**How is literature taught in** **State religious and Ultra-orthodox classrooms in Israel? Values, a current context, the students’ world or an aesthetic experience?**

**What is the Story of Teaching Literature in State religious and Ultra-orthodox classrooms in Israel?**

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Dear Dr. Segev,  
  
Thank you for submitting your manuscript "How is literature taught in State religious and Ultra-orthodox classrooms in Israel? Values, a current context, the students’ world or an aesthetic experience?," to the Journal of Jewish Education.  
  
Whilst this manuscript has potential, you need to address the following issues before it can be sent for review:  
  
1.  The title is too unwieldy. Please find a more succinct way of titling your work.  
  
2.  Have your manuscript read by a native English speaker and make changes accordingly. Even the first sentence in the abstract "The examination of the ongoing situation within the walls of the classroom in literature lessons in the framework of linguistic education lessons in State religious and Ultra-orthodox elementary schools in Israel has scarcely been related to in research" is not clear, plain, academic English. Your work needs to flow in an articulate, smooth way. This is a significant issue.  
  
3. I am surprised that your examples of State religious education are from Pakistan and Holland, and do not include the UK, which has a historical, well established and well documented history of State religious education. Please address this.  
  
4. Your work reads like a precis of a dissertation. I attach various articles that should help you understand how to turn a dissertation into an article. You need to find a focus. We do not need every element of your dissertation. You need to tell a story.  
  
5. You have explained differences between your results for the State religious and ultra-orthodox classrooms. My challenge to you is - so what?  What are the implications of this for Jewish education? What is the value of your study for a reader of the Journal of Jewish Education?  
  
If you decide to undertake the additional work necessary, then please do re-submit your manuscript and I will read it again, to determine whether or not it is ready for review.  
  
With best wishes,  
  
Helena Miller  
  
Senior Editor

**Abstract**

The examination of the ongoing situation within the walls of the classroom in literature lessons in the framework of linguistic education lessons in State religious ang Ultra-orthodox elementary schools in Israel has scarcely been related to in research.

This article describes the results of a qualitative study which was conducted on lessons in State religious and Ultra-orthodox elementary schools. The study examined the literary works which the teachers had presented to their classes, the contexts in which they were taught, and the teachers’ responses to what had been learned in their lessons from a religious perspective, comparing the different sectors.

Keywords:

State RE, literature teaching in State religious schools, teachers’ approaches to literature teaching in State religious schools.

**Background**

**State RE**

Studies which examine ways of coping with multiculturality within countries, pose a country’s treatment of State RE as one of the criteria for social openness, which is manifested in the ongoing dialogue that exists between the different streams in society (Robben & Mercer, 2007). In the education systems of different countries in the world there are various models for mixing State RE with education for familiarizing the core ideas of religion. The UK, has a historical, well established and well documented history of State RE. In the UK, the governments wish is that the publics schools will reflect the Christianity because that is the dominant religious in the country (Stern, 2018).In that aspect it is similar to the Milazzian and the Israeli RE education . Another example to the way RE is conducted can be found in Pakistan, where State RE is part of the continuous learning in schools (Hamid, S. N., & Nadeem, T., 2020). A diffrent example which is similar in some perspectives to what is happening in Israel, is found in Holland, where two-thirds of the schools are Christian schools and the other third are state schools with no State religious affiliation. The Christian schools are funded by the state and are committed to a state curriculum, except for the State religious studies, which are taught based on a unique curriculum (Veugelers & Leeman, 2020) which is similar to what is happening in Israel . In countries which have chosen to lead State RE as part of the state education, one can find a variety of ways to cope with issues arising from the integration. One issue is accommodating a curriculum to the different State religious perceptions which exist among the public (Willaime, 2007, Pp 58-59). This issue poses the will to cater to, on the one hand, the needs of a religious population, which is interested in a curriculum based primarily on theological studies, and on the other hand the needs of a traditional population, which is interested in combining religious studies and core studies to allow for graduates of the education system to be integrated within the job circle (Hasson, 2018). Another issue is the extent of a country’s involvement in the contents and the management of State REal institutes, all the while centralizing the curriculum and accommodating it to the policy of the government. It has been found that when there is a combination of theological contents with core studies, there is little intervention on the part of a state in the RE, and autonomy is given to the State religious institution for the management of State religious institutes (Hasson, 2018). When a unified solution for the entire population is presented, a state’s involvement and intervention in the processes is greater (Reingold, Baratz & Abuhatzira, 2013).

The Israeli education system is composed of several of subsystems (Stern, 2018). This article will focus on the following subsystems: State RE system and the Ultra-orthodox education system. In those systems, teachers are expected to provide religious references even in lessons which do not deal with holy subjects, as part of shaping the students’ forming identity in State religious and Ultra-orthodox education (Dagan, 2006).

In Israel there is a wide variety of State religious representations, which are manifested in the school types: 1. A State religious representation – a diverse and relatively pluralistic population State religiously. In such schools one can find, among others, mixed classes, in which boys and girls study together. Those schools are budgeted by the state, and the curriculum is determined by the state. 2. An Ultra-orthodox representation – homogenous sex-segregated schools, which are partially budgeted by the state and the curriculum is acknowledged by the state. Under the umbrella of the term “State religious schools” and “Ultra-orthodox schools” there are various educational frameworks which demonstrate a variety of ideological perceptions among Ultra-orthodox society, which range on the spectrum in between conservativism and modernism, but this article is not the place to elaborate on them.

The curricula in the State RE are shared with the state education in Israel, except for subjects about which there is a large gap in worldviews between the state education and State RE. For those subjects there are unique curricula for the State RE in addition to the regular curricula. In this way, especially- designed readers have been produced for teaching literature in the State RE system, consisting of different literary texts from those taught in the general state-education system. The Ultra-orthodox district does not have one curriculum for teaching literature, and the different schools which fall under the definition “acknowledged (by the Ministry of Education) and unofficial”, enjoy the autonomy of creating a curriculum in literature in accordance with their worldviews. In July of 2019, a list of recommended literary works for teaching in Ultra-orthodox schools was posted on the Ultra-orthodox district website of the Ministry of Education. The lessons described in this article were recorded prior to posting that list.

**Literature Teaching in State religious Schools**

Many educators in Israel choose to teach books and literary works due to their literary-aesthetic value and their moral-educational contribution (Poyas, 2009). A study which examined Israeli teachers’ approaches to children’s literature (Elkad-Lehman & Gilat, 2009) found that children’s literature is perceived by educators as a source which supports the learning about the holidays and seasons of the year, and also as a source which assists in instilling values and introducing the Hebrew culture. The books which those teachers chose to teach reflect their moral conscious choice and reinforce their view of the books as an assistive tool for the learners’ moral education (Rosenthal, 2015), but many studies also approve the claim that an educator’s identity, namely, his or her perspectives, values, beliefs and opinions, is reflected in his or her professional decisions, in addition to his or her professional knowledge (Achituv, 2012, Achituv, 2013, gudmundsdottir, 1990, Grossman, 1990, & Shulman, 1997).

Looking closely at the way literature is placed in the curricula allows for an understanding of the policymakers’ perceptions of its underlying possibilities, in the aspect of promoting social-cultural perceptions. In the United States and Europe, literature learning is a part of language-and-culture learning in its broad sense and includes imparting language and literacy skills, developing an understanding of the aesthetic dimension, and moral discussions which are yielded from the literary works (Hasson, 2018). However, in Israel and other places in the world, teachers attempt to find religious ideas which will support their choice of a certain literary work, as a justification for bringing it into class, especially if that work is not part of a canonical corpus (Van Koeven & Leeman, 2011). In such cases, the meaning drawn from that work is not necessarily aesthetic (Gabrielsen, Blikstad-Balas, & Tengberg, 2019). Dorsey (1997) claims that literature can create conscious situations which destabilize the perceptions and beliefs according to which the reader has been shaped and in which he or she lives. This claim can account for situations in which teachers bring into class a literary work which reflects a complex reality and which might arouse discourse on religious and theological subjects, but avoid developing the discussion in directions that might deviate from the acceptable discourse and from the religious characteristics of their school. In this way they do not allow for the class to be an open and tolerant room which accepts pluralism (Berger, 2014) and religious individualism (Jackson, 2014, Woodhead and Catto, 2012) and allows for the expression and representation of secular views (Lipiäinen, Ubani and Viinikka, 2020, Taylor, 2007).

In elementary schools in Israel, literature learning is a part of the curriculum in linguistic education. Consequently, one can find in the different readers a combination of linguistic and literary activities following the reading of literary works.

In the curriculum of linguistic education in Israel, called “Hebrew – language and culture for state elementary schools and State religious schools”, it says:

“Reading fine literature at school is aimed particularly at providing aesthetic experiences, by which students will understand themselves and other people, develop their imagination and intellect, and foster a love for reading, literary awareness, and the ability to evaluate a literary work” (The Ministry of Education, 2003, P. 56).

Further on, the writers relate to literature as “a tool for instilling the treasures of culture and thought”, and warn one from “(turning) the reading in a literary work into a means of language teaching and letting it be only a serving tool for different subjects or subject matters” (The Ministry of Education, 2003, P. 56).

The instruction to refer to a literary text as an artistic genre with aesthetic qualities was started due to the ongoing situation in Israel both in the elementary schools and the teacher-training institutes regarding literature teaching in the teaching track for elementary schools. Literature learning introduces a learner to a unique world of texts with conventions of its own (Poyas, 2000). These conventions include ways of reading, tools for interpretation and criticism, ways of putting together, selecting and organizing the linguistic materials, creation manners, and research methods. According to Rosenblatt ( 1985), reading literature is an aesthetic transaction between a reader and a text, which involves an evocation of the reader while focusing on aesthetic actions and personal-internal processes, whereas non-literary texts encourage an efferent transaction between a reader and a text, whose meaning is about focusing on a text as a conductor and the transmitter of information.

In the majority of teacher-training institutes, literature teaching for elementary schoolchildren is not a separate specialization. Hence, most teachers who teach literature in elementary schools in Israel are not qualified for teaching literature. The relatively small number of hours spent on teaching literature in elementary school compels the teacher to spend more time on teaching other subjects, which comes at the expense of her professionalization in the field of literature (Orr, 2012). Research has found that in order to teach an effective lesson, a teacher has to have mastery both in the content knowledge of the lesson and in teaching methods (Shulman, 1986, Loewenberg, Ball,Phelps & Thames, 2008). Some teaching methods also involve an engagement of the students by assigning tasks. The question of what a good-quality task is preoccupies the researchers (Preatoriuos, Kelieme, Herbert&Pinger, 2018). (Winkler, 2020) views a good-quality task as a task which involves cognitive activation, a term which she breaks down into a task which has a number of clear qualities: a task which provokes challenging questions, stimulates the students to look for reasons and explanations, encourages further research of the subject, points out contrary opinions and facts, and encourages solutions which are not just either “black” or “white” (Winkler, 2020, P. 10).

As mentioned above, literature teaching in elementary school is made up of the many components. Due to the scarcity of research about literature teaching in State religious and Ultra-orthodox schools in Israel, we shall introduce the results of a study which examined those components.

The posed research questions were:

1. What characterizes the literary works chosen by the teachers among the different populations?
2. What context is used by the teachers to teach the literary works?
3. What kind of discourse is evolved in the classroom following the teaching of the literary works?
4. What are the connections between the teaching of literature as performed in a class activity and the teachers’ report about their approaches to teaching literature?

**The research Description And research Tools**

A qualitative study based on the qualitative approach. The chosen research method is collective case study: a study on a collection of specific cases through which general insights can be gained (Yin, 2003). The more recurring data obtained from different subjects, the higher the ability to rely on the data (Stake, 2006).

The data were collected using two research tools: A. Forty short questionnaires filled out by 28 teachers who teach in the State RE system and 12 teachers who teach in the Ultra-orthodox education system. B. Twenty-one recorded lessons: 12 lessons recorded by teachers who teach in the State RE system and 9 lessons recorded by teachers who teach in the Ultra-orthodox education system.

The questionnaires consisted of two parts: the first part asked about demographic details of the teachers and the second part consisted of two open questions. The validation of the questionnaire and its accommodation to the different sectors were made by two well-known women professors who teach in two teacher-training colleges in the field of literature teaching. The questions which appeared on the questionnaire will be presented in detail in the data analysis section.

The other research tool is recorded and transcribed lessons (voice recordings only), including lesson plans and students’ products. For the sake of the study and in light of the varying quality of the recordings, six lessons (out of twelve) were selected from the State religious schools, and six lessons (out of nine) were selected from the Ultra-orthodox district.

The study was conducted in order to learn what is happening in literature classes among the two sectors. The context for conducting this study was online and frontal continuing education programs on the topic of literature teaching in elementary schools which are geared for teachers and instructors in the State RE system and for teachers and instructors in the Ultra-orthodox district. The data were collected with their help: some were participants themselves, and others assisted in finding participants. In the continuing education program for teachers in the State religious sector, the participants were offered, after the program, to record themselves while teaching a literature lesson to their class and to submit their recording, attaching the lesson plan and the students’ products from the lesson. Every teacher was also requested to fill out a perspective questionnaire regarding literature teaching. The same possibility was also offered in the program for teachers in the Ultra-orthodox district.

The processing of the information gathered from the lessons was made through categorical analysis (Tzabar Ben Yehoshua, 2016). In the first stage, the lesson transcripts were being read while listening to their recordings. In the second stage the research themes were created.

For the sake of content analysis, several practices from the field of discourse analysis were combined, using the terms “cognitive activation” and “conversation analytic perspective.” The analysis by “cognitive activation” was made in the following steps: highlighting statements on the text which provokes a thought or response, and highlighting types of cognitive or miscellaneous activities in different shapes and colors for distinct representation. Additionally, an analysis of the structure and organization of the lessons was made in two stages: A. Recognizing and highlighting the parts of a lesson. B. Recognizing a central phenomenon around which the lesson is organized (for example, writing a phrase on the white board and returning to it time and again throughout the discourse). (Hzimmerman, 2016).

Analysis processes were made in a “go-and-return” activity (a critical rereading of the data analysis) to keep the validation and dependability principles (Yossifun, 2016).

The data arising from the open questions of the questionnaire were encoded into themes and examined in terms of the internal affinity they have for themselves and external affinity they have for the findings from the content analysis of the recorded lessons.

All the participants expressed their informed consent to participate in the study. Their anonymity and privacy were kept by changing the names of all the teachers who participated (Dushnik & Tzabar Ben Yehoshua, 2016). The Chief Scientist office gave its consent for voice recordings of the lessons.

A sample of the questionnaire results in the State religious and Ultra-orthodox sector

The first part asked about demographic details of the teachers and the second part consisted of two open questions about the teaching of literature in their schools.

The data analysis uncovered three central themes which the teachers pointed out as those describing their approaches to literature learning and the atmosphere in their schools. The themes which will be described below are as follows: (1.) atmosphere. (2.) making literature be present. (3.) pedagogical content knowledge.

1. The first theme, atmosphere, paints a picture of the atmosphere in the classroom during literature lessons. The teachers point out their students’ feelings as they experience it, as well as the contribution they have to those feelings as the leaders of the lessons.
2. The second theme, making literature be present, reflects the place of literature as perceived by the teachers, which is sometimes contrary to the way their students perceive it.
3. The third theme, pedagogical content knowledge, relates to teaching methods of literature.

The first question: Please describe freely and in your own words your approach to literature learning and the atmosphere in your school:

A sample of the questionnaire results of the State religious teachers:

1. **Atmosphere**

“My students really love the lesson, it’s actually their favorite.”

“A good atmosphere”

“We do our best to create a pleasant atmosphere”

1. **Making literature be present**

“I would be glad if this field were more present in the curricula in general.”

“In my opinion, in the new teaching booklet there is less room left for literature.”

“Literature lessons in our school are regarded as unimportant.”

1. **Pedagogical content knowledge**

“They love to learn, to hear, to become smarter. There are interesting discussions.”

“We do our best to make the learning enjoyable in the first place and to make the students experience the text.”

A sample of the questionnaire results of the Ultra-orthodox teachers:

1. **Atmosphere**

“The students look forward to having these lessons and are sorry that they have them only once a week.”

“Students really love them. There’s a great atmosphere, they wait for the lessons to come.”

1. **Making literature be present**

“In our school they put a lot of effort into this subject by working on literary pieces, we have a rich library where everyone takes part, and we also have literature days and encourage free writing.”

“In my school literature is a broad subject with a lot of presence.”

1. **Pedagogical content knowledge**

“These are the lessons which they always ask to learn, even if we haven’t really learned a literary term.”

“The teachers give their students a cognitive, sensory, motor, personal and interpersonal freedom of action. This is a subject that encourages fruitful and attractive discussions for developing certain topics.”

Second question: what would you suggest for changing or improving in the teaching of literature?

A sample of the questionnaire results of the State religious teachers:

1. **Atmosphere**

“To teach the lesson to half a class at a time once a week in order to create a better and more intimate atmosphere.”

1. **Making literature be present**

“And in fact, when there’s a lot of pressure to meet schedules and to teach all the material and they need to ‘cut down’ lessons, it’s usually the literature lessons.”

“To give it a more important and respectful place than it is today.”

1. **Pedagogical content knowledge**

“To take out the reading comprehension questions and to define it as a lesson for fun reading.”

“To publish comprehensive handbooks for teachers on how to teach every literary work.”

“Continuing education programs for literature teaching.”

“To read out loud more to the students, to give out books in many copies so that all the children will be able to read and follow along.”

“To create good materials for teachers.”

“The goals of teaching literature are difficult to implement. Every teacher ‘racks his brain’ on how to achieve them and doesn’t always succeed.”

A sample of the questionnaire results of the Ultra-orthodox teachers:

1. **Atmosphere**

“In our school we do our best to create a good and pleasant atmosphere in the literature lessons.”

1. **Making literature be present**

“To add an extra hour for literature in the schedule.”

“To have a formulated curriculum that will determine the place of literature in the schedule.”

1. **Pedagogical content knowledge**

“Varied good-quality teaching materials in an appropriate spiritual level that will be available for the teaching teams but will also be attractive enough for the students.”

“To hold continuing education programs for teachers, or alternatively to send out literary works with varied teaching methods as a model for every grade level.”

“It’s required to offer many continuing education programs in the subject! There’s not enough real knowledge of what literature lessons are.”

Here are the findings from the recordings of twelve literature lessons in six elementary schools in the State religious sector and six elementary schools in the Ultra-orthodox district:

The literary work and its choice by teachers in State RE:

This section will deal with cases when as part of the pre-reading activity, teachers connect the literary works to issues pertaining to the students’ world, and therefore they open the activity by explaining the reasons for choosing the literary work, namely, the considerations which the teacher chooses to present to the students. She might also have different or additional considerations which she does not reveal to the students. Some teachers choose not to tell their students why they are teaching that literary work now, but the context is obvious – a holiday or an upcoming event.

Sarit is a teacher and language coordinator at a school which belongs to the state-State religious stream. The class is a 2nd-grade class. Sarit explains to her students the reason for choosing the story she has chosen to read out to her class. She connects the choice of her story, a story by Uri Orbach, a children’s author who passed away abruptly about a year before, to an event which is going to take place the day after – a writing contest following Orbach’s books. It becomes clear that Orbach’s wife will be one of the judges in the contest. In this way, the teacher creates pertinence to the events of the day.

Ilanit, a 2nd-grade teacher for a girl’s class, also points out her choice of a literary work. She decides to teach a poem which deals with a boy who is looking for solutions of how to express feelings of frustration and anger, without confronting the adults who forbid him to behave violently. At the beginning of her lesson, Ilanit explains her decision to change the order of the lessons (to teach a language lesson instead of a Torah lesson):

*You know that this week (…) there were a few incidents of anger in the class, so today I decided, rather than starting with a Torah lesson, to start with this topic of anger, (…) we’re actually not canceling Torah, this is our Torah. (…) I brought you a special work of literature about the topic of anger.*

In her statement, the teacher connects the literary work to an event which took place in class to create pertinence to the students’ world. Her meaningful statement that there’s no cancellation of Torah, *“This is our Torah”*, empowers the literary work and the dealing with the poem because the teacher has decided that the poem is more important than Torah this time. The teacher points out that the poem will be taught further to the events that took place in class, and in this way she emphasizes that the poem is taught in this particular context, and doesn’t mention its aesthetic aspects, for which she might as well have chosen the poem.

Sometimes, the teachers don’t explain their choice of a literary work for a certain timing, but one can understand the context due to the circumstances. Ronit teaches a 6th-grade girls’ class. She chooses to teach a song about the Aliyah (immigration) from Ethiopia, in which the longing for Jerusalem is drawn attention to. Ronit doesn’t point out a certain context for teaching the song, but from the date when the lesson was recorded, a week and a half before “Jerusalem’s Day”, one can infer that the song, which deals with the immigration journey of Ethiopian Jews on their way to Jerusalem, is taught in that context. Based on the transcript of the lesson, it’s unclear whether the context is obvious to the students.

Contrastively, in the following example one can find a teacher who apparently teaches a song in a certain context, but does not reveal what it is:

Rina teaches a 6th-grade boys’ class at a state-orthodox school. The lesson takes place two days before the end of the school year. At the end of the lesson, the teacher calls the students and asks:

*Why do you think I chose this song? (…) just in the last two days of school?*

*The students give varied answers:*

*“Because it talks about the Kinneret and we go to the Kinneret on the summer holiday.”*

*“Because she’s saying goodbye to the Kinneret and we’re also saying goodbye*…”

The teacher repeats the students’ answers, but there’s no discussion about their answers, and no discourse evolves in the subject. In the last minutes of the lesson the teacher replays the song, without explaining her choice.

The following teachers also don’t expose to their students the context for teaching the literary works:

Orit is a linguistic-education instructor in elementary schools who teaches a literature lesson in a 3rd-grade class, like many Hebrew teachers, at a State religious school. Orit has chosen to teach a story, which is not included in the curriculum and does not appear in the readers. She passes around photocopies of the story to her students, without explaining her choice or the context of teaching that story.

Nirit, a 1st-grade teacher at a state school, teaches the girls’ class. Towards Purim, when the children dress up, she decides to teach Dan Pagis’s book, “The egg.” Although the story deals with questions of identity and a formation of the self, the teachers’ questions deal only with the dressing up of the egg.

In the last two examples neither of the teachers explains the considerations for choosing their literary works, but while in Orit’s example there seems to be no external reason for teaching the story, in Nirit’s example the context is obvious.

From those examples, one can learn that teachers in the State religious sector construct a pre-reading activity which makes the literary work connected to the students’ world and relevant to their everyday lives. However, the activity doesn’t take off from that technical connection, and no activity is held to advance the students’ literary understanding and to generate the meaning of a possible connection between them and the text beyond a literacy processing of the text.

**The issue of the literary work and its choice by teachers in the Ultra-orthodox district:**

Leah teaches a 5th-grade class at a school which belongs to an Ultra-orthodox unique network. The school board and staff are Ultra-orthodox, and the students come from secular-traditional homes, while the goal is to bring them closer to the Ultra-orthodox sector. The story which Leah has chosen to teach doesn’t appear in the reader, and in fact it’s taken from a children’s book entitled “We love you so much, child” written by the Ultra-orthodox children’s author Yehudit Yellin, who is also known in her pen name as Sari Wallach. It’s a realistic story, which aims at providing emotional support for children who struggle with various difficulties. None of the characters have names (Dad, one lady, etc.), and even more so, the hero of the story is called by a symbolic and generic name, “Ma ‘Chpat” (Hebrew for “I don’t care”), in order to arouse identification and empathy among the children’s audience. Ma ‘chpat is a vibrant boy full of life who can’t behave according to the expectations from children his age in the Ultra-orthodox sector, namely, to stay in the synagogue during the prayer and to daven. His labeling as a problematic child bothers him, even though he doesn’t express that outwardly. His father’s character in the book is presented as full of empathy, and the message is that you can change the way people label you by praying and addressing adults. Leah doesn’t explain her choice of the story and begins reading the story right away.

Hani doesn’t explain her choice either. She teaches at a state-Ultra-orthodox school in a 3rd-grade class. Hani chooses to teach the Ultra-orthodox adaptation (from the reader) to Aesop’s fable “The ant and the grasshopper.” It’s an allegorical and rhymed passage, but in order to adapt it to the Jewish world of values the ending was changed. The ant doesn’t leave the lazy grasshopper to freeze in the cold, but proves him wrong, teaches him moral values and also mercies him and takes him into her home.

A similar example can be found in Mirit’s lesson, a teacher for a 6th-grade girls’ class at a Chabad elementary school. The school board and staff are Ultra-orthodox and belong to the Chabad Hassidism, the teaching contents are unique to them, acknowledged and approved by the Ministry of Education. Although the school has a reader of literary works, Mirit chooses to teach a song by Zelda (a religious non-Ultra-orthodox poet), “Each of us has a name.” In the lesson plan that was attached to the recording of the lesson, she remarks: “The song will be taught in Bat Mitzvah lessons, as part of the subject “Identity – the unique imminence of Man’s personality.” The poem appears in the appendix of literary works for the linguistic education curriculum of the Ministry of Education recommended literary works for teaching in 5th-6th grades. Mirit doesn’t explain to her students why she has chosen to teach that song, but choosing the poem“Each of us has a name” for teaching in a Chabad institute is not a triviality, since there is extra rigor on teaching only literary works which were written by artists who belong in the Hassidism, and Zelda didn’t belong in the Hassidism as an adult woman. However, as part of the pre-reading activity, the teacher tells her students that before Zelda got married, she was named Zelda Shneorson, and that she came from a rooted Ultra-orthodox family of distinguished lineage, which accounts for the fact that her songs are taught in the Ultra-orthodox school network. The explanation provided by the teacher constitutes a religious justification for teaching the song.

Shuli, Bat Sheva and Limor chose to teach stories from the reader without explaining their choices or connecting them to certain events. Both Shuli and Bat Sheva teach 6th-grade girls’ classes in the same network of schools (in schools located in two different cities), whereas Limor teaches a 3rd-grade class in a different network of schools and has chosen to teach the book “Foxy is making friends” by Adam Ralf. This is a surprising choice, because it’s not written by an Ultra-orthodox author and it’s an exceptional phenomenon.

From the above examples one can learn that there is no significant difference between the sectors in the generic division of the literary works which the teachers chose to teach, but there is a significant difference in the State religious-education teachers’ need to choose a literary work in the context of the students’ everyday lives. One may note that all the State religious school teachers, except for one, chose to teach the literary work in a certain context, and tended to explain to their students why they were teaching that literary work, in the context of what was occurring, as opposed to the Ultra-orthodox-education teachers who did not explain their choices.

**Discussion**

The discussion will be divided into three parts:

1. A discussion of the pre-reading activities in the State religious schoolteachers’ lessons
2. A discussion of the pre-reading activities in the Ultra-orthodox teachers’ lessons
3. A discussion of how literature is perceived in the different schools based on the recorded lessons and the questionnaire results.

**A discussion of the pre-reading activities in the State religious schoolteachers’ lessons**

Sarit brought to class Uri Orbach’s book, and as an introduction to her students’ first encounter with the story made a pre-reading activity, in which she asked eight questions connected to prior knowledge: “*Do you know* *all kinds of professionals?” “Who would like to say what kinds of professionals he knows?”* The students are not asked to explain or prove their answers. This type of questions can be characterized as cognitive questions, but their purpose is not to activate the students beyond sharing their prior knowledge, and such they are not questions of cognitive activation. This is a “ping pong” discourse, in which Sarit asks, repeats the students’ answers, sometimes with a word of praise, *“good, good . .* .” and moves on to the next student. Apparently, she encourages students to connect to prior knowledge: “*Also… in ‘My Uncle Simcha’ you talked about all kinds of professions. Remember?*” But she doesn’t give her students time to respond, and a "naturally occurring discourse"(Kopfberg, 2016) doesn’t evolve. Even questions of predicting and guessing following the title of a book and the picture on its cover do not uplift the students’ answers beyond banal answers. After reading the title out loud, “*The dream fixer*”, the teacher asks, “*For those who don’t know the story, what is our book about?”*

Sarit provides general information about the author: “*Uri Orbach, may he rest in peace, wrote the story. He was a Knesset member and lived in our town*.” However, it’s unclear how this information advances the students’ understanding of the story. The title of the story, to which Sarit relates, “The dream fixer”, is a title with a symbolic meaning, and this is a critical point for the understanding of the story, to which she does not relate at all. In her questions, Sarit relates to the title and the illustration which appears on the cover: *“Do you see (on the cover) the man who fixes dreams?”* Sarit does not relate to the fact that the illustrated character is a portrait of the writer, Uri Orbach, which gives a different shade to the story.

The connection to prior knowledge, by looking at the cover and the title, is a strategy of addressing the paratextual (Elkad-Lehman, 2016), which corresponds with what Langer (1990) calls to stand outside and to “come into” the world of the text. That is, the readers use their prior knowledge and the means which are at their disposal (linguistic knowledge, curiosity, predicting, and artistic devices) to elicit ideas that will help them get into the text. In this case, since pre-reading activities have remained technical and solely in the field of vocabulary enrichment, with neither cognitive activation nor generic reference (this is an allegorical and fantastical story), it’s hard to see how they will assist in the literary understanding of the story while learning it.

In Ilanit’s lesson, the pre-reading activity is a writing activity. In that activity, the students are asked to write an idea for an answer to a question that appears in the title of the poem, “What do we do when we get angry?” (Writing activity: 1). The teacher writes the answers on the white board and a “ping pong” discourse evolves, when the students answer and the teacher repeats their answers, praising when necessary and giving the next student permission to talk. Afterwards, the teacher and the students read the title out loud in a shared vocal reading, and there is another writing activity following the title (writing activity 2).

In this lesson one may note how the tasks empower the place of the literary work as an assistive tool for developing social/emotional discourse which the teacher uses to activate social processes in the classroom, but in a paraphrase of Langer’s claim, there is no rule for “getting into” a text (Langer, 1990), and as a result, the literary work remains solely as an accelerator for discourse about social processes without holding a literary-artistic discussion about the literary work itself.

Among the State religious-education teachers who participated, only two teachers shared with their students information about the writer. In one of those two cases, the information was wrong: the teacher explained to her students that the writer was a member of the Ethiopian community, a poet and a screenwriter. However, a quick search online shows that in fact he is not a member of the Ethiopian community. The teacher ignores religious difficulties brought about by the text and asks the students to relate to the many difficulties faced by the Ethiopian immigrants only until their arrival in Israel. One student asks: “*I really don’t understand, why, why not believe that they are Jews*?” The teacher replies: “*That’s an excellent question*” but doesn’t try to challenge the student to search for an answer that will activate her cognitively. From this one can learn about the role of the literary works from the teacher’s perspective: this is a source of knowledge provided by the teacher. The emotional awakening felt by the student following the song, and the religious, moral and personal questions which come up from the song, are not a part of the lesson planned by the teacher, and therefore, not only do they remain unanswered, but they are also unwanted.

**A discussion of the pre-reading activities in the Ultra-orthodox schoolteachers’ lessons:**

A task with a cognitive activation ability is supposed to awaken the readers and to activate them into a research activity (Winkler, 2020). In her lesson, Leah uses the title to ask questions of cognitive activation which aim at provoking thought and curiosity about the story: “*I’d love to hear more ideas…” “What’s this title, Ma* *‘chpat*?” The second question cognitive as well and it aims at awakening the students and creating interest and expectation towards the reading of the story. The teacher asks provocatively:

*So I don’t understand, teacher, you’re bringing us a story to a literature lesson, and there’s a mistake in the title? Does it make any sense?* (Leah.)

After the students find out the mistake in the title (the phrase Ma Ichpat [I don’t care] appears without an Aleph – Ma ‘chpat), the teacher broadens their world and dramatizes the question:

*There’s no Aleph. Excellent. So why? Was the book wrong on purpose? It’s a book that costs a lot of money in the store. I can’t just write whatever I want. I proofread it first, I bring it to a book proofreader, it goes through a process of printing, adding vowel signs, pagination. Why is it so? Why is it Ma ‘chpat? Why is the title written like that? Do you think there’s a spelling mistake?*

Her questions meet the following characteristics that appear in Langer (1990): to be “inside” the world of the text and to move within the space that it offers. Here the readers draw from their personal experience and from the information they received about the text to expand their changing system of perspectives towards the text. The students respond to the teacher’s “provocation” with a good deal of interest and propose a variety of possible answers to the exceptional phenomenon.

Another example is found with Mirit, who teaches Zelda’s song, “Each of us has a name.” The teacher asks her students, “*What’s your name and do you like your name*?” The students are not asked to explain why they like (or dislike) their names.

The second cognitive task which Mirit asks her students to complete is a task which generates cognitive activation, when Mirit asks her students to read the Midrash that is written on the white board and to interpret it according to their own understanding. The Midrash is connected to the meaning of a person’s name:

“*A person has three names:*

*one that he is called by his father and mother;*

*one that people know him by,*

*and one that he acquires for himself.*

*Not of all what he acquires for himself.”*

(Midrash Tanchuma, Kohellet Rabba, 1).

The Midrash is the intertextual and ideological infrastructure for the song, and its understanding, as part of the pre-reading activity, advances the understanding of the song.

**A discussion of how literature is perceived in the different schools based on the recorded lessons and the questionnaire results.**

The perception of literature teaching as art in the curriculum is based on perspectives under the theory of literature and its teaching, that the role of literature is not to serve as a tool for teaching, but rather to enable it to exist on its own right, and that one should allow for experiencing literary texts as art works. However, this is not the case according to the results of this study. No teacher was found to teach out of her regard for literature. Among all of them, the view of teaching literature was instrumental, namely, literature as a literacy tool or as a tool for instilling values (Rosenthal, 2015).

Comparing the teachers from the two sectors unveiled differences, which demonstrate two different axes in relation to the teaching of literature. One axis is the perception of “literature as part of the language skills” (Poyas, 2006: 14). It is manifested in the Ultra-orthodox sector by avoiding explanations of the choice of a literary work. The other axis characterizes the teachers from the State religious sector: relating to the teaching of literature as a journey of self-revelation in a dynamic affinity for society. It is manifested in the State religious teachers’ practice of connecting the literary work to the students’ world, even though the connection is very basic and refers only to time and place.

Differences were also found between teachers in the State religious sector who explained their choices of the literary works they had brought to class, and teachers in the Ultra-orthodox district who didn’t do so. It might be the case that the State religious teachers’ practice of accounting for the context in which they teach the literary works versus the Ultra-orthodox teachers who don’t feel that need, embodies a different educational approach. The State RE is more open, there are relationships of closeness between the students and their teachers, and in many schools, the students address their teachers by their first names. By contrast, in the Ultra-orthodox district hierarchy and distancing are kept between the teachers and their students in order to preserve a relationship of respect between students and teachers. The students address their teachers in the third person, “the teacher”, and the teachers similarly address the principal in the third person by saying “the principal.” In such a reality, a teacher might not feel the need to explain her choices to her class. It might also be the case that the way in which teachers are trained in the Ultra-orthodox colleges, according to a curriculum in which almost no room is provided for literature and its teaching, and that the teacher-trainers do not specialize in literature, is the factor, but also the result: a lack of teachers who feel a personal affinity for literature and know literature. When they come to choose a literary work to teach in their classes, State religious schoolteachers rely on an existing pool of literary works which were chosen by literature specialists, and are familiar with the curriculum, which is approved by the Ministry of Education and inspectors in the State RE system. However, Ultra-orthodox teachers (who have no approved literature curriculum) are forced to choose independently literary works from the coursebooks of the network in which they teach and from independent sources which fit in with the essence of the school. The understanding that literature can create conscious situations which destabilize the perceptions and beliefs according to which the reader has been shaped and in which he or she lives, is also known in research (Dorsey, 1977), and emphasizes the importance attributed to literature learning in the researched schools, which belong to the Ultra-orthodox district, as a ground for instilling values and creating discourse. This corresponds with our research conclusions in the subject (Poyas, 2009, Rosenthal, 2015). One can also learn about a teacher’s position within the hierarchy of Ultra-orthodox schools: her autonomy is partial, and she is required to receive an approval from the superior ranks as to the learning contents in literature. Evidence for this perception can be found in the answers to the open question, “Describe freely and in your own words your approach to literature learning and the atmosphere in your school.” While in the State religious sector one can find such phrases as “*unimportant*”, “*I would be glad if this field were more present in the curricula*”, “*In my opinion, in the new teaching booklet there is less room left for literature*”, in the Ultra-orthodox sector the teachers reported a central and respectful perception of literature learning: “*In our school they put a lot of effort into this subject”; “a rich library and literature days*”; “*In my school the subject of literature has broad dimensions and the teachers provide a freedom of action…”; “fruitful and attractive discussions*.” The importance attributed to literature teaching in Ultra-orthodox schools apparently results from the large involvement of the authority figures in the choice of literary works, since it is obvious that the contents are “approved” and that there is no danger of “problematic and subversive” texts which might not represent the hegemonic perceptions of the school, so there is no problem with giving them wide-scale room in the school domain.

In the second question, “What would you suggest to change or improve in the teaching of literature?” one can find differences in the teachers’ answers between the two sectors, which support the drawn conclusions regarding the different importance attributed to literature teaching in the different schools. While in the theme of making literature be present, the teachers in the State religious sector paint a sad picture of the hierarchical place of literature teaching within the school system, and ask to make literature be present more respectfully: “*And in fact, when there’s a lot of pressure to meet schedules and to teach all the material and they need to ‘cut down’ lessons, it’s usually the literature lessons”; “To give it a more important and respectful place than it is today*.” The teachers in the Ultra-orthodox district ask to “*add an extra hour for literature in the schedule*” and “*To have a formulated curriculum that will determine the place of literature in the schedule*.” Thus, the gap between the different perspectives regarding literature teaching in the different sectors, which was pointed out at the top of our discussion, is amplified.

Another theme which came up from the open questions in the questionnaires is the atmosphere in the literature lessons in the schools of the different sectors. While the Ultra-orthodox school teachers answered the first question, which asked them to describe the atmosphere in their literature lessons in a way that describes their opinions of how the students experience their lessons, they replied, “T*he students look forward to having these lessons and are sorry that they have them only once a week”, “Students really love them. There’s a great atmosphere, they wait for the lessons to come”*, the State religious school teachers also related in their answers to the way they think their students feel in their lessons: “*My students really love the lesson, it’s actually their favorite*”, and also to their place in creating a pleasant atmosphere in their lessons: “*A good atmosphere”, “We do our best to create a pleasant atmosphere.*” While in both cases the teachers’ words reflect their own impression of their students’ perspectives and might therefore reflect, in a hidden way, their feelings and opinions regarding the teaching of literature in the institutes where they teach (Achituv, 2012, Achituv, 2013, Gudmundsdottir, 1990 Grossman, 1990, & Shulman, 1987), one should consider the fact that the State religious school teachers saw fit to remark their contribution to the good atmosphere which occurs in their classes based on their claims, whereas the teachers in the Ultra-orthodox district didn’t. This is an additional reinforcement for the teachers’ place in the different schools as discussed above. Despite the differences between the room which literature teaching takes, based on the feelings of teachers of literature who work in the different sectors, all the teachers feel that they lack literary content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge for teaching literature (Shulman, 1986, Loewenberg Ball,Phelps & Thames, 2008). The teachers are aware of their instrumental teaching: “the lessons which they always ask to learn, even if we haven’t really learned a literary term”, and they ask for tools for teaching literature aesthetically (Rosenblatt, 1995), although teachers in the State religious sector are offered teaching samples by the Ministry of Education about some of the literary works which appear in the curriculum. Thus, one can learn that teachers don’t feel that they have sufficient literary knowledge (pedagogical knowledge) for constructing literature lessons independently in a way which will reflect the aesthetic uniqueness of literature without efferent aspects (Rosenblatt, 1995). The policymakers in the fields of teacher training and the professional development of teachers in the State religious and Ultra-orthodox sectors should note that.

All the teachers from the State religious sector, except for one, chose age-appropriate literary works from the curriculum. In the Ultra-orthodox district, however, as of the time when the data were collected, a curriculum in literature hadn’t yet been formulated, and therefore four of the teachers relied on stories from the readers, and the other two chose stories from other sources.

In terms of pertinence to teaching, one may note that in the Ultra-orthodox sector a pre-reading activity is not perceived as a “gate” for the literary work, and no attempts were made to connect a literary work to the students’ everyday lives. By contrast, all the teachers from the State RE system made connections between the everyday occurrences in their students’ lives and the literary works, whether directly or indirectly.

In most of the pre-reading activities in the two sectors, most of the tasks were found to be cognitive in the literal sense and didn’t offer the students any cognitive activation. By contrast, there was one prominent lesson which the teacher based on knowledge from the field of Judaism for cognitive activation of the students while reading the lyrics of Zelda’s poem. Most of the questions were in the format of “ping pong” questions. Even in the discussion activity, the teachers did not allow for a dialogical conversation between the students in a way that would assist them in constructing complex arguments, and the discussion did not evolve into class discourse in which the students express different opinions, discuss them among themselves and interpret the literary work in various ways. The students do not try their hands at developing their own reasoned opinions about a literary work. There is no place for opinions which are contrary to the accepted interpretation or to questions which the teacher hasn’t planned to deal with. In the examined lessons from the State religious sector, no religious references to literary works were found, except for one case, in which a teacher ignored a question that was raised by a student on that topic. Thus, the perception of a teacher as actively having to lead personal discourse which deviates from the curriculum on topics of religion in the classroom (Roof, 1996), is not manifested in the discussed lessons. In the examined lessons the teachers seem to avoid creating discourse that might be taken as subversive and threatening for the hegemonic State religious perceptions with which their school identifies. בשיעורים שנבדקו נראה שהמורות נמנעות מלייצר שיח שעלול להתקבל כחתרני ומאיים על התפיסות הדתיות ההגמוניות שבית הספר מזדהה איתן. ניתן לראות כיצד לימודי הספרות בבתי הספר שנבדקו מציפים את הדיאלוג התמידי הקיים בהוראת הספרות בין הצורך של עובדי הוראה להשתמש בספרות ככלי עזר התומך בהוראת מקצועות אחרים, ובין הצורך להתייחס לטקסט הספרותי כאל יצירה אומנותית. בבתי הספר החרדיים והדתיים שנבדקו, ניתן לראות כי החינוך הדתי, והרצון של המורות להשאר בגבולות השיח הדתי המקובל בבתי הספר, מוביל אותן לרידוד השיח הספרותי ולמחסור בדיון פתוח שעלול להוביל את התלמידים לשאלות דתיות מורכבות שהמורות לא מעוניינות להתייחס אליהן.

**The research limitations**

The researcher is affiliated with a State religious stream. The sector acquaintance has prominent advantages, but also disadvantages (Achituv, 2012, Lieblich, 1993, Clandinin, 2007). The advantages are that the researcher’s prior acquaintance with the teachers’ worlds and ways of working created a comfortable atmosphere of trust and confidence and enabled her to ask for clarifications when it was necessary. However, the central disadvantage is that an “outsider” researcher is capable of seeing things which an “insider” researcher is already not aware of, since they are part of their thinking and routine standpoint. Thus, the advantage of working with one sector becomes a disadvantage when working with another sector, and vice versa. In order to ensure that the researcher’s sector disadvantages didn’t come at the expense of the research validation, three experienced researchers were asked to read the research and to provide their comments.

The gap between the number of State religious teachers who agreed to answer the anonymous questionnaire (28) and the number of Ultra-orthodox teachers who answered the questionnaire (12) necessitates an explanation. For technical reasons, the questionnaire was distributed online electronically. Since in the Ultra-orthodox sector it is not acceptable to use the internet, and most of the teachers don’t have an internet connection at home but only in their working environment, it was very difficult to obtain a wide-scale distribution of the questionnaire in this way. Therefore, the questionnaire was printed and forwarded manually to the linguistic education instructors, who agreed to assist in its distribution. Since there is built-in suspicion in the Ultra-orthodox sector towards anyone who is not affiliated with that sector, the teachers felt a need to ask for permission from the school principals to fill out the questionnaire, and when those principals heard that the questionnaire was geared for research conducted by a non-Ultra-orthodox woman, they refused.

Recording the lessons also involved difficulties. While the State religious teachers had smartphones which greatly facilitated this task, the use of such devices is forbidden and unacceptable in the Ultra-orthodox sector, let alone in education institutes. Therefore, the Ultra-orthodox teachers were provided with other recording devices, which encumbered the recording process and may have prevented other teachers from recording their own lessons.

**Conclusion**

**סיכום**

תרומתו של המחקר הנוכחי היא בהארת המצב הקיים בשיעורי הספרות במגזר הדתי ובמחוז החרדי ובשיקוף של מקומה של המורה המלמד ספרות במערכת החינוך במגזרים השונים. מתיאורי השיעורים משתקפת תמונה מדאיגה של התייחסות לטקסט הספרותי כאל כלי עזר של החינוך הדתי ולא כאל יצירה ספרותית בעלת איכויות אומנותיות. בנוסף לידע החסר של המורות שהשתתפו בשיעורים שנותחו בתיאוריות ובאסטרטגיות השונות שעומדות בבסיסה של הוראת הספרות, בולט הצורך שלהן שלא לאפשר חריגה מחשבתית מגבולות החינוך הדתי שהמוסד שלהן מאפשר. העיסוק בהצדקה של לימוד היצירה הספרותית כחלק מהחינוך הדתי בא על חשבון המרצת התלמידים לחשיבה בהירה יותר על הרעיונות שהם מעלים, לתווך בין הילד ובין הטקסט הספרותי ולהגדלת ההון התרבותי של התלמידים.