughly by focusing on case studies of saints and important clerics and thorough comparisons of Christianity to other religions and beliefs (Ene, 2015). This article does not present a study that promotes evidence of an effective curricular model, however it does suggest that other religions openly struggle with teaching prayer in an effective manner and have, as a response, considered aligning educational goals and strategies to children's age-appropriate developmental stages.

Recent articles of Judaic academia have produced tips and strategies for Jewish educators to use while teaching prayer. Goldmintz (2007) suggested teaching prayer during prayer sessions

rather than in a classroom, in short time increments (one or two minutes), with visual cues to stir emotional attachment, and with the teacher's humanizing the struggle of making prayer meaningful by sharing his or her own experiences in the endeavor. Noting the developmental stage of adolescents' abstract thinking and their healthy inclinations towards forging an independent sense of self and identity, another article (Goldberg, Pelcovitz, & Rosenberg, 2010) highlights the normality of adolescents testing limits in both the religious and secular realms. Here, the authors stressed the need for educators to serve as "non-judgmental role models, and not as overwhelmingly knowledgeable, perfect, and pious demi-angels." The authors further suggested creating a safe space for adolescent students to talk about God and belief, forging adult-student relationships that are open to questions and expression of religious struggle, teacher self-disclosure of religious struggle, and increased fluency of prayer to promote awareness. Much of these suggestions have scientific basis as noted above.

In a longitudinal study evaluating the effectiveness of a seventh-grade prayer curriculum in a Jewish orthodox school, several important findings were discovered despite noted substantial limitations[3]. Some of the aforementioned Judaic strategies were incorporated, and five years later, when students were in twelfth-grade, many students anecdotally reported that positive teacher role-modeling, positive teacher-student relationships, and effective appreciation of prayer through didactic and visual approaches continued to positively impact their prayer experiences. Though this study presented an appealing pedagogical methodology for teaching

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[3] The study was administered by a prayer educator, untrained in scientifically-sound methodologies of research, who administered the study to his own class. Additionally, there is concern for response-bias, confounding factors contributing to student gains in meaningful prayers (e.g., family dynamics, other prayer programs, communities), and a lack of a control group for comparison.

prayer to seventh graders, it lacked supporting empirical evidence and did not directly reflect

strengths and weaknesses in adolescent pedagogical methodologies as they relate to prayer.

Chapter III

METHODS

Setting

The needs assessment was conducted at a Jewish modern-orthodox high school for boys in the New York metropolitan area. According to the school's principal, the high school had an enrollment of approximately 300 male students with 86 students in the ninth grade at the time of the study. One-hundred percent of the school's ethnic makeup was Caucasian and more than 95% of students were raised in Jewish orthodox homes. To attend the school, students were required to submit an application and attend an interview. The principal indicated that the school examined prospective students' academic profiles and attitudes toward the schools' intensive dual curriculum to ensure there was mission-alignment and that students could achieve academic excellence in both Judaic and secular studies. Mission-alignment involves prospective parents and students sharing the school's goal of "providing students with a Jewish education through an unwavering commitment to serious Torah learning, the instilling of a strong and passionate love for *Eretz Yisrael* [Israel] and the rigorous study of modern science and the humanities." Every year, a significant number of seniors attended college classes for part of the day, and overall, more than 95% of this school's graduates went on to college.

Regarding organizational structure, the school provided a dual curriculum of Judaic studies in the morning and secular studies in the afternoon. School days began with mandatory morning prayers at 8:10 AM and ended at 6:00 PM. For Judaic studies, there were five classes of students tracked into three levels of difficulty. One Judaic teacher taught each class for the entire morning. Teachers were provided with general guidance regarding which book of Talmud should

be taught, and which chapters of Torah should be focused on, but Judaic teachers were empowered to incorporate their own teaching styles into their classrooms and were given the autonomy to decide the specific areas of focus within each field of study and the degree of thoroughness they desired. Judaic subjects typically taught in the morning included Talmud, Torah, Jewish law, Jewish philosophy, and Jewish ethics. Judaic teacher curricula were discussed with the principal and director of teaching and learning for approval.

The school principal identified student prayer as an area in need of improvement and expressed interest in the investigator conducting a needs assessment to propose curricular suggestions that could impact future programming. The principal was interested in exploring students' current quality of prayer, as well as teachers' current and perceived ideal methodologies of teaching prayer. The principal identified student prayer as an area in need of improvement and was open to curricular suggestions that could impact future programming.

Measures

Teacher Interviews.

Teacher interviews were designed to evaluate prayer education as the teachers perceived it to actually be and as they envisioned it should be in the school setting. As the study utilized Grounded Theory, there were no investigator hypotheses. The interview contained ten questions, with some questions containing multiple parts. Questions focused on teachers' teaching experience, process of curriculum development, and perspectives of the overall quality of student prayer-services in school. The interviews also addressed how teachers value devoting class time

to improving prayer and what teachers believe would be the most effective methods to improve the quality of student prayer (See Appendix A).

Student Surveys.

The investigator developed a student survey designed to evaluate students' relationships with prayer (see Appendix B). The SDRS-5 (Hays, 1989) was included in the survey to detect if students were providing answers that reflected social-desirability bias. Social desirability response style (SDRS) is a respondent's tendency to present him or herself favorably and can adversely affect the reliability of self-reported data. SDRS is problematic in assessment as it can inflate the reporting of desirable behaviors and deflate reporting of undesirable behaviors resulting in data misrepresentations referred to as social desirability bias (Vésteinsdóttir, Reips, Joinson, & Thorsdottir, 2017). It is therefore important to include an instrument in research studies that assesses individuals' personal behaviors when there are socially-mediated opinions and beliefs towards those behaviors.

Religious beliefs and practices are sensitive topics that carry concern for SDRS. While there is ample research exploring the effects of religious affiliation as a protective factor for adolescents conforming to negative peer influence (Grier & Gudiel, 2011), adolescent proclivity to conform to religious practice has sparse data. It is unclear whether adolescents raised in religious homes and communities find personal gratification and meaning in conjunction with their religious practices or perfunctorily participate in religious practices as a result of religious conformity but devoid of personal attachment. To study this topic, it was necessary to

incorporate an SDRS assessment to prevent gathering data that was tainted by social desirability bias.

Douglas P. Crowne and David Marlowe created a 33-item instrument in 1960 to measure the presence of social desirability bias. This measure has been widely used in various studies due to its simplicity and its ability, through subtle indicators of socially-desirable responding, to purify studies of the contaminating effects of psychopathology (Hays, 1989). However, adding a 33-item scale to a questionnaire or survey may be cumbersome for respondents, particularly adolescents, and can lead to respondent fatigue. Despite the potential value of assessing SDRS as part of self-report evaluations, assessment time is at a premium and therefore a short SDRS measure is a practical alternative to the original social desirability scale developed by Crowne and Marlowe (Hays, 1989; Vésteinsdóttir, Reips, Joinson, & Thorsdottir, 2017). One such alternative is a 5-item scale, the SDRS-5, which is based on Crowne and Marlowe's original 33-item scale and was designed to take one minute to administer. This scale produced an alpha reliability of 0.66 (0.68 in a second sample) and a test-retest reliability of 0.75 and reduces the respondent burden by lessening its length 85% (Hays, 1989). Incorporating the SDRS-5 in this research increased the qualitative reliability of the data collected.

The survey was comprised of three overarching categories: the student's background, prayer quality, and prayer education. Survey questions focused on how often students pray, their understanding of the prayer text, the meaning that they find in prayer, and their perspectives on their school's educational involvement in improving the overall quality of prayer. There were no short-answer prompts included. The survey consisted of 41 questions of which 40 were single-answer multiple-choice questions and one that involved choosing descriptive words most associated with their prayer experience from a word bank (See Appendix B). This survey was not

designed to have an overall summary score. Reliability and validity of the survey were not calculated. In a trial administration with three individuals taking the survey prior to entering the school, the survey took eight to eleven minutes to complete.

Procedures

For the teacher surveys, the investigator was invited to join a meeting with the school principal and ninth-grade Judaic teachers to discuss the comprehensive interview component of the study and to encourage participation. Teachers were told that each interview would be conducted by the investigator in person or by phone and should take no more than 25 minutes. Teachers were informed that participation was optional but encouraged. All five ninth-grade Judaic teachers agreed to participate. Two of the interviews were completed in person, two were completed by phone, and one teacher, due to his busy schedule, had difficulty arranging a time for the interview. It is noteworthy that the school principal was also one of the ninth-grade Judaic teachers and was included in the four teachers interviewed for this study. Teachers were provided with teacher permission-forms indicating their consent to participate in the study and be audio-recorded for the purposes of transcribing the interview afterwards. To ensure privacy, all interview recordings and transcriptions were secured in a locked file cabinet. Teachers were informed that all interview responses would be shared in aggregate form to protect teacher identity and privacy.

For the student surveys, all ninth-grade students were invited to participate in the study. An email that included a digital consent form was sent by the school to all ninth-grade parents informing them of the study, notifying them that breakfast would be provided to all students who participate, and encouraging them to sign consent forms to permit their children to participate in

the study. Parents of 67 of the 86 students in ninth grade digitally signed parental permission to participate. Arrangements were made with the school principal to invite all students with parental permission to participate in the study during school hours.

Typically, the entire ninth grade prayed together in school every morning. The survey was scheduled to take place immediately after prayer services. On the morning of the study a significant traffic event delayed many school bus arrivals. As a result, small prayer-services commenced as each bus arrived and late-arriving students were unable to participate in the study. Thirty-two students with signed parental and student consent forms were handed student surveys. Students were instructed to not write their name on the survey. Throughout the survey, the Investigator walked around the room to monitor students and respond to questions. All students completed the survey within fifteen minutes. Upon each student's completion, the Investigator collected and reviewed the student's survey and consent form to ensure all items were answered.

Statistical Analysis

The mean, mode, range, standard deviation, and percentage were calculated for each question of the student surveys. Similarly, for teacher interviews, all recordings were transcribed and qualitatively assessed using Classical Content Analysis (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2008) to identify major themes within the responses. Simultaneously, the investigator's colleague, a doctoral candidate who was also trained in Classical Content Analysis, read all teacher responses and independently identified major themes that emerged in the data sets. The colleague chosen was not Jewish or familiar with fine details of the literature included above for the purpose of providing a different perspective of the same interview material. The Investigator and the

doctoral candidate colleague then compared major themes, grouped them into categories and

agreed upon a cohesive final code.

Chapter 4

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to conduct a needs assessment for a potential prayer curriculum in a Jewish modern-orthodox high school. The needs assessment involved an evaluation of how students relate to prayer and how students and teachers perceive efforts to teach prayer.

Student Surveys

Thirty-two students completed student surveys (see Appendix B). The survey included a five-question Social Desirability Response Scale (SDRS-5) to evaluate social desirability bias and 41 items divided into three sections; student background, prayer quality, and prayer education. Each section is recorded below, item by item, in tables followed by explanations. Descriptive statistics include number of students in sample (n), mean, mode, minimum (Min), maximum (Max), standard deviation (SD), and percentages.

Regarding the SDRS-5, all 32 students completed the questionnaire. Each question had five responses, one of which was reflective of social-desirability bias. For every socially-desirable response recorded, respondents received one point. Lower scores are reflective of less social-desirability bias. Student answers ranged from 0 to 4 points, with one student receiving a 4, one student receiving a 3, one student receiving a 2, and a mode of 0. Overall, student responses were not influenced significantly by social desirability bias.

Additionally, to evaluate consistency of responses, there were a few instances where two questions asked for similar information. Results showed that student responses were

exceptionally consistent. For example, 53% of students responded that they are "often" or "almost always" focused for nearly all of morning services (question #15), and later 53% of students responded that their mind "sometimes" or "never" wanders during prayer (question #22). Although no reliability or internal consistency scales were included in this study, these responses in conjunction with other similar consistencies in student responses were indicative of minimal student response bias.

Table 1.A

Descriptive Statistics - Student Background

N = 32 for all questions

Choices for questions 1 to 8 are given at the bottom of Table 1

Question	Mean	Mode	Min	Max	SD
1) I have been going to an orthodox Jewish school since	1.06	1	1	2	0.25
2) On a typical school-day I pray	3.94	4	2	5	0.44
3) On a typical non-school-day I pray	3.77	4	1.5	5	0.66
4) On a typical school-day I pray with a minimum of ten people	3.84	4	3	4	0.37
5) On a typical non-school-day I pray with a minimum of ten people	3.33	4	1	4	0.95
6) On a typical non-school day, my parents encourage me to attend morning service	1.41	1	1	4	0.8
7) My father prays in synagogue three times a day	1.47	1	1	3	0.76
8) When I'm home for *Shabbat*, I pray alongside my father	1.78	1	1	4	0.91

Notes. Choices for questions 1 to 8 are:

Question 1:   1 = Kindergarten (or before), 2 = Elementary School (1-5th grade), 3 = Middle School (6-8th grade), 4 = High School.

Question 2 – 5: 1 = O Times, 2 = 1 Time, 3 = 2 Times, 4 = 3 Times, 5 = More than 3 Times.

Question 6-8:   1 = Almost Always, 2 = Often, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Never.

Table 1.B

Descriptive Statistics - Student Background Percentages

	n	Percentages				
		Kinder-garten (or before)	Elementary School	Middle School	High School	
1) I have been going to an orthodox Jewish school since	32	94%	6%	0%	0%	
		0 Times	1 Time	2 Times	3 Times	>3 Times
2) On a typical school-day I pray	32	0%	3%	3%	91%	3%
3) On a typical non-school-day I pray	32	0%	6%	13%	78%	3%
4) On a typical school-day I pray with a minimum of ten people	32	0%	0%	16%	84%	0%
5) On a typical non-school-day I pray with a minimum of ten people	32	6%	13%	22%	59%	0%
		Almost Always	Often	Sometimes	Never	
6) On a typical non-school day, my parents encourage me to attend morning service	32	75%	13%	9%	3%	
7) My father prays in synagogue three times a day	32	69%	16%	16%	0%	
8) When I'm home for *Shabbat*, I pray alongside my father	32	50%	25%	22%	3%	

Notes. Response Choices are highlighted in gray and Mode is highlighted in blue. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number,

Regarding student backgrounds, Tables 1.A and 1.B indicate that of the students who completed this survey (n=32), 94% were enrolled in a Jewish orthodox school since kindergarten (Mean = 1.06, SD = 0.25), with only two students indicating that they began attending orthodox schools between 1st and 5th grade. On a typical school-day, 94% of students indicated they prayed at least three times daily, with 84% reporting they typically joined a quorum of ten males over the age of 12 for all three services (Mean = 3.84). On non-school-days, 81% of students reported praying at least three times daily (Mean = 3.77), with 59% reporting they joined a

quorum of ten males over the age of 12 for all three services (Mean = 3.33, SD = 0.95, Mode = 4).

Seventy-five percent of students who participated in the study reported that their parents typically encouraged them to attend morning services on non-school days (Mean = 1.41, SD = 0.80, Mode = 1.00) and 69% of students noted that their fathers attended synagogue three times daily. Though answers range from "never" to "almost always" regarding parent encouragement to pray, 0% of students indicated that their fathers never attended synagogue three times daily (Mean 1.47, SD = 0.76, Mode = 1.00). There was a range of student responses concerning praying alongside their fathers in synagogue when they were home for *Shabbat* with responses ranging from almost always to never. Fifty percent of students indicated that they sat with their father almost always on *Shabbat* (Mean = 1.78, SD = 0.91, Mode =1.00).

Table 2.A

Descriptive Statistics – Prayer Quality
    Choices for questions 9 to 26 are given at the bottom of Table 2.A

Question	n	Mean	Mode	Min	Max	SD
9) When I pray in shul <u>near home</u>, I have a specific seat/section that I sit in	32	1.56	1	1	4	0.88
10) When I pray <u>in school</u>, I have a specific seat/section that I sit in	32	1.5	1	1	4	0.92
11) On the morning of a non-school day, I <u>usually</u> arrive at synagogue;	32	2.75	3	1	5	0.81
12) On a typical Shabbat morning I usually arrive at synagogue;	30	2.7	2	1	4	1.03
13) If asked to translate the words of weekday morning prayer into English, I would be able to translate ____ of the words with ease.	32	2.97	4	1	4	1.03
14) When I pray, I am careful to say every word.	32	2.16	2	1	4	0.92
15) When I pray morning prayers I am focused for nearly the entire service	32	2.34	3	1	4	1.00
16) For what percentage of prayers do you typically think about the <u>meaning</u> of the words as you say them?	32	3	4	1	4	1.02
17) The words of prayer have deep <u>meaning</u> for me while I recite them	32	2.56	3	1	4	0.8
18) I sometimes express my personal thoughts and feelings to God while I pray	32	2.06	2	1	4	0.84
19) When there is something I really want or need I usually incorporate it during prayers	32	2.02	1	1	4	1.00
20) I feel the presence of (or a close connection with) God while I pray at least 2 times <u>A WEEK</u>	32	2.34	3	1	4	1.10
21) There is a point nearly every day when I envision myself standing before God	31	2.74	3	1	4	1.03
22) My mind wanders during prayer	32	2.5	3	1	4	0.84
23) I feel that my prayers take on a different meaning each day	32	2.69	3	1	4	0.90
24) For how much of prayer are you thinking about and focused on God?	32	2.56	2	1	4	0.91
25) I would go to synagogue to pray even if I knew no family members or friends would be there	31	1.55	1	1	4	0.85
26) Overall, I usually find prayer to be a meaningful experience	32	2.22	2	1	4	0.87

Notes. Choices for Questions 9-26 are:

Questions 9-10, 14-15, 17-23, 25-26:   1 = Almost Always, 2 = Often, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Never

Questions 11-12:   1 = At least 5 minutes early, 2 = On Time, 3 = 5-10 minutes late, 4 = More than 10 minutes late, 5 = I don't go

Questions 13 & 16:   1 = 75- 100%, 2 = 50- 75%, 3 = 25- 50%, 4 = 0-25%

Question 24:   1 = Almost All, 2 = Most, 3 = Some, 4 = Barely any

Table 2.B

Descriptive Statistics - Prayer Quality Percentages

	n	Percentages			
		Almost Always	Often	Some-times	Never
9) When I pray in shul near home, I have a specific seat/section that I sit in	32	63%	25%	6%	6%
10) When I pray in school, I have a specific seat/section that I sit in	32	72%	13%	9%	6%
14) When I pray, I am careful to say every word.	32	28%	34%	31%	6%
15) When I pray shacharit (morning prayers) I am focused for nearly the entire service	32	25%	28%	34%	13%
17) The words of prayer have deep meaning for me while I recite them	32	9%	34%	47%	9%
18) I sometimes express my personal thoughts and feelings to God while I pray	32	28%	41%	28%	3%
19) When there is something I really want or need I usually incorporate it during prayers	32	41%	25%	28%	6%
20) I feel the presence of (or a close connection with) God while I pray at least 2 times A WEEK	32	31%	19%	34%	16%
21) Whether before, during, or after I pray, there is a point nearly every day when I envision	31	16%	19%	39%	26%
22) My mind wanders during prayer	32	13%	34%	44%	9%
23) I feel that my prayers take on a different meaning each day	32	9%	31%	41%	19%
25) I would go to synagogue to pray even if I knew no family members or friends would be there	31	65%	19%	13%	3%
26) Overall, I usually find prayer to be a meaningful experience	32	22%	41%	31%	6%

	n	At Least 5 Minutes Early	On Time	5-10 Minutes Late	>10 Minutes Late	I Don't Go
11) On the morning of a non-school day, I usually arrive at shul	32	3%	38%	44%	13%	3%
12) On a typical Shabbat morning I usually arrive at synagogue (shul)	32	13%	33%	23%	30%	0%

Table 2.B Continued

		75-100%	50-75%	25-50%	0-25%
13) If asked to translate the words of weekday morning prayer into English, I would be able to translate _____ of the words with ease.	32	9%	25%	25%	41%
16) For what percentage of prayers do you typically think about the <u>meaning</u> of the words as you say them?	32	9%	22%	28%	41%
		Almost All	Most	Some	Barely Any
24) For how much of prayer are you thinking about and focused on God?	32	9%	44%	28%	19%

Notes. Response Choices are highlighted in gray and Mode is highlighted in blue. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number,

Table 2.A and 2.B depict summaries of the data that emerged regarding students' prayer quality. According to student reports, 63% of students had a specific seat or section where they prayed at a synagogue near home (Mean = 1.56, SD = 0.88, Mode = 1) and 72% had a specific seat or section where they prayed at school (Mean = 1.50, SD = 0.92, Mode = 1). Regarding attending synagogue on non-school-days other than *Shabbat*, 44% of students arrived 5-10 minutes late and 38% were careful to arrive on time (Mean = 2.75, SD = 0.81, Mode = 3). Nine percent were arriving more than ten minutes late and 3% were not attending at all. On *Shabbat*, there was a wide range of synagogue arrival-times. Thirteen percent of students arrived at least five minutes early, 33% indicating that they arrive on time, and 53% indicated that they arrived at least 5 minutes late (Mean = 2.70, SD = 1.03, Mode = 2). It is noteworthy, that although most arrived late, every student reported attending synagogue on *Shabbat* morning.

Concerning students' ability to mechanically translate the words of prayer from Hebrew to English, responses ranged from being able to translate 0-25% of the words to 75-100% of the

words. Although the typical student understood approximately 25-50% of the words (Mean = 2.97, SD = 1.03), a significant 41% of students were able to translate only 0-25% of the words (Mode = 4). Similarly, survey results indicated variance in internalizing the meaning of the Hebrew words as they were recited. An average of student responses indicated that students thought (i.e. internalized) about 25-50% of the words they recited (Mean = 3.00, SD = 1.02), however 41% of students reported they think about the meaning of the words for only 0-25% (Mode = 4). Twenty-eight percent of students indicated that they almost always said every word of prayer while most students indicated that they said every word between sometimes and often (Mean = 2.16, Mode = 2.00, SD = 1.00). There was significant variance in student responses regarding maintaining focus throughout morning services ranging from almost always to never (Mean = 2.34, SD = 1.00) with 34% (Mode = 3.00) of students indicating that they were "sometimes" able to maintain focus throughout morning prayers.

Different than the literal translation of the words, students ranged in finding personal meaning in the words they recited during prayer, with 47% of students indicating this occurred sometimes (Mean = 2.56, SD = 0.80, Mode = 3.00). Only 3% of students indicated that they did not at times express their personal thoughts and feelings to God during prayer. Twenty-eight percent indicated they did this almost always, 41% expressed their thoughts often, and another 28% did this sometimes (Mean = 2.06, SD = 0.84, Mode = 2.00). In contrast, when there was something that a student really wanted, 41% of students almost always incorporated their needs into prayer, while 53% of students did this either sometimes or often (Mean = 2.02, SD = 1.00, Mode = 1.00). Although there was significant variance in student responses, 34% of student indicated that they only sometimes felt a close connection with God while praying at least two times a week (Mean = 2.34, SD = 1.10, Mode = 3.00). Thirty-nine percent of students indicated

that they only sometimes envisioned themselves before God at one point each day and 26%

indicated that this never occurs (Mean = 2.74, SD = 1.03, Mode = 3.00). These answers contrast

with the 44% of students who reported thinking about and focusing on God during most of

prayer (Mean = 2.56, SD = 0.91, Mode = 2.00). Sixty-five percent of students reported that they

almost always attended synagogue even if they knew no friends or family would be there (Mean

= 1.55, SD = 0.85, Mode = 1.00). Overall, regarding finding prayer to be a meaningful

experience, there was a variance in responses with 6% indicating never, 31% indicating

sometimes, 41% indicating often, and 22% indicating almost always (Mean = 2.22, SD = 0.87,

Mode = 2.00).

Table 2.C

Descriptive Statistics - Question 27: Word Bank

Adjectives	Frequency
"Wake up calling"	1
Uplifting	11
Relaxing	1
Difficult	7
Thought provoking	15
Inspirational	10
Meaningful	17
Refreshing	3
Pointless	6
Confusing	6
Restricting	5
Mindless	5
Too long	15
Exhausting	6
Boring	6

Notes. This table includes the frequency of words being selected
across student surveys.

Table 2.C includes a summary of the frequency of student responses for question 27, the last question in the prayer quality section. Respondents were asked to circle the words that best represented their experience with prayer. The word bank included seven positive and seven negative word-choices. The response "wake up" was an additional positive response created by a student. Overall, more positive words (n = 67) were chosen by students than negative words (n = 49), with "meaningful" and "thought-provoking" chosen as the most common positive words and "too long" chosen as the most common negative word.

Table 3.A

Descriptive Statistics – Prayer Education

Choices for questions 28 – 41 are given at the bottom of Table 3

Question	n	Mean	Mode	Min	Max	SD
28) My teachers <u>formally</u> teach prayer in <u>class</u> (e.g. set time devoted to the subject of prayer)	31	3.32	4	1	4	0.87
29) My teachers <u>informally</u> teach prayer in <u>class</u> (e.g. it comes up in class discussion naturally)	31	3.06	4	1	4	0.93
30) My teachers <u>formally</u> teach prayer in the <u>prayer room</u> (e.g. Someone speaks about the topic of prayer on a daily basis during or after prayers)	31	3.39	4	2	4	0.67
31) My teachers provide and encourage optional opportunities to learn about prayer (ex: learning groups [*chaburot*]/electives/clubs etc.)	30	3.03	3	1	4	0.96
32) The last time I can remember being formally taught prayer in school, I was roughly _____ years old	32	2.69	3	1	4	1.00
33) I think about questions relating to God that are difficult to answer	32	2.53	3	1	4	0.88
34) Attendance is taken to see if I am at prayer in school	32	1.56	1	1	4	1.08
35) My school monitors me during prayer to ensure I am engaged	32	2.31	3	1	4	1.06
36) My teachers pray with me during prayers in school	32	1.19	1	1	4	0.64
37) I feel comfortable speaking with a teacher (Rebbe) about difficult questions relating to God	32	2.16	2	1	4	1.02
38) This school year, a teacher has challenged me to critically think about the quality of my prayer at least once	32	1.31	1	1	2	0.47
39) My teachers sometimes use aids to help teach prayer in class such as special prayer books designed for classroom instruction, prayer-themed pictures, and handouts to help us focus	32	1.94	2	1	2	0.25
40) The quality of my prayers has improved since I began high school	31	1.23	1	1	2	0.43
41) I am interested in improving the quality of my prayer	31	1.1	1	1	2	0.30

Notes. Choices for Questions 28 – 41 are Given Below;

28-31: 1 = Every Day, 2 = Once a Week, 3 = Once a Month, 4 = Never

32: 1 = 4-7 (Pre-K -2nd grade), 2 = 8-10 (3rd-5th grade), 3 = 11-13 (Middle School), 4 =14 - current (High School), 5 = I can't remember ever being taught prayer in school

33-36: 1 = Almost Always, 2 = Often, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Never

37: 1 = Definitely True, 2 = Mostly true, 3 = Sometimes True, 4 = Not True at All

Table 3.B

Descriptive Statistics - Prayer Education Percentages

	n	Percentages			
		Every Day	Once a Week	Once a Month	Never
28) My teachers <u>formally</u> teach prayer in class (e.g. set time devoted to the subject of prayer)	31	6%	6%	35%	52%
29) My teachers <u>informally</u> teach prayer in class (e.g. it comes up in class discussion naturally)	31	3%	29%	26%	42%
30) My teachers <u>formally</u> teach prayer in the <u>prayer room/Shul/Beit Medrash</u> (e.g. Someone speaks about the topic of prayer on a daily basis during or after prayers)	31	0%	10%	42%	48%
31) My teachers provide and encourage optional opportunities to learn about prayer (ex: learning groups [chaburot]/electives/clubs etc.)	30	10%	13%	40%	37%
		4-7	8-10	11-13	14 - Current
32) The last time I can remember being formally taught prayer in school, I was roughly _____ years old;	32	19%	13%	50%	19%
		Almost Always	Often	Some-times	Never
33) I think about questions relating to God that are difficult to answer	32	13%	34%	41%	13%
34) Attendance is taken to see if I am at prayer in school	32	75%	6%	6%	13%
35) My school monitors me during prayer to ensure I am engaged	32	28%	28%	28%	16%
36) My teachers pray with me during prayers in school	32	91%	3%	3%	3%
		Definitely True	Mostly True	Some-times	Never
37) I feel comfortable speaking with a Rebbe (teacher) about difficult questions relating to God	32	31%	34%	22%	13%
		True	False		
38) This school year, a teacher has challenged me to critically think about the quality of my prayer at least once	32	69%	31%		

Table 3.B Continued

39) My teachers sometimes use aids to help teach prayer in class such as special prayer books designed for classroom instruction, prayer-themed pictures, and handouts to help us focus	32	6%	94%
40) The quality of my prayers have improved since I began high school	31	77%	23%
41) I am interested in improving the quality of my prayer	31	90%	10%

Notes. Response Choices are highlighted in gray and Mode is highlighted in blue. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number,

Regarding prayer education, student responses indicated that 19% of students were not formally taught about prayer in school since they were 4-7 years of age, while 50% received a formal education most recently in middle school (Mean = 2.69, Mode = 3, SD = 1.00). Fifty-two percent of students noted that in their current class teachers never formally addressed prayer, while 35% indicated that prayer was formally addressed once a month (Mean = 3.32, SD = 0.87, Mode = 4.00). Similarly, 48% of students indicated that prayer was never formally taught in the prayer room (Mean = 3.39, SD = 0.67, Mode = 4.00). Forty-two percent of students indicated that prayer never emerged in class discussion, while 26% indicated that this happened once a week and 29% indicated this happened once a month (Mean = 3.06, SD = 0.93, Mode = 4.00). There was variance in responses regarding how often students felt that teachers were providing opportunities and encouraging students to learn more about prayer with 40% indicating this occurred once a month and 37% indicating that this did not happen at all (Mean = 3.03, SD = 0.96, Mode = 3.00).

Regarding thinking about difficult questions relating to God, students indicated a variance in responses with 13% noting that these types of questions did not arise, 41% noting they arose sometimes, 34% indicating they arose often, and 13% indicating they arose almost always (Mean = 2.53, Mode = 3, SD = 0.88). Though there was again significant variance of student responses, overall students reported feeling comfortable approaching their teachers with questions relating to God more often than they were experiencing those forms of questions (Mean = 2.06, Mode = 2.00, SD = 1.03).

Sixty-nine percent of students reported feeling challenged to think critically about prayer this year by a teacher, while 31% of students did not feel similarly (Mean = 1.31, Mode = 1.00). Despite this, 77% of students reported that their prayers had improved since they began high school (Mean = 1.23, Mode =1.00, SD = 0.43), 90% of students, a significant 28 of the 31 students who answered this question, reported a desire to improve the quality of their prayers (Mean = 1.10, Mode =1.00, SD = 0.30).

Teacher Interviews

Careful implementation of Classical Content Analysis of teacher interviews produced several overarching themes in connection to student prayer in school. The overarching themes and subthemes are presented in Table 4, together with the number of teachers (Range = 1-4) that referenced each theme or sub-theme.

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics - Teacher Interview Themes

Themes/Sub-Themes	Frequency
Curriculum Implementation	
Teachers feel empowered/Independent	4
Administration has limited power	2
Prayer not included in formal curriculum but informally discussed with varying frequency	4
"Whole Child Approach" for Spiritual/Judaic content	
Meeting student needs	3
Inspiring/guiding students to feel/improve their relationships with God	4
Emotional-scaffolding/develop self-awareness as precursor to connecting with God	1
Need to prepare students for spiritual independence	2
Teacher Thoughts of Student Opinion/Experience with Prayer	
Too Long	2
Lack understanding of words	2
Not meaningful or worthwhile	1
Variance of student connection to prayer	4
Current Methods of Teaching Prayer	
Providing feedback in class for their behavior during prayer	3
Occasionally focus on concepts within prayer at monthly learning club	1
Role-modeling	4
Effective Ways to Teach Prayer	
Create conducive environment for prayer/Smaller prayer groups/Explanatory service	3
Involve parents to improve the culture at home of disengaged prayer	1
Invite selective older college or post-college students to join prayer groups to increased role models	1
Teach self-awareness as precursor to awareness of God	1
Increase discussion of prayer in class, but not formal curriculum	1
Ineffective Ways to Teach Prayer	
Policing during prayer (rather than role-modeling)	2
Curriculum of explicit instruction - "knowledge doesn't lead to action in this context"	1
Challenges to Teaching Prayer	
Teacher belief that a curriculum for prayer would be ineffective	1
Time constraints in school	3
Environment not conducive: too hot and too many people	2
Difficult to teach child how to *feel*	1
Teachers will not do it, even if asked by administration	2
Teachers perceive teaching prayer to be juvenile for high school students	2

Notes. This table includes overarching themes and subthemes that emerged during Classical Content Analysis. The frequency of how many teachers mentioned each subject, ranging from 1-4 teachers, is included.

Regarding curriculum implementation, all teachers reported feeling empowered and/or independent in implementing their curricula. Teachers indicated that the school administration and the director of teaching and learning informed teachers which book of Talmud they should teach, and then were given the autonomy to choose the pace, scope, and breadth they could employ, and which outside subjects or ideas they wished to incorporate into their lesson plans. Concerning how often the topic of prayer was discussed informally in class, teachers' responses ranged from four times per week to once a month at most. Two of the teachers noted that if the administration were to propose that prayer be taught for a specific amount of time each week, some teachers would not comply.

All four teachers indicated that their responsibilities exceeded teaching Judaic content areas as a subject and involved guiding and/or inspiring students religiously to improve their relationship with God. All four teachers also mentioned that they incorporate "extra" subject matter into the classroom that was specifically chosen to meet student needs. When asked what specific "extra" subjects they incorporate, all four teachers indicated that there were no specific books or subjects, however two of them mentioned that they often incorporated ideas from *pirkei avot*, a book comprised of ethical lessons from early Torah sages, one teacher indicated that he often incorporated ideas that related to students' struggles and successes drawn from the weekly Torah portion (*parsha*), and another teacher indicated how he typically drew information from an array of books to aid in transforming Talmud study into applicable Jewish law.

When teachers were asked their perceptions of how students related to prayer with regard to the literal translations of Hebrew words, the meanings behind literal word definitions, the levels of value tied to the experience of praying, and the overall quality of student prayers, all four teachers indicated that there was a range among students. On the less meaningful end of the

scale, two teachers indicated that they often heard their students complaining that prayer services were too long, and two teachers reported that they have heard their students say that they did not understand what they are saying while they prayed. On the other side of the scale, one teacher stated that he admired how strong some of the students' prayers were, while another teacher indicated that there was a wide range of students with many who did not understand what they were saying and some who were exceedingly passionate about their prayers.

With regards to current methods of teaching prayer, all teachers reported that they did not have formal curricula in place, but tried, in varying degrees, to incorporate teaching prayer informally. All teachers reported that they prayed with their students and considered role-modeling to be a valuable method of teaching prayer. Three teachers indicated that they provided feedback at the start of class about the in-school prayers that took place earlier that morning. When asked to describe the feedback provided, teachers indicated that feedback was generally a quick comment or a brief highlight of what specifically the teacher thought was "great" or "less than great" about prayers that morning, such as proper decorum, focused recitation of prayers, or timely attendance. Teachers indicated a range of frequency in providing this feedback from once every few weeks to approximately four times each week. Additionally, one teacher indicated that prayer was sometimes the focal topic of a monthly post-school learning night program (*mishmar*).

Concerning effective methodologies for improving prayer services, three teachers indicated that changing the current environment of school prayers could effectuate an improvement in student prayer. One teacher reported that the room was hot and stuffy, while other teachers indicated that it would be easier for students to focus if there were several smaller prayer groups, including some who provided explanation while praying to increase student

understanding. One teacher suggested increasing the number of role models in the room while praying by inviting older college or post-college students to pray with them. Another suggestion that emerged was increasing the frequency of mentioning prayer in class to highlight its importance. One teacher suggested that teachers could spend time teaching core values that might help students to further develop as people and also help them develop better relationships with God. For example, if students were taught to feel sincere gratitude toward their parents for what they provide, then they might more readily understand what it means to feel genuine gratitude towards God for what He provides.

As for ineffective methods for teaching prayer, two teachers shared that spending significant time during prayer asking students to remain quiet and engaged in prayer was ineffective and took away from their ability to properly role model what prayer should look like. One teacher posited that a prayer curriculum would be ineffective as "knowledge does not lead to action in this context."

Regarding challenges that may arise in incorporating a prayer curriculum, three teachers indicated that while a prayer curriculum would be helpful, there are significant time constraints regarding meeting student needs, and it would be difficult to introduce another topic to focus on. One teacher, as mentioned earlier, felt that a prayer curriculum would not be effective in teaching students how to relate to prayer and believed that teachers would not incorporate subjects if they did not wish to. As mentioned earlier, two teachers felt that the environment of the prayer room was not conducive for teaching students to pray meaningfully. Two teachers noted that teachers would likely perceive teaching prayer to be juvenile for high school students and not a good use of time, and two teachers indicated that teachers would not incorporate it into their classrooms even if asked to by the administration. Lastly, one teacher indicated that while

teaching students to intellectually understand a concept can often be taught with relative ease,

teaching a student to *feel* an experience is difficult.

Chapter V

DISCUSSION

A needs assessment for a prayer curriculum was conducted at a Jewish modern- orthodox boys' high school in the metropolitan New York region. The school principal expressed interest in learning about student struggles with prayer and how teachers are currently addressing those needs. All 86 ninth-grade students and all five ninth-grade Judaic teachers were invited to participate in the study. Although the parents of 67 students signed consent for their children to participate, only 32 of those students were available to participate at the time the study was conducted. These students answered survey questions regarding their background, prayer quality, and prayer education history. Four ninth-grade teachers signed consent forms to participate in the study and engaged in interviews with the investigator that focused on their perceptions of student prayer, how they teach prayer, what would be the most effective methods for teaching prayer, and what challenges might be encountered in introducing prayer as an area of educational focus.

I.   Student Background

Regarding the homogeneity of the student population evaluated, all students were male, enrolled in ninth-grade of the same dual-curriculum high school, and attended Jewish orthodox schools from a young age, 94% of which attended since kindergarten or earlier. As noted above, all ninth-grade students were invited to participate in the study and as a result the study sample included students from across academic tracks. Survey results indicated that most students (84%) were brought up in homes with a father that regularly (often or almost always) attended prayers

three times daily. As the question only asked about fathers who attended *three* times daily, it is possible to speculate that some of the remaining 16% of student responses would indicate that their fathers attend prayer services twice or at least once daily. While there were certainly differences among family dynamics and cultures, synagogue affiliations and their respective cultures, and other exterior influences that affect individual students, this study represented a homogenous sample of students that may be generalized to other students with similar familial, religious, and educational backgrounds.

Regarding the behavioral aspect of student prayers, most students prayed regularly. Nearly all students (94%) prayed three times daily on school-days, and more than four-out-of-five students (81%) prayed three times daily on non-school-days, most of whom prayed with a quorum of ten men who reached the age of thirteen (84% in school, 59% outside of school). Additionally, 13% of students endorsed praying two times daily on non-school days which revealed that on non-school-days 84% of students prayed at least two times. Not a single student prayed "0 Times" daily. Although most student responses indicated that their parents encouraged them to pray on non-school-days, the range in responses might have been reflective, in part, of children's self-motivation to pray or a routine that did not require parental involvement rather than a lack of desire for parents to be involved. The percentage of parents who encouraged their children to attend prayer services each morning was comparable to the percentage of students' non-school-day prayer attendance leaving room for speculation that parental encouragement was effective for adolescent prayer attendance on non-school-days. Concerning punctuality to prayer services, 41% of students typically arrived either on time or early on non-school days while 44% typically arrived 5-10 minutes late. Although punctuality may be indicative of the value that students afforded to prayer, it is possible that other factors, such as transportation and personal or

familial responsibilities, prevented some adolescents from regularly arriving to synagogue in a timely fashion.

Overall, 94% of students prayed at least two times daily inside and outside of school. On non-school days, most students attended services in a synagogue and arrived early, on-time, or a few minutes late. However, there was a considerable number of students who, on non-school-days, arrived at synagogue for morning services more than ten minutes late (13%) or did not attend at all (3%), and a significant number of students prayed with a quorum of ten males who reached the age of thirteen once or no times daily (19%) on non-school days.

II.   Prayer Quality

Student surveys indicated a wide range of student prayer quality, as teachers anticipated during their teacher interviews. On the favorable end, 9% of students could mechanically translate at least 75% of the Hebrew text of prayer. However, 66% of students could translate fewer than half of the words including 41% who indicated they could translate fewer than 25% of the words. Results were similar for internalizing the meaning of the words while they prayed. Only 9% of students internalized 75% or more of the prayer text meaning, while the majority, 69%, internalized meaning for fewer than half the words. Although the majority of students could not translate and failed to internalize the majority of words, 62% of students were often or almost always careful to say every word when they prayed, 63% of students were often focused for nearly the entire morning service, and 53% said they thought about and focused on God during most or almost all of the prayer service. These results may indicate that students were taught to conceptually appreciate prayer as a time to encounter God and were trained to value

recitation of the prayer text, however students may not have been effectively trained to translate and internalize the words they recite.

As noted above, 62% of students were usually careful to say every word of prayer. However, it is unclear why the other 38% of students did not say every word. It may be a result of students' poor understanding of the prayer text, poor reading and comprehension skills, or due to time constraints caused by late arrival. Similarly, the finding that 37% of students were generally unfocused for morning services may reflect students' poor understanding of the prayer text, lack of interest in prayer text, or high level of distractibility. The survey did not probe reasons why students skipped words or were unfocused and such probes could be material for further research.

Additionally, it is perhaps not surprising that 60% of students indicated that their prayers only sometimes or never took on different meanings each day. It is unreasonable to expect individuals who do not understand the vast majority of the prayer text to extract new emotionally stirring connections to the prayer text each day. However, as noted above, some students did derive meaningful experiences from praying despite their unfamiliarity with the translation and lack of personal connections to the prayer text.

Regarding teacher perceptions of student prayer quality, all teachers indicated that there was a range in students' ability to translate and extract personal meaning from the prayer text, and teachers were overall nearly accurate in their assessment of student averages. On a scale from 1-10, with "1" indicating students could barely translate any of the words of prayer and "10" indicating that students could translate all of the words of prayer, teachers' responses ranged from 1-5 when in reality 41% of students indicated they could translate 0-25% of the words and the overall average of students' ability to translate words was slightly more than 25-

50%. Similarly, on the same scale of 1-10 with "1" indicating students could barely relate to the words of prayer beyond the literal definitions of the words, and "10" indicating that students could relate to all of the words of prayer beyond the literal definitions of the words, teachers' responses ranged from 1-5 when in reality 41% of students indicated they could relate to 0-25% of the words and the overall average of students' ability to relate to the words was 25-50%. This indicates that the average as reported by "mode" for both questions was in the 0-25% range , or a teacher response of "1-3," while the average as reported by "mean" was approximately 25-50%, or a teacher response of "3-5." These scores suggest that while a significant portion of students could translate and derive personal meaning from 0-25% of the words, there was a minority of students with better Hebrew skills and this significantly lifted the student average.

With regards to connecting to God during prayer, 69% of students "often" expressed their personal thoughts to God while praying and another 28% of students had this experience "sometimes." When students had something they really wanted or needed, only 66% of students, or 3% less than those who incorporated typical every-day personal thoughts, incorporated those needs into their prayers. The fact that 94% of students expressed personal needs and thoughts to God at least occasionally indicated an overwhelmingly strong conceptual student-understanding of a key function in prayer; developing and maintaining a relationship with God. However, there was concern for the considerable number of students that struggled to accomplish this regularly. In fact, 50% of students did not "often" feel the presence of God while praying minimally twice a week, and students envisioned themselves standing before God at some point each day even less frequently. It appeared that students were overall conceptually aware that prayer is an auspicious time for connecting to God and many students utilized prayer-time to foster this relationship. Many students, however, appeared to find difficulty in transforming the conceptual

understanding of prayer into the meaningful practice of prayer and therefore struggled to envision themselves standing in the presence of God and relating personal matters to Him.

Overall, students indicated that the meaning they attributed to prayer was higher than their understanding of the words of prayer. Sixty-three percent of students indicated that they "often" or "almost always" found prayer to be a meaningful experience and, when asked to ascribe adjectives to their experiences with prayer, more than half of the students chose "meaningful" as a fitting description. In fact, significantly more positive words were chosen than negative words, with the words "meaningful," "thought-provoking," "uplifting," and "inspiring" emerging most frequently on the positive end of the scale, and "too long" indicated most frequently on the negative end of the scale. Based on 41% of students who reported understanding 0-25% of the text of prayer, it appears that the meaning ascribed to prayer by most of the students was either derived from their general conceptual understanding of the transcendent experience of prayer and/or their ability to think about their relationship with God while praying.

Analysis of this data suggests that while most students often found prayer to be a meaningful experience overall, a significant minority of students did not, and students ranged in their abilities to translate and relate to the words of prayer with most students understanding 0-25% of the words. It appears that school-focus on improving student understanding of prayer text and aiding students in extracting meaning from prayer is warranted and could potentially benefit a significant portion of students.

III.   Prayer Education

All ninth-grade teachers felt empowered to develop their own methods of teaching prayer within the broad contours delineated by the school administration, and all teachers incorporated their own self-selected Judaic sources and disciplines to meet student needs. Additionally, all teachers felt that their roles extend beyond teaching Talmud and also included inspiring and guiding students, assisting students in improving their relationships with God, and preparing students for independence in religious and spiritual matters. However, despite this backdrop and the fact that most teachers indicated that student prayer quality was less than what was realistically ideal for students' developmental age and maturity level, teachers did not formally incorporate prayer into their curricula. Teachers ranged in frequency of incorporating prayer education informally into their classrooms via teacher role-modeling, post-prayer feedback, and occasional class discussion as it related to other classroom subject-matter. Perhaps not surprisingly, 42% of students felt that prayer was *never* taught informally in class with another 26% indicating that informal prayer education occurred only *occasionally* in class discussion. These student responses may be attributed to lack of informal prayer education or to students not recognizing that teacher feedback falls under the category of "prayer education." Although prayer education was not an area of emphasis in the school, 77% of students indicated that their prayers improved since they began high school. This improved student prayer quality may be suggestive of effective teaching methodologies employed by teachers, a natural improvement commensurate with developmental growth and unrelated to school, or a result of presenting the question as "true" or "false" rather than presenting more options. Regardless, this question provided somewhat limiting information as it did not specify what aspects of prayer improved and it did not ask students to rate their prayer quality prior to high school in relation to the time

of the study, leaving room to speculate that gains in prayer quality were marginal if measurable at all. Overall, however, 90% of students indicated that they were interested in improving the quality of their prayers. Based on the data, it appears that (1) teachers extended themselves beyond their role as educators of a specified subject-matter and instead cared for their students' spiritual needs, (2) teachers correctly identified a general need for improvement in student prayer quality, (3) students expressed desire to improve the quality of their prayers, (4) and overall prayer was not sufficiently addressed, formally or informally, in the classroom setting.

Eighty-eight percent of students thought about difficult questions relating to God that they found difficult to answer at least occasionally, with 47% indicating that these thoughts occurred "often" or "almost always." However, students varied in their level of comfort approaching teachers to discuss these challenging questions with a significant 35% of students that indicated they either "sometimes" or "never" felt comfortable. As noted in chapter II, adolescents have a newly developed capacity to think about abstract concepts such as life-purpose, beliefs, relationship with God, and ethical dilemmas. According to the research of Piaget and Elkind, it is developmentally appropriate for boys in ninth-grade to encounter perplexing thoughts about who they are as individuals, what is God, and how they understand their relationship with God. While there are many students that indicated that they would feel comfortable approaching teachers with these types of questions, the survey failed to ask how likely they would proactively approach teachers about their challenges, and there were a significant number of students who indicated that they did not feel comfortable or at least not a high-level of comfort in discussing these matters with teachers. It appears beneficial for the school to create a platform for welcoming questions of this nature that permits open dialogue together with guided teacher support.

In asking teachers what they believed would be effective methods for improving student prayer in school and what challenges might arise in implementing these methods, many suggestions abounded. Multiple teachers commented on the prayer room environment suggesting that it was too hot, over-crowded, and diverse in student ability-levels with regard to connecting to prayer. Teachers suggested smaller prayer groups with some that offer explanatory services. Additionally, teachers suggested increasing the number of role-models that pray with students, increasing discussion of prayer in the classroom to highlight its importance, and increasing student self-awareness as a precursor to awareness of God.

Regarding difficulties or challenges in teaching prayer, teachers provided answers that ranged from practical challenges in the classroom to systemic school challenges. Two teachers mentioned that role-modeling was difficult because much of their prayer time with students was devoted to maintaining decorum rather than setting an example of how to connect to God in prayer. One teacher noted that teaching students conceptually about prayer was not a challenge but teaching students how to *feel* prayer is difficult. Most teachers noted that time-constraint was the biggest barrier to focusing on prayer in class as there was limited time in their classes and significant areas or Judaic studies to address. Some teachers believed that focusing on prayer as a school-subject was juvenile for high school students, and it should have instead been focused on more heavily in elementary and middle school, with some teachers even indicating that there are teachers that would not teach prayer even if asked by the administration.

Overall, recognition is due to the school principal for having expressed interest in evaluating strengths and weaknesses in students' prayer quality and prayer education, and to all teachers who shared a common goal of teaching, inspiring, and nurturing their students' spiritual development. Despite the variance in teacher opinions regarding the most effective methods to

reach this goal, all teachers willingly participated in the study to best assist and support their students. This spoke volumes about the culture of the school. Students overall prayed regularly inside and outside of school, however there was significant room for improvement in the quality of their prayers. Some salient points that emerged regarding prayer education include; (1) Every student regularly prayed at least once on non-school days, with 81% of students praying three times, most of which were with a quorum of ten males who reached the age of 13. Although the ideal goal was to have 100% of students willingly praying three times daily at a synagogue with purpose and meaning, the overwhelming majority of students regularly engaged in the behavioral aspect of praying. (2) Students overall found prayer to be a meaningful experience and 90% of students expressed interest in improving the quality of their prayers. (3) Students' understanding and ability to extract meaning from the prayer text was substandard and in need of improvement. There was a need for students to exceed beyond the mechanics of behavioral involvement in prayer, and bring God into their prayers, or as a teacher phrased it, go beyond the conceptual understanding of prayer and help students "*feel*" prayer. (4) Consistent with their developmental age, many students indicated that they at least occasionally had significant questions relating to God that they struggled to answer and there was variance in responses regarding their level of comfort in approaching teachers to discuss these struggles. Questions relating to God should be embraced with a platform that allows for classroom discussion and guided resolutions, rather than allowing for these questions to remain unanswered or for students to potentially reach resolutions to their questions that may be incongruent with Jewish traditional values and philosophies. (5) As some teachers mentioned, much of the student-disconnect to prayer could be attributed to a lack of effective prayer education prior to high school, however whatever the

cause, it was clear that there were deficiencies and they were not being addressed enough in school.

Though not directly the focus of this study, there also appeared to be systemic concern with teachers not always following the guidelines set by administration which, aside from leading to an unhealthy school infrastructure, could seriously negate a school focus on improving student prayer or any other administrative mission. Teachers indicated an array of challenges in focusing on educating students in prayer, however the potential gains were too significant to let these barriers impede all efforts. A school focus on improving student prayer while remaining sensitive to teacher classroom time-constraints was warranted.

IV.   Recommendations for Designing and Implementing a Time-Balanced Prayer Curriculum

Consistent with the curriculum development stages outlined by Hilda Taba, this study has addressed the first step in forming a curriculum by diagnosing the educational needs of ninth-grade students as they relate to prayer. Some possible objectives that may emerge are a need for students to improve their understanding and personal meaning attached to prayer text, a need to emotionally stir students to relate to God while praying, and a need to create a platform that allows students to explore difficult questions regarding self-identity, God, and the nature of the relationship between students and God. Together with teachers, the next steps in the curriculum development process would be selecting content material that addresses these objectives, organizing the content material into modules for presentation, determining if there is a particular learning experience that would convey this information beyond didactic lecture and class-discussion, determining the sequence of how each module should be presented, and determining

an evaluative process that allows students to demonstrate that they absorbed the outlined material. While these stages are traditionally employed to create a typical classroom curriculum, the Taba method does not necessarily need to be for a formal curriculum that occupies significant class time and may be utilized for a more informal "curriculum" of organized material to teach.

In line with teacher concerns for students gaining an understanding of prayer but also an emotional attachment to prayer, Taba's fundamental goals in teaching include cognitive and emotional gains. These goals are; (1) concept formation via open questions that elicit student thoughts and opinions, (2) challenging students to critically think about the purpose of material and the varying perspectives of material to allow students to gain a deep and realistic grasp of material, (3) application and generalization of material to make it personal and meaningful, and (4) interpretation of feelings attitudes, and values where students are charged to think beyond the conceptual constructs that arose in discussion and consider how they personally feel about the content to embrace personal connection to the material taught. Taba's methodology suggests that students learn from challenging each other, considering other perspectives on class material weighed against their own perspectives, and ultimately by teacher guidance in relating these newly found perspectives to their own emotions and beliefs. This requires classroom discussions that are teacher-led and guided but remain open for student debate and perspective-taking.

To relate this theory to the current study, teachers may decide to incorporate a guided prayer discussion in class once every other week for 30 minutes on a set day with a specific topic that teachers plan in advance. Based on questions that students choose in advance, the teacher might ask an open-ended question to warm-up student conversation and allow them to begin forming their own opinions, and then gently challenge student perspectives until they begin to

openly debate opposing opinions that emerge in discussion. At this point the teacher becomes a moderator to keep the conversation tame and fluid, while occasionally sprinkling questions to strengthen student opinions and consider opposing perspectives. The teacher then transforms this discussion into application to bridge theory and practice. Finally, and perhaps most importantly in addressing current student needs, teachers guide students in considering how they emotionally connect to the class conclusions and varying perspectives that emerged during class discussion.

In addition to the formal aspects of the newly adopted prayer curriculum addressing students' conceptual and emotional relationship to prayer and God, the National Research Council's Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education presents numerous educational strategies that may aid in achieving deeper learning. One such strategy is predicated on the data that suggests that students learn most deeply when they are interested in the subject-matter, they believe they are capable of achievement, and, most importantly, they attribute their performance to effort rather than to ability. Therefore, priming student motivation in having meaningful prayer is essential and may be accomplished by observing others successfully experiencing meaningful prayer (role-modeling) and abundant positive encouragement. Accordingly, it is essential that teachers are able to be present during prayer time to pray rather than be held responsible to keep decorum. If possible, it may be productive to have additional staff members present at prayer services to monitor decorum while teachers engage in prayer, and/or invite selected college or post-college students to join prayer services, as one teacher suggested, to increase the number of role models present. Additionally, it is critical that teachers, or other staff present, continuously encourage students that they are capable of having a meaningful prayer service.

Most teachers indicated that they provide feedback of student prayer services at least occasionally. Another educational strategy proposed by the National Research Council (National Research Council, 2013) is providing explanatory feedback, a form of feedback that focuses on explaining why a particular practice is incorrect or insufficient rather than simply flagging errors. Explanatory feedback is proven as the most effective form of feedback and is critical in both aiding student acquisition of skills and promoting deeper learning. As many teachers already incorporate prayer feedback into their classroom teaching routines, incorporating this research-based form of feedback should not involve taking away additional class time and may be more effective.

While the investigator of this study generally agrees with the sentiment shared by some teachers that the overall substandard student ability to translate and find meaning in prayer text is an issue that should have been addressed in elementary and middle schools, the reality of the issue cannot be retroactively addressed. Certainly, elementary and middle schools should be attuned to this issue and address it within the confines of their schools, however with the current issue presenting in high school, it seems warranted for teachers to at least provide occasional and optional avenues for students to improve their skills in translating and understanding prayer texts. Although encouraging students to use a prayer book that includes Hebrew with age-appropriate English translation is an important first step, the National Research Council provides further research-driven strategies that could be utilized to promote deeper understanding of the prayer text. Teachers could create platforms for students to elaborate, question and self-explain the content that emerges in prayer text. This could be accomplished by creating optional groups where students meet occasionally with a teacher present and actively engage selected materials to process content in their own words rather than memorizing information as presented in the

prayer text. Students might be asked to explain a text in their own words aloud to the group, and students might be challenged on the material they just read with questions such as *why*, *how*, *what if*, and *so what*.

Lastly, consistent with Goldmintz (2007) and the feedback provided by some of the teachers during teacher interviews, if practically possible it would appear beneficial to improve the environment of prayer services in school. This could be accomplished by dividing the school-wide prayer service into several smaller prayer groups allowing for nuanced specifications for each group including varying speeds of prayer, incorporating explanatory components into prayer, and overall decreasing the distractions that result from large crowds in confined spaces. In each prayer room, care should be taken to ensure temperatures are appropriate, uplifting pictures are hung around the room for additional pictorial inspiration, and, as noted above, each room contains multiple role models participating in the prayer services. Incorporating short daily or weekly prayer education sessions targeted at improving prayer quality at opportune moments during prayer services could also aid in improving student prayer as it may provide a new dimension of student thought in the moment.

V.   Limitations

As a limitation of this study, all data relied on self-report responses. Although teachers were informed that their responses would be kept anonymous and shared only in aggregate form, there was room for social desirability bias where teachers may have been compelled to respond in a fashion that represents how they wanted to be perceived rather than providing responses that reflected their honest opinions and practices. For students, the SDRS-5 was utilized to evaluate the presence of social desirability responses and scores indicated minimal bias. However,

although inconsistencies emerged infrequently, there still may have been response bias as indicated by inconsistencies found in some responses between teachers and students. For example, all four teachers indicated that they do not formally educate students in prayer, yet only 52% of students indicated that they never received formal prayer education in the classroom as defined as "a set time devoted to the subject of prayer" in class. These inconsistencies appear to have emerged from a lack of specificity in some of the survey questions.

Additionally, for student surveys there was no formal evaluation for reliability or internal consistency implemented. This left room for threats to internal and external reliability. Regarding internal reliability, one may extract important information about student behavior and thoughts regarding prayer from this study, however one cannot form causational conclusions about the relationship between the two. Additional questions targeted to such interactions between data points could possibly provide causational data. Regarding external reliability, the sample consisted of a relatively small randomized group within the ninth-grade of one homogenous boys' modern-orthodox school. While conclusions might be relatable to other students in this setting and perhaps students in other similar educational settings, the homogeneity of this study limits the generalizability of conclusions to other populations. The data does not reflect how females relate to prayer, how males learn and relate to prayer in co-educational settings, or how males in single-gender educational settings relate to prayer beyond the Jewish modern-orthodox school systems.

VI.   Suggestions for Future Research

Education of religious prayer is an area that is largely understudied with nearly no scientific studies dedicated to the field of Jewish prayer in particular. As this study indicated,

Jewish prayer education requires improvement and therefore it is incumbent upon researchers to further this field of study and improve pedagogical methods.

Further research in Jewish prayer is needed for both content and population. Regarding content, it would be beneficial to better understand how an individual's family and community impact his or her relationship with prayer. The investigator firmly believes that when it comes to religious matters, families and schools share a partnership in educating a child. Religious education is not relegated to classroom education alone but requires shared values and active role-modeling from parents and community members in addition to teachers. Based on this premise, it would be important to study how frequently and with what methods parents encourage their children to pray. Included in this area of study, it would be of interest to explore parent attitudes toward prayer, their current prayer quality, their frequency in attending prayer services at synagogue, and the impact this has on their children.

Future study should focus more on what students find meaningful about prayer so as to expand on areas already meeting with success, and on what is impeding students' ability to find meaning in prayer so as to better address these needs in the classroom setting. Also, future studies should include more detailed questions regarding prior prayer education to better understand what has and has not been focused on in the past so that improvements could be made in prayer education in elementary and middle schools as well. Similar to Ene's proposed layout of prayer curricula across age-ranges that build upon each other and consistent with Piaget and Elkind's stages of development as detailed in chapter II, it appears beneficial to design a prayer education that challenges students to improve their understanding of prayer commensurate with their developmental ages. With a larger educational framework focused on prayer, it is possible that by the time students reach ninth-grade a significantly larger percentage

of students should be able to translate and extract personal meaning from 75-100% of the prayer text and thereby allow ninth-grade teachers to focus their prayer curricula on adolescent-appropriate material such as student relationships with God and their own identities. Lastly, it would likely be beneficial to ask students what has and has not worked for them in the past regarding prayer education to better evaluate, modify, and develop effective teaching methodologies for prayer.

Regarding populations for future studies, this study focused on a small homogenous study sample, which limited its generalizability to educational institutions with similar constructs. A larger study surveying all-girls schools, and co-educational schools could potentially help improve education of prayer across other Jewish modern-orthodox high schools. However, it would be worthwhile to also study prayer education in Jewish modern-orthodox elementary and middle schools to evaluate and improve prayer education on those levels, so that when students arrive in high school prayer education can focus on developmentally appropriate content rather than translation of prayer text and extracting basic personal meaning. Lastly, there is need to replicate this study and the abovementioned future studies for other sects of Judaism as well. Quality of prayer and prayer education appear to be pervasive concerns across sects of Judaism and across religions as well. These challenges will be better addressed with the illumination of student-based and teacher-based data rather than blindly continuing current methods that appear to be lacking success with 21st century students. With school administrations and teachers that share an interest in effectively aiding their students to develop religiously and spiritually, coupled with an awareness of student needs, such as the teachers and administrators in the current study, future research may positively impact students' ability to relate to God and pray meaningfully.

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APPENDIX A
Teacher Interview

This is an anonymous interview. Your name will not be shared in connection with any of your responses; responses will only be shared in aggregate form, together with the other interviews conducted. Please speak only of your experiences rather than the experiences of others or desired experiences, unless specifically asked otherwise. There is no judgment in this interview. This survey should take roughly 20 minutes to complete. Thank you in advance for sharing your honest thoughts, opinions, and experiences.

1) What subject(s) do you teach?

2) How many years have you taught in this school?

3) How many years have you taught altogether?

4) How is your curriculum established? (i.e. Are you provided with a pre-established curriculum from the school? Does the school give you general guidelines for forming your own curriculum? Etc.)

   a. Does the school allow for you to incorporate personal areas of interest into the lesson plan?
   b. If so, what "extra" items do you typically incorporate in your curriculum?

5) Do you typically pray (daven) with your students?
   a. If so, what value do you feel this serves?

6) Keeping in mind the age of your students, I'm going to ask you several scale-based questions, 1-10, where "1" is the absolute worst an area could be and "10" is ideal. How would you rate the students';
   a. Understanding of what the words of prayers mean _____
   b. Ability to relate to the words of prayer (i.e. beyond literal meaning) _____
   c. Engagement in prayer (focused) _____
   d. Perception of prayer (ex: useless – meaningful) _____
   e. Overall quality of prayer _____
   f. If different, what do you think would be a more reasonable expectation for the quality of students' prayer in school (from that same scale of 1-10?) _____

7) Is prayer (tefillah) part of your formal curriculum? (i.e. is there time set aside specifically for teaching prayer on a regular basis)
   a. If YES,
      i. Please elaborate (what specifically about prayer is taught and how is it taught):

      ii. Are there particular strategies/techniques/models that you utilize in teaching prayer?

      iii. How often is it taught?

      iv. What are your goals when teaching prayer? (understanding meaning of words? Making text of prayer relatable? Making experience of praying meaningful? Etc.)

      v. How do you monitor if these goals are met?

  b. If NO, does prayer occasionally come up as a discussion point in class?
      i. How often?

      ii. Is this intended or happens by chance when related to other subjects?

      iii. Do you believe that prayer should be incorporated into the school curriculum? Why/why not?

8) What do you think would be the biggest challenge in beginning a new curriculum for prayer?

9) How do you think focusing on improving an adolescent students' connectivity to prayer could be beneficial for that student?

10) Do you think there is more school could do to improve the quality of student prayers? Please explain:

APPENDIX B
Student Survey

T*his is an anonymous survey. Please be as honest as possible and speak only of **your experiences**. There is no judgment. This entire survey should take roughly 15-20 minutes to complete. Thank you in advance for taking a few moments to consider each question and sharing your honest thoughts, opinions, and experiences.*

For each of the 5 questions listed in the table below, please place an "X" in the corresponding box. Do not mark more than one "X" per question.

Questions	Definitely True	Mostly True	Don't Know	Mostly False	Definitely False
1) I am always courteous to people who are disagreeable					
2) There have been occasions where I took advantage of someone					
3) I sometimes try to get even rather than forgive and forget					
4) I sometimes feel resentful when I don't get my way					
5) No matter who I'm talking to I'm always a good listener					

Please circle the answers below that most accurately reflect your experiences. Please do not leave any questions blank. Feel free to write a short note where you feel answers require further explanation.

Background:

1) I have been going to an orthodox Jewish school since;

Kindergarten (or before)   Elementary school (1-5th grade)   Middle school (6-8th grade)   High School

2) On a typical school day I pray;

0 times   1 time   2 times   3 times   more than 3 times

3) On a typical non-school day (Friday or Sunday depending on time of year) I pray;

0 times   1 time   2 times   3 times   more than 3 times

4) On a typical school day I usually pray with a minimum of ten people (minyan);

0 times   1 time   2 times   3 times   more than 3 times

5) On a typical non-school day I usually pray <u>with a minimum of ten people (minyan);</u>

0 times   1 time   2 times   3 times   more than 3 times

6) On a typical non-school day, my parents encourage me to attend shacharis (morning service)

Almost Always   Often   Sometimes   Never

7) My father prays in synagogue (shul) three times a day

Almost Always   Often   Sometimes   Never

8) When I'm home for Shabbat, I pray alongside my father

Almost Always   Often   Sometimes   Never

Quality of Prayer:

9) When I pray in shul <u>near home</u>, I have a specific seat/section that I sit in

Almost Always   Often   Sometimes   Never

10) When I pray <u>in school</u>, I have a specific seat/section that I sit in

Almost Always   Often   Sometimes   Never

11) On the morning of a non-school day, I <u>usually</u> arrive at shul;

At least 5 minutes early   On Time   5-10 minutes late   More than 10 minutes late   I don't go

12) On a typical Shabbat morning I <u>usually</u> arrive at synagogue (shul);

At least 5 minutes early   On Time   5-10 minutes late   More than 10 minutes late   I don't go

13) If asked to translate the words of weekday morning prayer into English, I would be able to translate _____ of the words with ease.

75- 100%   50- 75%   25- 50%   0-25%

14) When I pray, I am careful to say every word

Almost Always   Often   Sometimes   Never

15) When I pray shacharit (morning prayers) I am focused for nearly the entire service

Almost Always   Often   Sometimes   Never

16) For what percentage of prayers do you typically think about the <u>meaning</u> of the words as you say them?

75- 100%   50- 75%   25- 50%   0-25%

17) The words of prayer have deep or personal <u>meaning</u> for me while I recite them

Almost Always   Often   Sometimes   Never

18) I sometimes express my personal thoughts and feelings to God while I pray

Almost Always   Often   Sometimes   Never

19) When there is something I really want or need I usually incorporate it during prayers

Almost Always   Often   Sometimes   Never

20) I feel the presence of (or a close connection with) God while I pray at least 2 times <u>A WEEK</u>

Almost Always   Often   Sometimes   Never

21) Whether before, during, or after I pray, there is a point nearly every day when <u>I envision myself</u> standing before God

Almost Always   Often   Sometimes   Never

22) My mind wanders during prayer

Almost Always   Often   Sometimes   Never

23) I feel that my prayers take on a different meaning each day

Almost Always   Often   Sometimes   Never

24) For how much of prayer are you thinking about and focused on God?

Almost All   Most   Some   Barely any

25) I would go to synagogue to pray even if I knew no family members or friends would be there

Almost Always   Often   Sometimes   Never

26) Overall, I usually find prayer to be a meaningful experience

Almost Always   Often   Sometimes   Never

27) Please circle the <u>words</u> that best describe your typical experience while praying

Uplifting   Boring   Too-long   Relaxing   Fun   Exhausting   Difficult   Confusing   Pointless
Meaningful   Thought-Provoking   Mindless   Restricting   Inspirational   Refreshing

<u>Education of Prayer</u>:

28) My teachers <u>formally</u> teach prayer in <u>class</u> (e.g. set time devoted to the subject of prayer)

Every Day   Once a Week   Once a Month
    Never

29) My teachers <u>informally</u> teach prayer in <u>class</u> (e.g. it comes up in class discussion naturally)

Every Day   Once a Week   Once a Month
    Never

30) My teachers <u>formally</u> teach prayer in the <u>prayer room/Shul/Beit Medrash</u> (e.g. Someone speaks about the topic of prayer on a daily basis during or after prayers)

Every Day   Once a Week   Once a Month
    Never

31) My teachers provide and encourage optional opportunities to learn about prayer (ex: learning groups [chaburot]/electives/clubs etc.)

Every Day   Once a Week   Once a Month
          Never

32) The last time I can remember being formally taught prayer in school, I was roughly _____ years old;

4-7 (Pre-K -2nd grade)   8-10 (3rd-5th grade)   11-13 (Middle School)

 14 – current (High School)   I can't remember ever being taught prayer in school

33) I think about questions relating to God that are difficult to answer

   Almost Always   Often   Sometimes   Never

34) Attendance is taken to see if I am at prayer in school
   Almost Always   Often   Sometimes   Never

35) My school monitors me during prayer to ensure I am engaged
   Almost Always   Often   Sometimes   Never

36) My teachers pray with me during prayers in school
   Almost Always   Often   Sometimes   Never

37) I feel comfortable speaking with a Rebbe (teacher) about difficult questions relating to God
   Definitely True   Mostly true   Sometimes True   Not True
   At All

_____

38) This school year, a teacher has challenged me to critically think about the quality of my prayer at least once
            True / False

39) My teachers sometimes use aids to help teach prayer in class such as special prayer books designed for classroom instruction, prayer-themed pictures, and handouts to help us focus
            True / False

40) The quality of my prayers have improved since I began high school
            True / False

41) I am interested in improving the quality of my prayer
            True / False