

**INDIVIDUALS PRACTISING COMMUNITY:
THE CENTRAL PLACE OF INTERACTION
IN THE EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY OF *LIMMUD***

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ABSTRACT

In light of growing evidence of exogamy among Jews and diminishing levels of community engagement, the question of how to sustain and cultivate Jewish identity has become a major preoccupation in the Jewish world since the early 1990s. Among the numerous organisations, programmes and initiatives that have been established and studied in response, *Limmud*, a week-long annual festival of Jewish life and learning in the UK that attracts an estimated 2,500 people per annum and has been replicated throughout the world, remains decidedly under-researched. This study is designed to understand its educational philosophy. Based upon qualitative interviews with twenty *Limmud* leaders, and focus group sessions with *Limmud* participants, it seeks to explore the purposes of the event, its content, its social and educational processes, and contextual environment. It further explores the importance of relationships in *Limmud's* philosophy, and the place of social capital in its practice.

The study demonstrates that *Limmud's* educational philosophy is heavily grounded in the interaction of competing tensions, or polarities, on multiple levels. Major categorical distinctions drawn in educational philosophy and practice, and Jewish and general sociology, are both maintained and allowed to interact. This interaction takes place in a “hospitable and charged” environment – one that is simultaneously safe, respectful and comfortable, whilst also edgy, powerful and challenging – that allows the individual freedom to explore and navigate the contours of Jewish community, and the Jewish community opportunity to envelope and nurture the experience of the individual. The study suggests that the interaction of these competing forces, in the context of an intensive Jewish experience, may

be an important feature of Jewish educational initiatives attempting to respond to the identity challenges described above. More generally, in detailing a contemporary educational model that sustains religious/ethnic identity whilst emphasising critical thought and openness to competing claims and ideas, it presents an approach that may be applicable in other religious and ethnic communities.

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Amongst the changes that took place was a sabbatical at the Mandel Institute in Israel, where I was fortunate to study with Professors Ze'ev Mankowitz and Daniel Pekarsky, both of whom inspired me to think about education in new ways, and taught me as much through their example as they did from the various texts we read together. In addition, I took up my current role at the Institute for Jewish Policy Research (JPR) during the course of my studies, and I am extremely grateful to my colleagues – notably Dr David Graham and Dr Laura Staetsky – for the lessons they teach me daily about social and demographic research that can be found throughout this work. I also acknowledge Harold Paisner, the chairman of JPR, for allowing the Institute to support my studies, as well as the United Jewish Israel Appeal (UJIA), which funded them in the early years.

Twenty people gave up their free time to be interviewed by me and to share their thoughts and ideas freely, and without them, this thesis would never have been possible. In

interviewing them all, without exception, I was struck by their common passion and intelligence, and am extremely grateful to them for their insights. The focus group participants similarly gave up their time freely, and provided me with yet more food for thought. I am particularly grateful to Raymond Simonson, the former Executive Director of *Limmud*, who helped me to identify and contact several of the interviewees, and allowed me access to the *Limmud* office throughout.

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Throughout the course of writing this thesis, Professor Morgan pushed me to simplify my overly verbose writing-style, and to curb some of the “American” influences that appear to have found their way into it as a result of my time living there! I hope I have succeeded; if I have not, the blame is entirely mine, but his mantra of “clarity and brevity” will remain with me for all time.

Finally, I dedicate this thesis to my late father, Martin Boyd (z"l), whose teaching and vision of Jewish education inspires me continually, and to my children, Natan, Ariella and Ely, whom he never knew, but who interact with him daily through the example he set me.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In December 1980, a few dozen individuals involved in various aspects of Jewish education in Britain gathered together for a small and rather parochial conference at Carmel College near Wallingford in Oxfordshire.¹ Whilst the four young organisers of the conference had ruffled a few feathers within the Orthodox Jewish communal establishment during its planning stages, this was in no way a headline-generating event; it barely even registered on the Jewish educational Richter Scale in the United Kingdom, and certainly not in other parts of the world. Inspired by the Coalition for Alternatives in Jewish Education (CAJE),² a USA-based conference for Jewish educators that first took place in 1976, it sought to bring together individuals involved in Jewish education – teachers in day schools and supplementary schools, youth workers, rabbis, parents – irrespective of their Jewish denominational background or level of practice. In so doing, it instantly broke two communal taboos: first, the notion that Jews from different denominations could participate in a shared event, and second, the idea that the different positions individuals held were part of a shared whole that existed under the new nomenclature of ‘Jewish educator.’ The purpose of the conference was for the participants to network within and across these lines, to learn from one another, and to develop new educational ideas and

¹ In the existing literature about *Limmud* (newspaper articles, blogs, academic articles, etc.) it is commonly suggested that 80 people attended the first conference. In the course of interviewing one of the key organisers of the first event for this thesis, he suggested that it may have been no more than 40. I could find no definitive way of ascertaining which number is correct.

² CAJE later changed its name to the Coalition for the Advancement of Jewish Education.

skills in order to improve the quality of Jewish education. Run on a shoestring budget and entirely by volunteers, it was called *Limmud*, meaning “learning” in Hebrew.

Today, over thirty years later, *Limmud* has arguably become one of the most intriguing global phenomena in contemporary Jewish education. It continues to run its five-day long annual conference in the UK, although that now draws some 2,500 participants each year and attracts some of the most interesting and creative Jewish thinkers, educators, academics and artists in the world. In addition, it runs several single day *Limmuds* in various venues around the UK – one-day conferences held for local Jewish populations – as well as ‘*LimmudFest*,’ a Glastonbury-style cultural and educational festival every summer. Over the years, *Limmud*’s main conference has been variously described by journalists as a “*kiddush Hashem*” (sanctification of God’s name),³ a “miracle that has become a *yom tov* (religious festival) in its own right”,⁴ “astoundingly sexy”,⁵ and “a focus of emulation throughout the Jewish world”.⁶ The realities behind the final comment are perhaps most arresting – *Limmud* has spawned numerous similar initiatives throughout the Jewish world, and a 2011 study argued that it has become “an international movement comprising annual events in more than 50 locations world-wide, reaching over 30,000 individuals per year.”⁷ Strikingly, this includes initiatives in Israel and the United States, both countries that have typically inspired Jewish educational innovation elsewhere, rather than be shaped by it.

³ Chaim Bermant, *The Jewish Chronicle*, 03/01/97.

⁴ Chaim Bermant, *The Jewish Chronicle*, 02/01/98.

⁵ Orna Coussin, *Haaretz*, 30/12/04.

⁶ *The Jewish Chronicle*, editorial, 03/01/03.

⁷ Cohen S.M. and Kopelowitz E. (2011) *The Limmud International Study. Jewish Learning Communities on a Global Scale*. Jerusalem: Research Success Technologies, Ltd. Downloaded from: <http://www.bipa.org/Publications/details.cfm?PublicationID=13459>, 22 February 2012.

To date, however, no empirical attempt has been made to fully articulate its educational philosophy. This may be because *Limmud* has continued to be run predominantly by volunteers, or because it lacks the formal status of a school or tertiary educational institution, but either way, the gap is conspicuous in its absence.

This thesis is designed to fill the gap. Its fundamental question is: what is *Limmud's* implicit educational philosophy? In seeking to address this, it explores three subsidiary questions: (i) should *Limmud* be categorised as a formal, non-formal or informal educational initiative?; (ii) to what extent is an emphasis on the development of Jewish social capital central to *Limmud's* educational approach?; and (iii) in what ways, if at all, is *Limmud* a response to the challenges of Jewish community continuity and renewal?

It is a case study that, through qualitative interviews and focus group discussions with key leaders and participants, seeks to uncover the implicit educational philosophy of the organisation, the reasons behind its assumed success (if, indeed, its plaudits are correct), and the shortcomings inherent within its educational approach. Ultimately, it is an attempt to shed light on an educational initiative that challenges many of the orthodoxies of educational philosophy and practice, both in the Jewish community and beyond, and seems to inform and change the ways in which Jewish educational thinkers and practitioners undertake and understand their own work.

My interest in *Limmud* comes from having been a part of the British Jewish community throughout my life, and having worked within it in various capacities for a substantial part of my professional career. I have also worked in the field of Jewish education in Israel and the

United States, and served as a research and policy consultant to Jewish communities in Europe. More specifically, I am currently Executive Director of the Institute for Jewish Policy Research in London, a leading Jewish research centre and think tank in Europe, having previously been based at another Jewish research centre, the JDC International Centre for Community Development. Prior to that, I was a Jerusalem Fellow at the Mandel Institute in Israel, served as an educational consultant to the Jewish Agency for Israel in New York, ran the Research and Development Unit at the United Jewish Israel Appeal (UJIA) and worked as Director of Research at the Holocaust Educational Trust (both in London). Each of these experiences afforded me opportunities to monitor developments in Jewish education in Britain and throughout the world, and gave me exceptional access to some of the personalities involved. They also encouraged me to identify communal trends, examine sociological forces, and analyse existing data, all of which deepened my understandings of the range of developments I observed.

Prior to my work as a Jewish community researcher, analyst and strategist, my most formative personal and professional experiences were in non-formal Jewish education. I was actively involved in Jewish youth movements, and began my professional career training youth leaders at the British Jewish community's centre for informal Jewish education. These experiences helped me to cultivate an understanding of non-formal education which I used both to shape my own practice, and to teach others. The combination of experience in non-formal education and analytical research – all within the context of Jewish communal work – positions me well to undertake this study.

It does, however, also bring some disadvantages: notably, the potential to be less than fully objective about my subject due to my close relationship with it, and a lack of parallel experience in, or knowledge of other ethnic or faith communities with which to make comparisons. I began this work with an awareness of these potential pitfalls and personal shortcomings, but equally with a strong sense that whilst there are many examples of Jewish educational excellence throughout the Jewish world, the *Limmud* conference in the UK is one of the most compelling examples of Jewish educational provision that I have seen. Its range of learning opportunities, its capacity to meet individual learning needs, its communal spirit and sheer exuberance all mark it out as something worthy of investigation. I have examined it through three lenses: non-formal education (NFE), social capital theory, and Jewish thought and practice. Concerning NFE, *Limmud* is clearly not an educational institution in the traditional sense of that term. It has no formal premises of its own – rather it holds its main conference – the subject of this investigation – in the rented property of a university campus, and its other activities variously at synagogues, hotels, conference centres, and on farmland. *Limmud* has no formal faculty to speak of – whilst there are regular presenters who return year after year, no one is employed as a permanent member of *Limmud's* teaching staff, and many of the names listed on the programme are unfamiliar to the average participant. The organisation has a very small professional team – a full-time Executive Director (a position that has only existed since 2006), three administrators, and a staff member dedicated to international activities. Beyond these, its activities are run entirely by volunteers – individuals who give up their spare time to make *Limmud* happen. The participants who attend *Limmud* do so under no obligation or duress; indeed they pay for the right to attend the conference which is always held during the Christmas/New Year period, a time when most people are on holiday. In each of these

respects, it has the characteristics of a non-formal or informal educational organisation, and should be examined in that context.⁸ Thus, the first key part of the literature that I will draw on in this study is from that field.

Second, *Limmud* is a community, although not in the traditional sense of the term. It has behavioural and ethical norms to which the individual is required to adhere, but it exists only temporarily – individuals join it for a very specific period of time in return for a very specific set of services. It has much of the warmth and feeling of safety and security of a traditional community, but this feeling is transitory – once the conference is over, the community, as it is constructed during the event itself, largely ceases to exist. Aspects of it remain, but for the main part, the individual returns to his own home and life, with little of a tangible nature that is able to replicate that experience until *Limmud* reconstitutes its community again.⁹ The individual at *Limmud* has a considerable degree of control of her learning, in so far as she is able to select freely from the large range of educational opportunities that are available throughout the day. Each is equally free *how* to learn – via lecture or discussion, panel debate or participation in various art forms, etc.; *what* to learn – history, politics, Jewish texts, music, art, literature, ethics and values; and indeed *whether* to learn – continually having the choice to attend a session or not without fear of formal judgment or reprisal. In each of these regards, *Limmud* is a response to a range of sociological forces that require explanation if one is to begin to understand what takes place there, and why it appears to have struck such a rich chord in the Jewish community. As a

⁸ The terms “non-formal” and “informal” are explored in detail in chapter 3. Suffice it to say at this stage that the characteristics listed are not typical of a formal educational institution like a school or university.

⁹ When discussing an average or typical *Limmud* participant in this thesis, I use the third person singular in both its masculine and feminine forms. This is both to reflect the egalitarian nature of *Limmud*, and to avoid any impression of sexism or gender bias.

result, the sociological context is critical. The sociological literature I could explore is vast, but I chose to concentrate particularly on the area of social capital, as it seemed clear to me, based on my experience of the event, that a key part of its strength lies in the relationships that exist between the various players involved in it.

Third, *Limmud* is essentially a Jewish educational endeavour, and thus it needs to be located within a Jewish educational and communal context. Jewish education in Britain and elsewhere has been through something of a renaissance since the early 1990s (see chapter 2), and the success of *Limmud* is part of that story. Understanding why that renaissance has happened, what factors contributed to it, and how that context allowed *Limmud* to flourish and grow is therefore the third lens through which my analysis will be conducted. As a Jewish endeavour, there is a need to assess the nature and particularities of the British Jewish community in order to explore whether there are elements specific to that community that allow *Limmud* to function as it does. Similarly, there is a need to understand aspects of the concept of Jewish community itself – how it is similar to, and how it differs from other religious and ethnic communities, and how any distinctive elements may lend themselves to an educational endeavour of this nature. Thus, the third area of literature from which I will draw deals with these particular Jewish themes and seeks to understand them.

Based on this literature and theoretical framework, my research is grounded in ethnographic experience, and builds on that through organisational analysis and qualitative interviews. The ethnographic component involved observation of, and participation in *Limmud* conferences in 2009, 2010 and 2011. The organisational analysis included

examination of *Limmud's* literature and website, and the qualitative interviews were conducted particularly with individuals who have been heavily involved in shaping *Limmud's* educational philosophy and practice, as well as some who have recently been drawn to it. This approach allowed me to generate a multi-faceted portrait of an organisation, and combined with my analysis of the literature from the fields of non-formal education, social capital and Jewish education, constituted a case study of Jewish educational practice in Britain which I hope will make a contribution to the fields of Jewish and non-formal education. Ultimately, my research questions were: what is the implicit educational philosophy that underpins *Limmud*; upon what educational principles does it draw, and what does it teach us about non-formal education in contemporary society? In addition, I was eager to explore the extent to which *Limmud's* educational philosophy and practice is an effective response to the concerns that fuelled the Jewish educational renaissance of the 1990s and 2000s: namely assimilation, intermarriage, and a general haemorrhaging of Jewish communities throughout the world.

However, in the first instance it is necessary to (i) set the context for the work; (ii) explore the relevant literature that already exists; and (iii) outline my chosen research methodology and the reasons behind it. The next three chapters will examine each of these areas in turn.

CHAPTER 2

JEWISH EDUCATION AND THE BRITISH JEWISH COMMUNITY

Introduction

To set the context for this research, it is important first to examine the field of Jewish education in general, and some of the ideas, principles and methods that underpin it. It is also important to examine the demography, communal infrastructure and nature of British Jewry, the community which gave birth to *Limmud* and continues to house and support it. Finally, attention should be paid to some of the specific developments that have taken place in Jewish education in Britain and elsewhere in the recent past, and to locate *Limmud's* story within that. This chapter provides that background.

Jewish education

Education is a foundational concept in Judaism. It is highlighted in several well-known texts, most notably the *Sh'ma*, which is probably the most fundamental expression of Jewish faith in Jewish liturgy.¹⁰ Whilst there are numerous other biblical and post-biblical references to

¹⁰ The central expression of the *Sh'ma* can be found in Deut. 6:4 ("Hear Israel, The Lord is our God, the Lord is One"), yet the liturgical text is an amalgamation of three biblical portions, Deut. 6:4-9, 11:13-21, and Num. 15:37-41. The educational motif can be found in Deut. 6:7 – "you shall teach them [the words of the *Sh'ma*] diligently to your children, and speak of them when you are sitting in your home, when you are walking on your way, when you lie down and when you arise." Traditionally, the *Sh'ma* is recited twice a day, during morning prayers (*Shacharit*) and evening prayers (*Maariv*), as well as before going to sleep. It is also the prayer recited on one's death bed.

the importance of education, it may be that Jewish emphasis on it was primarily a result of historical circumstances: certainly in both periods of exile after the destruction of the temples in Jerusalem, education became a necessity if Judaism was to survive without a geographical base (Ben-Sasson).¹¹ Without a physical centre, innovative ways of maintaining Jewish life needed to be created, and an increased emphasis on education – its value, its institutions and its methods – was identified as a central part of the solution, with universal elementary Jewish education introduced as early as 64CE¹² (Gamoran).¹³ Evidence for this can be found in the *Talmud*.¹⁴ To offer three examples: the Divine Presence was said to rest between two people when they sit down to study (M. Avot 3:3), a notion that demonstrates how learning was being transformed at that time into an affirmation of Jewish religious commitment;¹⁵ any community with twenty-five or more children was obliged to provide a teacher for them (BT BB 21a), a text which is often cited as the basis upon which the *cheder* (lit. ‘room,’ but more accurately understood as the Jewish

¹¹ The temples in Jerusalem served as the heart of Jewish religious life in ancient times. The First Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BCE; the Second Temple by the Romans in 70 CE. In Janet Aviad’s article, “Education,” she notes that: “The conditions of exilic life forced the Jews to organise themselves as a religious community and to depend upon education for their very survival... Only through intense loyalty to the ritual framework and to the religious ideas that gave it significance could exilic life be maintained. Instruction in the Torah, therefore, was indispensable, and study, *talmud torah*, necessarily assumed the highest place in the hierarchy of Jewish values.”

¹² The system for recording dates in this paper conforms to standard Jewish practice: BCE (Before the Common Era) being the equivalent of BC, and CE (Common Era) the equivalent of AD.

¹³ Gamoran notes: “Up to the destruction of the Temple [in 70 CE], Jewish education had been a means of transmitting the social heritage of the Jewish people to the Jewish children in *Palestine*. After the destruction of the Temple, Jewish education became the sole means of maintaining the unity of the people in the *Diaspora*.” (pp.5-6).

¹⁴ The *Talmud* (lit. “study” or “learning”) is one of Judaism’s central texts, and contains rabbinic discussions about Jewish law, ethics, philosophy, history and customs. Traditionally, it is understood as “*torah she b’al peh*” (the oral Torah) – i.e. given by God to Moses on Mount Sinai, but subsequently transmitted orally rather than in writing. In contrast, most Jewish historians regard it as a text developed by the rabbinic leadership in the centuries following the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem to respond to the particular challenges of that era. It was codified in the first few centuries of the Common Era, and is comprised of two main parts – the *Mishna* (ca.200 CE) and the *Gemara* (ca.500 CE). It should perhaps be noted that there are, in fact, two *talmuds*: the Babylonian Talmud or *Talmud Bavli* which was developed by rabbis based in the Babylonian academies, and the Jerusalem or Palestinian Talmud or *Talmud Yerushalmi*, developed by rabbis based there. All talmudic references in this study come from the Babylonian Talmud (generally considered to be the more influential of the two) and are referenced by the initials “BT”.

¹⁵ M. Avot = Mishna Avot, a section of the Mishna containing ethical maxims.

elementary school) was founded;¹⁶ and the ancient historian Josephus described Jewish education as “our principal care of all” (Drazin).¹⁷ Furthermore, the Babylonian *Talmud* itself was developed and written in educational academies, known as *yeshivot* (sing. *yeshivah*) or *batei midrash* (sing. *beit midrash*), an institutional framework that survives to this day, and exists to teach traditional Jewish texts, to train rabbis, and to serve as a means to avow one’s commitment to Judaism.¹⁸ Intriguingly, from earliest times, these institutions were regularly opened up to the general public as a means of influencing Jewish life in the home and public realm; indeed one *talmudic* source even notes that a leading Jewish authority was accused of preventing 12,000 Jews from paying government taxes because they were away from their homes for two months a year learning at his academy (BT BM 86a-b).¹⁹ What this demonstrates is that Jewish education, whilst principally concerned with children, was not limited to them; indeed adult education, certainly from the *talmudic* era onwards, was almost universal (Drazin).²⁰

The traditional purpose of Jewish education was very clear. Drazin sums it up succinctly: “Jewish education was never something extraneous to life or merely an instrument that served to prepare for life and that later could be discarded when its utility was exhausted.

¹⁶ BT BB 21a means *Babylonian Talmud*, tractate “Bava Batra”, p.21a. Bava Batra is concerned with property law.

¹⁷ See: Drazin N. (1940). *History of Jewish Education from 515BCE to 220CE*. Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, p.11, where the author quotes from Josephus’s work *Against Apion*.

¹⁸ The most well-known ancient Babylonian academies were in Sura and Pumbedita (Fallujah) in what is today Iraq. These *yeshivot* have been replicated throughout the centuries, mainly, but not exclusively, within Orthodox Jewish circles.

¹⁹ BM = “Bava Metzia,” the section of the *Talmud* concerned with civil law.

²⁰ See: Drazin (1940). He notes: “Not only were fully mature persons enjoined to review constantly all that they had formerly learned lest they forget something and commit a sin, but they were drawn to it by appreciation of the fact that they had not learned as much as there was to learn of the Torah.” (p.13). His view is, in part, supported by a well-known talmudic text: “Turn it [the Torah] and turn it over again for everything is in it, and contemplate it and grow grey and old over it and stir not from it, for you can have no better rule than it” (M. Avot 5:22).

Jewish education was rather synonymous with life. It unfolded life, giving it direction and meaning. In fact, a modern Hebrew term for education, *Chinuch*, from a root found twice in the Bible in the sense of 'to train,' etymologically means 'dedication' or 'initiation', and hence may refer to the fact that the child on receiving Jewish education, was dedicating his life to the service of God and to the observance of all His laws. This has been the characteristic essence of Jewish education from the earliest times... Jewish education was hence essentially character education."²¹ Thus, the reason to study Jewish texts was in order to learn how to observe God's laws, and live a life in accordance with divine will. Contrary to a commonly-held belief today, Jewish education was never intended to be an end in itself. The idea of *torah lishma*, learning for its own sake, which is a frequently-heard phrase today that originates in the *Talmud*, cannot be paralleled with the Greek philosophical idea that there is some inherent value in abstract intellectual speculation. Rather, it means that no benefit *other than* the service of God should be derived from studying Jewish texts; even the pursuit of studies for the fundamental benefit of becoming a rabbi or teacher was considered problematic or even reprehensible (Drazin).²²

Whilst this certainly points to the centrality of biblical and post-biblical texts as the core content of Jewish education, it would be a mistake to claim that it was, and is limited to this. Indeed, the contemporary content of Jewish education is almost impossible to summarise in a chapter of this length, not least because there is no consensus on the matter. Certainly, traditional Orthodox thinkers place heavy emphasis on *halacha* (Jewish law), as recorded in both biblical and post-biblical texts, and indeed with a handful of notable exceptions, Jewish

²¹ Drazin (1979), p.12.

²² The concept of *torah lishma* can be found in M. Avot 6:1.

education as a whole principally consisted of Bible and Talmud up to the advent of modernity (Gamoran).²³ Nevertheless, *Chasidut* (or “Chasidism”) – a pre-modern movement that developed in eastern Europe in the 18th century – emphasised simple piety, prayer, joy and mysticism over intensive textual study, in an attempt to alter “not the belief but the believer” (Gamoran). Later, in a not dissimilar way to Protestantism within Christianity, the progressive thinkers of 19th and 20th century central Europe (notably Martin Buber, Hermann Cohen and Leo Baeck) highlighted spirit and values at the expense of the more legalistic literature contained within the *Talmud*. Still others rejected all such positions, and even went so far as to maintain that Judaism itself “has no essence,” and is, in fact, “an enduring and evolving historic force [that] undergoes continuous transformations” (Scholem, 1987). There is truth within all of these stances: Judaism is a combination of law, values, behaviours and rituals, shaped and defined by the forces of history, and Jewish education, broadly understood, seeks to teach all of this, in accordance with the particular ideological position held by the particular Jewish educator or community.

Nevertheless, there is commonality in the simple notion of “the text” or the canon. All Jews would recognise the role that a certain body of literature plays in Jewish education (even though they would choose to emphasise and deemphasise parts of it according to their beliefs), so much so that George Steiner, the twentieth century philosopher, has even

²³ Whilst these subjects certainly formed the basis, the curriculum was expanded at various stages, most notably in medieval Spain, where it included poetry, philosophy, arithmetic, logic, optics, astronomy, music, medicine, science and metaphysics. Moreover, both Jewish and non-Jewish thinkers were studied: the works of Aristotle, Euclid, Menelaus and Archimedes were part of the curriculum. In 16th century Italy too, the Jewish educational curriculum included composition, calligraphy, Latin and Italian (Gamoran). Furthermore, Drazin maintains that a certain degree of secular knowledge was always required, as it would have been impossible to fully understand, for example, the laws of forbidden and permitted foods without learning something about botany, zoology, physiology, anatomy, hygiene and medicine. (p.14).

controversially described it as the Jewish “homeland”.²⁴ This is because Jewish history is in many respects defined by its texts; the *Torah* itself (the first five books of the Bible) is the base upon which an ever-expanding exegetical tradition was built in an on-going attempt to understand the meaning of divine will. Within that tradition there are, of course, texts of greater and lesser importance: amongst the former are the rabbinic commentaries contained within the *Mishna* and the *Gemara* (which together comprise the *Talmud*) and a number of later commentaries, including most notably works by the 11th century French scholar Rashi and the 12th century philosopher Rambam. However, these works too have been discussed and interpreted, giving rise to a body of literature so vast that it has become a lifelong task to learn it, and even then, it is way beyond the capacity of the individual during a typical life span. There have been numerous attempts to summarise all of this down to a central essence or core, but ironically enough, the texts that seek to do this simply become absorbed into the greater textual canon to be pondered and studied along with everything else.²⁵ The primacy of the text also gave birth to one of Jewish education’s most well-known and oft-utilised methods – *chavruta* (lit. “friendship”) – a distinctive approach to Jewish learning which has become increasingly popular in recent times, and which involves two peers studying together in dialogical cooperation about the meaning of a particular text (Brown & Malkus, 2007).

This content, and these principles, educational institutions and methodologies survived the centuries through the various trials and tribulations of Jewish history, including the

²⁴ Steiner, G. (1996). “Our Homeland, the Text,” in *No Passion Spent: Essays 1978-1996*. London: Faber and Faber.

²⁵ Consider, for examples, the prophet Micah (“act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God” – Micah 6:8); Shimon HaTzadik (“The world stands on three things: “*Torah*” – i.e. learning, “*Avodah*” – i.e. worship, and “*Gemilut Chasadim*” – i.e. good deeds – M. Avot 1:2); and Hillel (“What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbour. That is the whole Torah; all the rest is commentary. Go and learn it!” – Shab. 31a).

particularly turbulent medieval period.²⁶ Indeed, they continue to be drawn upon today, in spite of the Enlightenment and the process of Jewish emancipation, which, not surprisingly given the changes it brought to Jewish life in general, introduced a range of new modes of Jewish education, new frameworks for its practice, and new conceptions of “the educated Jew.” (Fox, Scheffler, & Marom, 2003).²⁷ To cite several examples: in parallel with a similar development in Christian theology in Germany, the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* (Science of Judaism) movement of nineteenth century Germany introduced to the field of Jewish education critical investigation of Jewish texts using scientific methods, and a number of new institutions were established designed to teach Judaism in this fashion.²⁸ As new vistas opened up for Jews in wider society, the decline in Jewish knowledge and practice that inevitably followed inspired the creation of new centres for Jewish adult education, notably Franz Rosenzweig’s *Freies Juedisches Lehrhaus* (Free Jewish House of Learning) in Frankfurt in 1920.²⁹ Concern about the dangers of enlightenment ideas prompted Orthodox authorities to reassert and renew the *yeshiva*, and it was adapted to confront the new realities first in Eastern Europe, and later in Israel, the United States and a number of other

²⁶ The medieval period was a particularly turbulent time for Jews in Europe. Persecution was commonplace and included forced conversions, accusations of and punishment for ritual murder, and entire Jewish communities being expelled from particular regions and countries. In this context, the *Talmud* was commonly condemned as blasphemous, and confiscated or publicly burned in France, Italy, Poland and elsewhere.

²⁷ During the Enlightenment, Jews were emancipated throughout Europe and elsewhere. The encounter with modernity spawned a number of new forms of Judaism, each of which sought to find different ways to reconcile Jewish tradition with the philosophical and practical realities of the new era. See, for example: Katz, J. (1978). *Out of the Ghetto. The Social Background of Jewish Emancipation, 1770-1870*. New York: Schocken.

²⁸ The *Wissenschaft* movement was founded in Germany in 1819. Whilst its proponents had a tendency to present Judaism as something of a relic (Mendes Flohr, 1998), its philosophy evolved over time, and institutions that may be regarded as part of its legacy include the Jewish Theological Seminary of America (established in 1886), the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (established in 1925), and the Jewish Studies departments of a range of universities including Brandeis, Harvard and University College London.

²⁹ Rosenzweig was concerned about his contemporaries’ growing distance from Jewish texts and life, and regarded a renewed form of Jewish learning to be critical to the renewal of Jewish life. His *Lehrhaus* was both a continuation of, and a departure from traditional Jewish learning: Rosenzweig regarded Jewish study to be the means by which one moved closer to Judaism, but his approach to it drew on modern scientific methods. In one oft-quoted remark from his article “On Jewish Learning,” Rosenzweig calls for the classroom to “remain the anteroom leading to the synagogue and participation in its service. An understanding of public worship and participation in its expression will make possible what is necessary for the construction of Judaism: a Jewish world.”

countries.³⁰ New types of Jewish schools were established, often to help Jews integrate into wider society, but more commonly today to strengthen and affirm children's Jewishness.³¹ The enlightenment spirit and the question of how Jews should or should not integrate into wider society also spawned new models of Jewish youth work, camping and non-formal education, which were heavily influenced by German youth movements such as the *Wandervogel* and the scout movement.³² Finally, the welfare needs of the vast wave of Jewish immigration to the United States from eastern Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, breathed new life into the YMHA (the Young Men's Hebrew Association) and YWHA (Young Women's Hebrew Association), which, with time, inspired the establishment of Jewish Community Centres (JCCs) to provide Jewish educational and cultural input.³³ Thus, the field of Jewish education has become increasingly broad and diverse, involving a range of formal and non-formal organisations and institutions, a number of both conflicting and complementary philosophies, and a significant variety of methods and approaches.

³⁰ The modern renewal of the *yeshiva* movement began in the now Belarussian town of Volozhin in the 18th century, where secular subjects were included in the curriculum for trainee rabbis, and other similar institutions were established in Eastern Europe in its wake, notably in Ponevezh, Mir, Brisk and Telz. Today, there are numerous *yeshivot* around the world, and attending one for a year or more is commonly regarded as an educational rite of passage for many Orthodox Jews.

³¹ One of the first of these was the Jewish Free School (JFS) in London, although its establishment pre-dates Jewish emancipation. Arguably the first Jewish day school of the modern era was Samson Raphael Hirsch's *Realschule* in Frankfurt, Germany. In recent years, Jewish day schools have become increasingly popular in Britain and the United States.

³² The *Wandervogel*, established in Berlin in 1896, was a youth movement for young Germans with a strong emphasis on outdoor activities, and that highlighted many of the educational and cultural ideas associated with German Romanticism. It served to inspire Jews of a range of persuasions, and several Zionist youth movements were set up (notably *Betar*, *Bnei Akiva*, *Hashomer Hatzair*, and *Habonim*) to prepare young Jews for emigration to Palestine. In a not dissimilar manner, an increased focus on non-formal educational and social frameworks for young people influenced the establishment of a number of Jewish youth clubs in Britain, most of which were largely bent on integrating young Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe into British society. See: Sidney Bunt (1975) *Jewish Youth Work. Past, present and future*, London: Bedford Square Press, and Rose D. (2005) 'The world of the Jewish youth movement', *the encyclopedia of informal education*, www.infed.org/informal/jewisheducation/jewish_youth_movements.htm (accessed 26 December 2008).

³³ Today there are over 250 JCCs in North America providing educational, cultural, social and recreational programmes for people of all ages and backgrounds. One, based on the North American model, is currently being established in London.

The Jews of Britain

In both historical and contemporary terms, the British Jewish community constitutes, at best, a population of occasional passing interest. According to most historical accounts, Jews first arrived in Britain with William the Conqueror in the wake of the Norman Conquest, although some scholars maintain that there has been a Jewish presence since Roman times (Endelman 2002, Roth 1964). Persecution followed them, however: in a dominant Christian context in which Jews were routinely blamed for the death of Christ, a young man from Norwich became the first Jew in the world to be accused of ritual murder (1144), the community of York – under siege by the local population – committed mass suicide (1190), and, ultimately, all Jews living in Britain were expelled by a decree of Edward I in 1290. A small community was re-established in 1656 during the Protectorate of Oliver Cromwell, the members of which were essentially of *Sephardi* origin, having been descendants of refugees from the Iberian peninsula following the Inquisition and the expulsions from there in 1492 and 1496.³⁴ However, the largest influx of refugees – about 100,000 in total – came from Eastern Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and was comprised of those who fled from Tsarist Russia because of persecution there.³⁵ Other waves of immigration came from Nazi Germany in the 1930s (some 60,000 arrived between 1933 and 1941), and more recently, significant populations have arrived from Israel, South Africa and, to a lesser extent, the United States (Sachar, 1985, Graham, Schmool & Waterman, 2007).

³⁴ 'Sephardi' Jews are of Spanish, North African and Middle Eastern descent, and are usually contrasted with 'Ashkenazi' Jews who trace their family roots back to Western, Central and Eastern Europe.

³⁵ Estimates suggest that the community increased from 60,000 in 1880, to about 250,000 by 1919 (Graham, Schmool & Waterman, 2007).

According to the 2001 UK Census, there are 267,740 Jews living in Britain today, although this figure constitutes an undercount (Graham, et. al., 2007).³⁶ Two-thirds are based in London, with sizeable populations in Manchester, Glasgow and Leeds, and smaller numbers scattered across the country (Graham, et. al. 2007). The community as a whole includes a small but rapidly growing strictly-Orthodox, or *haredi*, community that rather separates itself off from both the mainstream Jewish community and from wider British society, but the vast majority of Jews remain well-integrated having been based in the country – or other similar Western countries – for several generations (Graham and Vulkan 2010, and Boyd 2011). The largest religious organisation is the Modern Orthodox ‘United Synagogue’ which is headed by its Chief Rabbi Lord Sacks, although much of its membership is only nominally-Orthodox in terms of adherence to Jewish law (Kalms 1992), and significant proportions of British Jews have elected to join more progressively-leaning synagogues, variously termed ‘*Masorti*’ (traditional), ‘Reform,’ or ‘Liberal.’³⁷ The existence of these denominations is a result of the enlightenment forces described above, and, if anything, there is reason to think that further sub-divisions of the community will take place in the future. A cursory glance at any of the recent sociological studies of Jewish identity that have been conducted in Britain and elsewhere in the Jewish diaspora clearly demonstrate the extent of Jewish religious diversity today: respondents are typically asked to categorise themselves from a growing range of adjectives – Strictly Orthodox, Orthodox, Traditional,

³⁶ The figure published based on the 2001 Census data “did not include Jews who identified by ethnicity only in England and Wales, or Scottish Jews who identified as Jewish by upbringing but held no current religion. These broader definitions brought the total number of Jews enumerated in the United Kingdom... to 270,499.” (Graham, et. al., 2007). Moreover, the same report estimates that up to 15% of all Jews living in the United Kingdom chose not to identify themselves as Jewish in the Census, as doing so was voluntary. Data on Jews from the 2011 Census are only beginning to be analysed now, but initial hypotheses suggest that the number has remained largely static since 2001 (Graham, Boyd and Vulkan, 2012).

³⁷ In 1998, Schmool estimated that progressive members comprised 17% of the total number of Jews living in Britain, which represents approximately 25% of all synagogue members (Troen 1998). More recent data suggests that these figures may have increased to 23% of the total number of Jews and 31% of all synagogue members (Graham and Vulkan 2010).

Conservative, Reform, Liberal, Reconstructionist, Renewal, Multi-denominational, Post-denominational, Secular, Agnostic or “Just Jewish.” (Cohen & Eisen 2000; Horowitz 2003; Cohen & Kahn-Harris 2004; Jmelnizky & Erdei 2005; Kovács 2009, etc.) Whilst not all of these categories exist in the British community, they do reflect some discomfort with particular labels, and as is generally the case in a context of “liquid modernity” (Bauman, 2000), there is often a degree of movement between the denominations over the course of an individual’s lifetime. Furthermore, at any given point, only about 70% of British Jews belong to a synagogue; the remaining 30% choose not to affiliate for a variety of reasons: because they don’t regard synagogue membership as a priority; because they choose to identify in ethnic rather than religious terms; or because they are so well-assimilated that they no longer opt to identify at all (Schmool & Cohen 1998, Graham 2003, Hart and Kafka, 2006; Graham and Vulkan 2010). To complicate the picture still further, according to research data gathered in 1996, religious observance in the Jewish community should not necessarily be equated with an expression of religious faith anyway, but rather more “a means of identifying with the Jewish community.” (Miller, Schmool & Lerman 1996).

Located in both the contexts of time and space, the current size of the community is rather small: data from 1950 indicates that the British Jewish community reached its highest point then at 420,000,³⁸ but even that figure is dwarfed by the size of the two largest Jewish

³⁸ This figure is questioned in the literature (see, for examples, Graham, Schmool and Waterman (2007) and Prais and Schmool (1968)). The debate revolves around methods used to gather the data, and how to define the boundaries of Jewish society. Population estimates have become considerably more accurate since the inclusion of a voluntary question about religion in the 2001 UK Census (Graham, Schmool and Waterman, 2007). Prior to that, the method consistently adopted involved extrapolating population size from the number of deaths recorded within the Jewish community. This assumed that anyone who lived as a Jew would wish their death to be recognised by some Jewish ritual, and avoided any definition of Jewishness based on activity or membership within the community. However, it did not necessarily include all who, if asked, would self-identify as Jewish, and thus inevitably constituted an undercount which could not be viably estimated (Schmool and Cohen, 1998). Thus, numbers have always had to be adjusted to take this factor into account.

communities in the world – Israel and the United States – both of which are today home to over five million Jews each. Its decline in numbers can largely be accounted for by low birth rates and the long-term impact of an ageing population, but the forces of assimilation and emigration, particularly to Israel, have also taken their toll. Thus, in most respects, Britain is something of a backwater for world Jewry – a community of some interest, but hardly a major centre of Jewish life. Nevertheless, it is home to one of the densest concentrations of Jews in the world – aside from Israel and the USA, only France and Canada have larger Jewish populations, and London is home to the fourteenth largest metropolitan Jewish community in the world (DellaPergola 2011).

Life within the British Jewish community has had something of a reputation for dullness for much of the post-Second World War period. Not untypically, Sachar entitles his chapter about British Jewry “The Jews of Complacency,” and he describes the community as “far more adept at exploiting its common denominator of ethnic gregariousness than at responding imaginatively to new religious and ethnic challenges.”³⁹ He adds, “Anglo-Jewish organisational life altogether remains notably pedestrian,”⁴⁰ and variously describes its cultural life as somnolent,⁴¹ its religious-educational life “exceptionally shallow,”⁴² and the

Furthermore, there are multiple definitions of Jewishness: For example, Hartman (2007) notes: “Over the last two centuries, diversity, along with subsequent denominationalism of unprecedented scope, have taken root within the [Jewish] community. As a result, it has become increasingly difficult to ascertain a shared ethos around which the Jewish community can remain unified. Within this context, it is not surprising then, that one of the more pointed and salient expressions of this denominationalism is the bitter contentiousness to which any discussion of membership and admission policies inevitably devolves. As a people divided over the question of what constitutes Judaism, we have been unable to reach anything approaching a consensus around the question of ‘who is a Jew?’, and all current attempts seem to only further the divisive nature of contemporary Jewish collective life.” For a discussion of how this affects demographic estimates, see DellaPergola (2011), pp.24-25.

³⁹ Sachar, H. M. (1985). *Diaspora. An Inquiry into the Contemporary Jewish World*. New York: Harper & Row., p.168.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.167.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.165.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p.160.

religious establishment as “a bore.”⁴³ Sachar also quotes Chaim Bermant, who wrote a widely-respected weekly column in *The Jewish Chronicle* for over thirty years before his death in 1998, and maintained “as a community [the Jews of England] seem on the way to extinction.”⁴⁴ It is difficult to know whether this view of the community contributed to the demographic decline, or whether the demographic decline created the somnolence, but it is certainly prevalent. A United Jewish Israel Appeal (UJIA) document from 2003 similarly describes the “conventional pessimistic view” of British Jewry: “Intermarriage figures, assimilation rates and loss of identity are regularly reported and discussed, and the prevailing image is of a community in crisis.”⁴⁵ That said, much of what is known about British Jewry comes from the archives its community’s weekly newspaper, *The Jewish Chronicle*, which has been in existence since 1841, the simple longevity of which suggests a certain degree of cultural vibrancy and communal engagement.

Arguably one of the more important findings about the qualitative nature of the identities of British Jews is that it is difficult to generalise; indeed, attitudes on educational policy, censorship and ethical issues tend to be very divergent (Miller, Schmool & Lerman, 1996). The same authors point to a clear divide within the community – between secular and progressive Jews on the one hand and more orthodox on the other. Nevertheless, certain trends are identifiable: British Jews tend to be more left-wing politically than those in equivalent socio-economic bands in wider society, more radical on environmental issues, and more liberal on crime and punishment. A growing sector feels “firmly and securely rooted in British society, and endogamy is regarded by many in the community to be on the

⁴³ Ibid., p.167.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p.165.

⁴⁵ *The Next Horizon* (2003). London: UJIA. p.6.

decline, although this is difficult to ascertain. Estimates suggest that exogamy amongst Jewish men under the age of 40 was thought to be at 44% in 1996; no reliable data has been published since that time. Attitudes towards Israel vary, although they lean heavily towards strong attachment: according to a 1997 study, 43% of the community feel a strong attachment to the Jewish State, 38% a moderate attachment, 16% feel no special attachment, and 3% have negative feelings (Kosmin, Lerman, Goldberg, 1997), and more recent data indicates that these feelings have been maintained at least in the intervening years (Graham and Boyd 2010).⁴⁶ The mainstream establishment of the community has traditionally been overwhelmingly supportive of the Israeli government, as indicated by the Jewish Leadership Council's investment in the January 2009 pro-Israel rallies during the war in Gaza, but dissenting voices can be heard with increasing frequency, particularly in the progressive movements, amongst Jewish journalists working in the liberal media, and via the creation of new Jewish organisations, most notably "Independent Jewish Voices."⁴⁷ Indeed, there is now some evidence to suggest that these positions are beginning to influence the established community leadership.⁴⁸ Whilst attitudes to Israel certainly test

⁴⁶ The question asked in the 2010 study did not replicate the question asked in the 1997 survey, thus it is impossible to make direct comparisons between the two datasets. Nevertheless, the percentage of Jews in Britain who had visited Israel increased from 78% in 1997 to 95% by 2010, and other measures recorded in 2010 but not 1997 (for example, 90% of Jews in Britain consider it to be their "ancestral homeland", 87% feel responsible for its survival, and 82% say it plays a "central" or "important but not central role in their lives") suggest that attachment levels remain very strong.

⁴⁷ The Jewish Leadership Council is a recently-established body comprised of the voluntary leaders of the major Jewish communal organisations and a number of other well-known leaders of the community. Its mission is "to strengthen the major institutions of British Jewry, to promote cooperation between them and to help the leadership of the community to articulate a confident and compelling narrative of mainstream Jewish life in the United Kingdom." See: www.thejlc.org. Independent Jewish Voices is a body founded in opposition to the mainstream community leadership's position on Israel. Its commitment to human rights and opposition to racism of any kind, have caused it to denounce "those who claim to speak on behalf of Jews in Britain and other countries" who "consistently put support for the policies of an occupying power above the human rights of an occupied people." See: <http://jewishvoices.squarespace.com/>.

⁴⁸ For example, speaking at a public Jewish communal event in November 2010, Mick Davis, the Chairman of the Jewish Leadership Council arguably went further than any previous senior British Jewish leader in his criticism of Israeli government policy towards the Palestinians, notably offering a clear critique of the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu ("I object to the fact that Netanyahu hasn't got the courage to take the

some Jews' sense of belonging to the community, a significant number of Jews do feel heavily attached, a feeling that is more likely to be characterised by a shared sense of ethnicity, rather than a commitment to spiritual interests (Cohen & Kahn-Harris, 2004).

Understanding precisely what community belonging means is, of course, complex. In many respects, it would be more accurate to talk of British Jewish *communities* rather than one coherent whole containing shades of difference within it.⁴⁹ There is little connection between the *haredi* community and other non-*haredi* Jews (with some notable exceptions), and there have been several episodes of internecine conflict between the various religious denominations, particularly the United Synagogue and the progressive movements.⁵⁰ One commentator has even claimed that “polarised religious divisions... are now the most distinguishing hallmark of Anglo-Jewry” (Alderman, 2003).⁵¹ However, as has already been stated, these divisions are somewhat fluid, and the boundaries that separate them increasingly porous, so it is not uncommon to encounter Jews in the process of becoming more or less religiously-engaged over the course of their lives. Furthermore, because

steps that he would like to take. I think he would like to be seen as the person who makes the great advance...He is a prisoner of the past and a prisoner of the circumstances that he finds himself in. I don't understand the lack of strategy in Israel.”) A summary of his comments can be found here: <http://www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/41424/mick-davis-full-comments> (first accessed on 19 November 2010). To see evidence of high level support for his position, see: Lord Janner, “It is our obligation to speak against injustice” *The Jewish Chronicle*, 25 November 2010, downloaded from: <http://www.thejc.com/comment-and-debate/comment/41758/it-our-obligation-speak-against-injustice> (first accessed on 26 November 2010).

⁴⁹ See: “A Community of Communities: Report of the Commission on Representation of the Interests of the British Jewish Community” (2000). London: Institute for Jewish Policy Research.

⁵⁰ The most well-known occurrence in recent years became known as the ‘Hugo Gryn Affair.’ Hugo Gryn was a Holocaust survivor, and greatly-loved and respected Reform rabbi in the community who also had a considerable profile in British society at large. When Gryn died in 1996, the Orthodox Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, who had previously written with concern about the growing fault line between Orthodoxy and progressive forms of Judaism, neither attended his funeral nor a subsequent memorial service held in his honour. In the face of immense public criticism, Sacks eventually agreed to address a memorial meeting, although not before writing a letter to *Dayan* Chenoah Padwa – arguably the leading authority on Jewish law in Britain – in which he confessed his distaste for what he was about to do, and his private opposition to Gryn and his religious beliefs. When that letter was published by the *Jewish Chronicle*, Sacks came in for yet further criticism, and was publicly denounced as a hypocrite (Alderman, 1998).

⁵¹ Encel, S. & Stein, L. (eds.) (2003). *Continuity, Commitment and Survival. Jewish Communities in the Diaspora*. Westport: Greenwood.

Jewishness is both an ethnic and religious category, it is feasible to maintain one's identity outside of any formalised Jewish religious framework at all, and thus completely secular Jews are commonplace. Not only is Jewishness thus expressed in multiple ways, there is also an increasingly large body of evidence from the United States to suggest that the connections between these communities appears to be in decline, which only adds fuel to the sense of disunity (Cohen and Wertheimer, 2006).⁵²

In essence then, the portrait that emerges from much of the data and literature shows a British Jewish community in a clear state of demographic decline, with a rising intermarriage rate, that has undergone several episodes of intra-communal strife, and that has a much greater reputation for conservatism than cultural creativity or innovation. Certainly, that was the prevailing image in December 1980 when *Limmud* ran its first ever conference, and whilst more recent demographic data show little sign of a reversal of fortune, recent developments in Jewish education offer clear evidence of valiant attempts in that direction.

Recent developments in Jewish education in Britain

Community divisions, crisis, and the paucity of British Jewish education were all laid bare in Britain during the early-1990s, a period when new emphasis was being placed on Jewish education in the United States, which, as the 1990s unfolded, spread to the UK (Wertheimer, 1999, Schmool & Miller, 1994). This emphasis in both places was the result of

⁵² Cohen and Wertheimer note: "Mounting evidence now attests to a weakened identification among American Jews with their fellow Jews abroad, as well as a waning sense of communal responsibility at home. The once-forceful claims of Jewish "peoplehood" have lost their power to compel."

two major factors: (i) a sense that the State of Israel, which had long been the primary focus of Diaspora Jewry's interest, concern, and even ethnic identity, was heading towards a new era of peace and prosperity; and (ii) an increased belief in an alarmist scenario that intermarriage and assimilation in the Diaspora would cause irreparable haemorrhaging in the community, and ultimately spell the end of Diaspora Jewry.⁵³ Whilst the former of these was obviously greeted (rather prematurely) with delight, the second caused considerable concern: one leading academic, summarising data gathered in the late-1980s and early 1990s, noted that "reports of high and mounting rates of Jewish-Gentile marriage have led many to speculate that large numbers of American Jews – or, more precisely, their offspring – will fail to identify as such or will do so in only the most superficial fashion. In response, many Jewish parents and the organised Jewish community are pinning their hopes for 'Jewish continuity' on the Jewish educational system" (Cohen, 1999). Indeed, a landmark report was published in 1990 following two years of work undertaken by some of the leading Jewish educational thinkers in the world, which made the following statement:

"There is a deep and widespread concern in the Jewish community today that the commitment to basic Jewish values, ideals, and behaviour may be diminishing at an alarming rate. A substantial number of Jews no longer seem to believe that Judaism has a role to play in their search for personal fulfilment and

⁵³ The sense that Israel no longer needed British Jewish support was partly due to the peace agreements that were signed in the first half of the 1990s. The Oslo Accords, and the bilateral peace deals agreed between Israel and the Palestinian Authority and Israel and Jordan contributed to a feeling that Israel no longer needed Diaspora Jewish support in the ways it had during the more critical earlier period marked by the Middle East wars of 1967 and 1973. Furthermore, a landmark speech given by the Israeli parliamentarian Yossi Beilin at an American Jewish fundraising event in 1994 caused a storm when he maintained that Israel no longer needed Diaspora Jewry's financial support as it had become economically self-sufficient. The belief that the real crisis in the Jewish world had shifted from Israel to the Diaspora was supported by data in the 1990 American National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS) showing that 52% of American Jews were married to non-Jews.

communality. This has grave implications not only for the richness of Jewish life but for the very continuity of a large segment of the Jewish people.

“Throughout history Jews have faced dangers from without with courage and steadfastness; now a new kind of commitment is required. The Jews of North America live in an open society that presents an unprecedented range of opportunities and choices. This extraordinary environment confronts us with what is proving to be an historic dilemma: while we cherish our freedom as individuals to explore new horizons, we recognise that this very freedom poses a dramatic challenge to the future of the Jewish way of life. The Jewish community must meet the challenge at a time when young people are not sure of their roots in the past or of their identity in the future. There is an urgent need to explore all possible ways to ensure that Jews maintain and strengthen the commitments that are central to Judaism.

“In our uniquely pluralistic society, where there are so many philosophies and ideologies competing for attention, and where the pursuit of Judaism increasingly involves a conscious choice, the burden of preparation for such a decision resides with education. Jewish education must be compelling – emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually – so that Jews, young and old, will say to themselves: “I have decided to remain engaged, to continue to investigate and grapple with these ideas, and to choose an appropriate Jewish way of life.” Jewish education must be sustained, expanded, and vastly improved if it is to achieve this objective. It must become an experience that inspires greater

numbers of Jews to learn, feel, and act in a way that reflects a deep understanding of Jewish values.”⁵⁴

This concern, and its broad solution, “spawned dozens of local ‘continuity’ commissions” in the United States (Aron, Zeldin and Lee, 2006), and soon began to inform the central policy of the newly-appointed British Chief Rabbi, Dr Jonathan Sacks (now Lord Sacks).⁵⁵ In a series of articles written in 1993, which subsequently informed the main thesis of his 1994 book *Will We Have Jewish Grandchildren?*, Sacks explained as follows:

“Anglo-Jewry lacks an overall strategy for education, for continuity and for communal priorities as a whole. As a result we, in common with America, have done what no Jewish community did between the destruction of the second Temple and the nineteenth century. We neglected our intellectual, spiritual and cultural life. We lost our finest heritage, the Jewish educational environment and the concept of a ‘learning society.’ Worst of all for a people that has always cared for its future, we put the Jewish needs of our children last.”⁵⁶

“We need a new community-wide organisation. The reason is simple. There are many religious and educational bodies in Anglo-Jewry and many youth groups and outreach programmes. Each is valuable and each has a vital role to play. But

⁵⁴ See: *A Time to Act. The Report of the Commission on Jewish Education in North America*. Lanham, New York, London: University Press of America, 1990. Downloaded from the Internet on 18 December 2008: <https://www.policyarchive.org/bitstream/handle/10207/10839/ATimeToAct.pdf?sequence=1>.

⁵⁵ Sacks’s policy built on the earlier work of Fred Worms, a leading figure in the British Jewish community, who authored a major report in 1992 that was published by the Jewish Educational Development Trust entitled *Securing Our Future*.

⁵⁶ See: Jonathan Sacks, “Studies in Renewal 4 (September 1993), downloaded on 19 December 2008 from <http://www.chief Rabbi.org/ar-index.html>.

there is nothing that puts them together into a coherent strategy. The result is fragmentation and creative chaos – creative, but chaos nonetheless.

“A single body is needed to promote, strategise and resource all those many activities in our community which create Jewish continuity. Its task will be to intensify Jewish life in such a way as to create future generations of Jews who are proud, knowledgeable and committed as Jews. To do so it will have to aim at nothing less than a complete transformation of Anglo-Jewish attitudes, so that continuity moves from last to first place on our communal agenda. The new organisation will have to become the third arm of Anglo-Jewry, alongside Israel and welfare. The clearest test of its success or failure will be whether in five years time education is still languishing at the bottom of our list of communal charities or whether it has made its claim to at least equal status with the other causes. If we succeed, Anglo-Jewry will have a future. If we fail, its future is altogether in doubt.”⁵⁷

The “single body” was launched in 1993 under the name “Jewish Continuity.” Jewish Continuity’s role was to invest heavily in Jewish education in Britain in order to reverse the assimilatory tide and usher in what Sacks hoped would be a “decade of renewal.” In so doing, it was also hoped that a new relationship would be established with Israel, whereby the country would become a place for Diaspora-based Jews to study and learn in order to return to the Diaspora sufficiently inspired by their experience to wish to help sustain

⁵⁷ See: Jonathan Sacks, “Studies in Renewal 5 (October 1993), downloaded on 19 December 2008 from <http://www.chief Rabbi.org/ar-index.html>.

community life (Sacks, 1994). Jewish Continuity was established amid a flurry of media coverage, but was almost instantly criticised by different sectors of the community either for its over-emphasis on the mainstream Orthodox community, or for its funding of progressive institutions such as Leo Baeck College (Alderman, 1998). Sacks had written previously that the new organisation “will be aimed at all Jews in the unshakable belief that every Jew is precious;” in reality, however, there was much consternation over funds raised within the Orthodox community going to the progressives, and vice versa. As one commentator observed, “religious disputations promptly and inevitably ensued which threatened to kill it [Jewish Continuity], and which very nearly did.”⁵⁸ The difficulties should perhaps not have been a surprise given that the British Chief Rabbi is actually only the Chief Rabbi of mainstream Orthodoxy in Britain and other Commonwealth countries, but it was one of the key factors that led to Jewish Continuity’s quick demise, and ultimate merger with another community organisation, the Joint Israel Appeal (JIA) in 1996, to create the United Jewish Israel Appeal (UJIA) in 1997.⁵⁹ Publically, this arrangement was about fundraising, but UJIA’s greater neutrality on denominational matters (the JIA had a long history of working with, and raising funds from Jews from across the Jewish religious spectrum) positioned it as a far more impartial, and arguably effective educational body.

As UJIA’s educational programme unfolded under the name “Renewal,” it became clear that its strategic approach and marketing tone would differ radically from those of Jewish Continuity. Jewish Continuity’s strategic approach lacked coherence, but so far as it was

⁵⁸ Chaim Bermant, “Charitable Priorities,” *The Jewish Chronicle*, 17 October 1997.

⁵⁹ This episode has been recounted in detail in: Kahn-Harris, K. and Gidley, B (2010). *Turbulent Times. The British Jewish Community Today* (London: Continuum), and is the subject of a recently-submitted doctoral thesis (see: Graham, R. (2011). *Jewish community education: continuity and renewal initiatives in British Jewry 1991-2000*. Doctoral thesis, University of Huddersfield. Restricted to repository staff only until November 2013).

discernible, the organisation invited members of the British Jewish community to bring their educational ideas to it; if it then deemed them of value and potential benefit, it would invest in them. UJIA, in contrast, published a substantial public document outlining its strategy, in which it identified three strategic priorities: non-formal education for young people and university students, youth programmes in Israel, and investment in the recruitment, training and retention of teachers, rabbis, and other community practitioners.⁶⁰ In essence, Jewish Continuity invited innovation from individual members of the community but was criticised for its scattergun approach; UJIA struggled to respond to or invest in new and creative ideas, but was nevertheless praised for its targeted and focused tactics. In terms of marketing, UJIA learned from Jewish Continuity's earlier mistakes. Continuity was launched not only on the back of Sacks's high profile lectures and pamphlets, but also with a series of full-page advertisements conveying the so-called crisis, placed in the British Jewish community's national weekly newspaper, *The Jewish Chronicle*. Once it was operational, its work was highly visible: every investment it made was publicly reported and analysed. In contrast, UJIA's programme was low-profile, developed quietly behind the scenes, but with a view of the communal situation that was considerably more upbeat than Continuity's: a compelling challenge to face over time, rather than a terrible crisis in need of immediate solutions.

Irrespective of the political complications and strategic differences, the Jewish Continuity/UJIA chapter in British Jewish history certainly achieved one thing: it helped to raise the profile of Jewish education in the community. In the years since, a number of major successes can be noted: the establishment of several new Jewish schools, sustained participation in youth tours to Israel, the creation of several new organisations and

⁶⁰ *The Next Horizon* (2003). London: UJIA.

initiatives, and, in general, a cultural shift which positioned the field of Jewish education at the heart of Jewish communal concerns (Miller, 2001).⁶¹

Limmud too, is a product of that period. Whilst it was established in 1980, it wasn't until the 1990s that it began to expand dramatically in terms of its participant numbers, and develop a high quality educational profile in Britain and beyond. The reasons for its expansion are a matter of conjecture, although several reasons are suggested in the literature, including (i) that it was genuinely cross-communal, attracting speakers and participants from across the denominational spectrum; (ii) that it was seen as a positive and upbeat response to the challenges outlined by Sacks and others, rather than a desperate, last gasp attempt to curb the tide of assimilation; and (iii) that it was all about Jewish education, offering individuals a range of opportunities to engage in the learning that community leaders had elected to prioritise. Given the context outlined above, these were important elements in its growth and expansion.

However, what makes *Limmud* more intriguing is the fact that it has been replicated so widely throughout the Jewish world. Given the rather dismal view of British Jewry that prevailed for so long, it is surprising that a British Jewish educational model has been drawn on for inspiration and copied worldwide.⁶² Indeed, *Limmud* in the UK has now spawned a

⁶¹ As Jonathan Sacks noted in 1999: "In the past few years we have seen more new Jewish schools open, more dynamic young men enter the rabbinate, more outreach activities, alternative *minyanim*, seminars, conferences, experiments in adult education, more new Israel experiences, youth programmes and creative ventures in the media than ever before in Anglo-Jewish history." See: *Renewal*, Issue 1, June 1999, downloaded on 19 December 2010 from <http://www.chief Rabbi.org/ar-index.html>.

⁶² There are currently *Limmuds* in Argentina, Australia, Austria, Birobidzhan, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, China, France, Germany, Hungary, Lithuania, Mexico, Moldova, Netherlands, New Zealand, Poland, Romania, Russia, South Africa, Sweden, Turkey, Ukraine, the former Yugoslavia, and a number of locations across Israel and the United States. Each of these is "an independent volunteer-led organisation" but *Limmud* International, which runs under the auspices of *Limmud* UK, "supports each group through leadership training, development,

new body – *Limmud International* – to ensure that the core values and principles of *Limmud* UK are preserved and understood as communities throughout the world create their own versions of the conference. Clearly, the *Limmud* approach has struck something of a chord in people’s lives. Whilst the concerns about assimilation have neither waned nor disappeared since the early 1990s, and numerous educational attempts to help create a Jewish revival have been made during the intervening years, my starting hypothesis is that, given its clear capacity to inspire and engage large numbers of Jews, *Limmud* surely holds some important lessons, both for Diaspora Jewish organisations seeking to renew Jewish life, and for other religious and ethnic minorities concerned with similar challenges in their own contexts. I hope that via *Limmud’s* deconstruction, we may discover some of its essential educational principles, and this is my overarching research objective.

networking, mentoring and advice.” To become endorsed by *Limmud*, these initiatives must involve a “group of volunteers” covering “as wide a cross-section” of the local Jewish community as possible; and its leadership must endorse *Limmud* International’s “Core Values and Principles and Success Indicators” document (<http://www.limmudinternational.org/images/stories/Articles/limmud%20core%20values%20%20success%20indicators.pdf> – accessed 1 February 2013), among other conditions (see the *Limmud* International website (http://www.limmudinternational.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=56&Itemid=60 – accessed on 1 February 2013).

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Introduction

Before beginning my analysis of *Limmud* and seeking to answer my fundamental research question – what is its educational philosophy? – it is necessary to locate my work in the context of the existing literature. The purpose of this chapter is to examine research conducted in other areas that informs my analysis, to understand the methods employed in that research, and to outline and assess the findings. It also seeks to identify gaps within the literature, and to explain how this study is a contribution to filling them.

In the course of observing the *Limmud* conference, it became apparent to me that it is an educational initiative that brings together elements associated with formal educational structures (a university campus, lecture theatres, frontal lectures), non-formal educational initiatives (learner-driven, community-based, involving both cognitive and affective learning), and informal educational principles (individualised, casual or incidental learning). I considered it necessary, therefore, to examine some of the literature that differentiates between these ideas and practices, and clarifies their meaning in order to construct an appropriate framework for my research. However, it seemed particularly important to examine and understand the notion of ‘non-formal education’ (NFE) because, from my earliest encounters with it, *Limmud* appeared principally to me to be an example of this. Moreover, given that my research goal was to develop an understanding of *Limmud’s*

implicit educational philosophy, examining the philosophical literature in this area was paramount. There are number of philosophers and theorists whose ideas have become closely association with non-formal educational philosophy,⁶³ and it was clear from the outset that at least some of their ideas and the ways in which they understood education were likely to inform my analysis. Furthermore, existing definitions of NFE in the literature would shed light on the critical distinctions between NFE and formal and informal education and learning, which would serve to both situate my research, and to minimise the possibility of confusion over my use of terminology. I similarly regarded the philosophical and definitional literature about “non-formal Jewish education” (NFJE) and “informal Jewish education” (IJE) to be important, so the philosophical and analytical literature that exists in those areas played an important role in my analysis.

As I will demonstrate, the philosophical literature about NFE – and particularly about NFJE and IJE – places considerable emphasis on the role and importance of the group and interpersonal relationships in education. In light of this, I was eager to identify an area of the literature that might allow me explore these themes in more detail. There are various ways of doing this (literature from the fields of psychology, community development and organising, dialogue and group work were all initial possibilities), but I was particularly drawn towards the literature about social capital, which explores the value of social relationships and networks, the conditions that are necessary to sustain them, and the cultural norms that underpin them. *Limmud's* clear emphasis on voluntarism and interpersonal ties indicated to me that this literature would be particularly helpful, again, in terms of situating my research and building a framework for it. Furthermore, in a study of

⁶³ See, for examples, the Encyclopaedia of Informal Education: www.infed.org.

this length, I had to limit the fields of study from which I drew insight; it may well be that greater emphasis on some of these other areas of literature would yield other interesting and legitimate insights, and whilst I touched on all of them, I ultimately had to be selective. However, it did seem pertinent to consider some of the core sociological literature concerning aspects of identity and community, as well as the literature that explores these issues within the Jewish community (i.e. the extent to which sociological dynamics like individualism and the decline of communal ties are affecting Jews, and how the issue of social capital is understood and explored within that particular ethno-religious context. I hypothesised that, in spite of many of the challenges that these forces present – or perhaps, in part, as a result of them – *Limmud* appeared to build social capital in a range of ways, and thus offered an intriguing educational model of volunteerism and individual and social learning).

Finally, it was important to examine the literature on *Limmud* itself. Whilst little of an academic nature has been written about *Limmud*, there is a growing collection of journalistic articles that highlight important elements of the conference and its educational approach. The best of these are valuable sources and, in spite of their lack of empirical data, offer hypotheses worthy of consideration.

The structure of this chapter explores these areas in the order described above: first, the literature on NFE followed by that on NFJE; then the key general literature on social capital followed by analysis of the same topic in the context of the Jewish community; and finally, the literature on *Limmud* itself.

Non-formal education: foundational principles

In seeking to understand the term “non-formal education” (NFE), it is necessary to contrast it with two related terms: “formal education” and “informal education.” This task is complex, not least because each of the three terms has been contested over the course of several decades, and no single definition of any has become universally accepted or deployed. Indeed, “many texts use one or more of the terms without any clear definition,” and “issues involved are either assumed or addressed without the explicit use of the terms at all” (Colley, Hodkinson & Malcolm, 2002).⁶⁴ Furthermore, the various distinctions that are drawn between the terms “education” and “learning” add an auxiliary layer of complexity. Turning to some of the scholars and philosophers whose ideas have become associated with non-formal education is a helpful way of beginning to explore where the distinctions might lie.

Many scholars have noted important distinctions that are commonly drawn between fundamental educational approaches. Indeed, Dewey (1938) begins his famous work, *Experience and Education*, by stating “Mankind likes to think in terms of opposites. It is given for formulating its beliefs in *Either-Ors*, between which it recognises no intermediate possibilities.”⁶⁵ The main “either-or” he highlights is between “traditional” education and “progressive” education. In the case of the former “the subject matter of education consists of bodies of information and of skills that have been worked out in the past; therefore the

⁶⁴ Colley, H., Hodkinson, P. and Malcolm, J. (2002) *Non-formal learning: mapping the conceptual terrain. A Consultation Report*, Leeds: University of Leeds Lifelong Learning Institute. Also available in *the informal education archives*: http://www.infed.org/archives/e-texts/colley_informal_learning.htm.

⁶⁵ Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience and Education*. New York: Touchstone, p.17.

chief business of the school is to transmit them to the new generation.”⁶⁶ In the case of the latter, emphasis is placed on “expression and cultivation of individuality”, “free activity” and “learning through experience.”⁶⁷ Similarly, Rogers (1977), working in psychotherapy, differentiated between learning that has been personally appropriated, as opposed to what he calls “jug and mug” education – “wherein the faculty (the jug) possess the intellectual and factual knowledge and cause the student to be the passive recipient (the mug) so that the knowledge can be poured in.”⁶⁸ The former, which he terms “person-centred education” (and clearly favours), sits at the opposite end of the educational continuum to the latter: it involves a teacher or leader who is secure in herself, and who facilitates the learning process for the student by providing learning resources from which the student is able to develop his own programme of learning, either alone or in cooperation with others, as well as the self-discipline to take responsibility for continuing to learn and self-evaluate. For Rogers, this type of learning “tends to be deeper, proceeds at a more rapid rate, and is more pervasive in the life and behaviour of the student than is learning acquired in the traditional classroom.”⁶⁹ Freire (1972), following the work he did with illiterate peasants in Brazil, drew a remarkably similar distinction, juxtaposing “banking education” (that seeks to deposit certain ideas into the individual in order to domesticate) with “problem-posing education” (that helps the individual to liberate himself from the underlying assumptions of the establishment). “In the banking concept of education,” writes Freire, “knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they

⁶⁶ Ibid., p.17.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p.19.

⁶⁸ Rogers, C. (1977). “The Politics of Education”, in: Kirschenbaum, H. and Land Henderson, V. (1989). *The Carl Rogers Reader*. Boston/New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, p.326.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p.328.

consider to know nothing.”⁷⁰ “In problem-posing education,” he continues, “people develop their power to perceive critically the *way they exist* in the world *with which* and *in which* they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation.”⁷¹ In essence, Freire argues: “Whereas banking education anaesthetises and inhibits creative power, problem-posing education involves a constant unveiling of reality. The former attempts to maintain the *submersion* of consciousness; the latter strives for the *emergence* of consciousness and *critical intervention* in reality.”⁷² Gardner (1993), who brings together education and psychology in his work, can perhaps be added to this group in light of the challenge he brings with his multiple intelligence theory to the Cartesian assumption that learning is solely cognitive. Whilst all of these thinkers ultimately adopt slightly different perspectives on how best to resolve the tension between the contrasting forms of education they identify, the critical point is that they draw a distinction, and further, that all of these distinctions in some way point to the formal/non-formal division. Formal education – generally associated with schooling – tends to variously emphasise Dewey’s characterisation of a type of education that is designed to be preparation for living (i.e. one studies a particular curriculum in order to become qualified to later perform a set of tasks), Freire’s notion of banking education (i.e. that certain ideas can and should be deposited within the learner), Rogers’s explication of “jug and mug” education (that information can transferred into the learner), and an intellectual approach to learning that Gardner regards as one of, but not the only means by which the individual learns. In that sense, all of these commentators are often associated with non-formal education, or claimed by its proponents. Nevertheless, the way in which each of

⁷⁰ Freire, P. (1972). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. London: Penguin, p.53.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p.64. Italicised text is Freire’s emphasis.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p.62. Italicised text is Freire’s emphasis.

them seeks to resolve the tensions they see between the educational approaches they identify will be an important component in my study. The contrasts drawn are not always black and white: whilst Rogers clearly believes in an educational approach that situates the learner at the heart of the endeavour and Freire supports an approach to learning that begins with people's problems and questions and frees the individual from the oppressive forces of the ruling classes, Dewey sees risks in both progressive and traditional education and ultimately favours fusions between "the child and the curriculum" (1902) and learning and real life, and Gardner argues that people learn in multiple ways. Thus, whilst all of these thinkers are often associated with NFE (and one might further add, among others, Bruner (1996) and his emphasis on play and social interaction in education, Noddings (1984, 2002) and her focus on caring and subsequent conclusion that the home is the primary educator, and Palmer (1998) and his concentration on the need for a comprehensive form of community as a support framework for authentic education), the ways in which they relate to, and resolve the different educational approaches they identify constitutes an important part of non-formal educational discourse. So what are the critical differences between educational approaches, and what might be the relationship between them? And how might an understanding of this issue help to answer the key question: what is the implicit educational philosophy of *Limmud*?

Non-formal education: definitions

In spite of the many compelling arguments offered by the thinkers highlighted above, formal education remains the dominant approach, and, compared with non-formal and informal

education, the least contested term. Eraut (2000) offers one of the sharpest definitions, and in so doing, simultaneously outlines those factors that constitute non-formal education. His five features of formal learning are: (i) a prescribed learning framework; (ii) an organised learning event or package; (iii) the presence of a designated teacher or trainer; (iv) the award of a qualification or credit; and (v) the external specification of outcomes.⁷³ Whilst the status of educational endeavours that fulfil some of these criteria but not others remains unclear, Eraut's primary assumption is that any significant learning that is not of this type may be classified as non-formal.

However, drawing in part on some of the thinkers discussed above, many researchers argue that NFE ought to be characterised by a set of positive attributes, rather than comprised of factors that are "not" formal. According to Rogers (2004)⁷⁴, the original definition of non-formal education emerged in the late 1960s, and grew out of a widespread dissatisfaction with the formal educational structures that was captured most sharply by radical thinkers like Freire (1972)⁷⁵ and Illich (1973).⁷⁶ Rogers identifies Philip Coombs as the person who offered this first clear definition, and then applied it, perhaps most notably, to his work with Ahmed about the potential contribution of NFE to the reduction of rural poverty (Coombs and Ahmed, 1974).⁷⁷ However, in their study, Coombs and Ahmed still appear to rely heavily on a non-definition, describing non-formal education as "any organised activity with educational purposes carried on *outside* the highly structured framework of formal

⁷³ Eraut, M. (2000). "Non-formal learning, implicit learning and tacit knowledge," in F. Coffield (ed.) *The Necessity of Informal Learning*. Bristol: Policy Press.

⁷⁴ Rogers, Alan (2004). *Non-Formal Education. Flexible Schooling or Participatory Education?* Hong Kong: Kluwer Academic Publishers, p.37.

⁷⁵ Freire, P. (1972). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

⁷⁶ Illich, I. (1973). *Deschooling Society*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

⁷⁷ Coombs, P. H. and Ahmed, M. (1974). *Attacking Rural Poverty. How Nonformal Education Can Help*. Baltimore/London: John Hopkins University Press.

education systems as they exist today.” They go on to add: “Non-formal education... is not a ‘system’ of interrelated parts like formal education. Rather it is a bewildering assortment of separate educational activities, generally having little connection with each other... Non-formal education has extraordinary freedom and latitude to serve people of any age or background in virtually any kind of learning they desire. It can have a multiplicity of auspices and sources of support, assume an almost infinite variety of forms, use all sorts of staff and pedagogical methods, operate at different times and places and for varying lengths of time. It can, in short, be totally pragmatic.”⁷⁸ In contrast, Coombs saw the formal educational system as deficient due to “its failure to adapt rapidly enough to changing needs.”⁷⁹

In the four decades since then, numerous thinkers and practitioners have attempted to sharpen the definition. Consequently, the literature is too vast to offer here a fully comprehensive analysis of all the different views, but it is possible to consider some of the main theories of more recent years. Some commentators focus on several distinct characteristics of education that enable it to be categorised as non-formal. One of the more intriguing studies was conducted by D. M. Hunt, who sought to differentiate between formal and informal types of mentoring.⁸⁰ In so doing, he identified ten important areas: (i) the degree of external control – i.e. the extent to which the endeavour is managed or overseen by a sponsoring power; (ii) the degree of planning and institutionalisation; (iii) the level of intentionality of both mentor and mentee; (iv) the nature of the goals, both those of

⁷⁸ Ibid., p.233.

⁷⁹ Coombs, P. H. (1968) *The World Educational Crisis*. New York: Oxford University Press, p.141.

⁸⁰ Hunt, D.M. (1986). “Formal vs. informal mentoring: towards a framework,” in W.A. Gray and M.M. Gray (eds.) *Mentoring: Aid to Excellence in career Development, Business and the Professions – Proceedings of the First International Conference on Mentoring Vol.II*, Vancouver: International Association for Mentoring.

the sponsoring organisation (if applicable) and the individuals involved; (v) the locus of decisions about goals (the extent to which they are internal or external to the dyad); (vi) the depth and nature of the dyadic relationship; (vii) the degree to which participation is voluntary (by both partners); (viii) the time frame over which the relationship exists; (ix) the nature of how it is evaluated; and (x) the 'ecology' or nature of the setting in which the relationship is set. According to Hunt, informal mentoring is characterised by its unplanned nature, the fact that the individuals involved set their own goals rather than have them imposed by an external power, a voluntary friendship involving a high degree of social intensity and certain element of paternalism, an indefinite time span, and the notion that monitoring and evaluation are difficult to do as they are based on perception rather than set in accordance with specific criteria.

More recently, in his review of the literature on adult learning, D. W. Livingstone (2001) opts to highlight just three essential elements that determine the distinction between the different types of education: curriculum, the teacher-learner relationship and the voluntary or compulsory nature of the endeavour.⁸¹ For him, NFE occurs most commonly in adult education courses and workshops, in cases "when learners opt to acquire further knowledge or skill by studying voluntarily with a teacher who assists their self-determined interests, by using an organised curriculum." In contrast, formal education takes place when the teacher has authority to prescribe that the student learns a curriculum taken from an established body of knowledge, while informal learning occurs without such an externally-imposed curriculum, and outside the pre-established curricula of educative

⁸¹ Livingstone, D.W. (2001). *Adults' Informal Learning: Definitions, Findings, Gaps and Future Research*, Toronto: OISE/UT (Nall Working Paper No.21) at http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/29/c9/e8.pdf (accessed 5 May 2009).

institutions. Livingstone further identifies a fourth category beyond formal education, non-formal education and informal learning: “informal education or training”, which occurs when the teacher or mentor takes responsibility for instructing others without reference to an intentionally-organised body of knowledge, generally in more incidental or spontaneous learning situations.

Not dissimilarly, a European Commission report on lifelong learning issued in 2001 highlights the issues of institutional presence, educational structure, learner intentionality and certification.⁸² According to its understanding, NFE is similar to formal education insofar as the learning is structured (in terms of learning objectives, learning time and learning support) and the learner clearly comes to the endeavour with an *intention* to learn. However, it differs on issues around institutional presence and certification: whereas formal education is typically provided by an educational institution or organisation and leads to certification, NFE has neither of these features. To clarify further, informal learning, according to the EC definition, has none of the four main features of formal education. There is no educational institution involvement (it results from daily activities), it is not structured, does not lead to certification, and, in most cases, is non-intentional or even random.

⁸² European Commission (2001). Communication: Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality, at <http://www.bologna-berlin2003.de/pdf/MitteilungEng.pdf> (accessed 5 May 2009).

The issue of learner intentionality is also identified by Hodkinson and Hodkinson in their study of learning in the workplace,⁸³ although they cross reference it with the issue of the source of knowledge to create the following matrix (Table 3.1):

Table 3.1. Hodkinson and Hodkinson's learning matrix


	Intentional/planned	Unintentional/unplanned
Learning that which is already known to others	(1) Planned learning of that which others know	(2) Socialisation into an existing community of practice
Development of existing capability	(4) Planned/intended learning to refine existing capability	(3) Unplanned improvement of on-going practice
Learning that which is new in the workplace (or treated as such)	(5) Planned/intended learning to do that which has not been done before	(6) Unplanned learning of something not previously done

According to them, formal education is only that form which resides in box (1) – i.e. planned and intended learning that is already known by experts. Nevertheless, in exploring each of the six boxes, Hodkinson and Hodkinson introduce an important new element to the current analysis. Whilst valuable at the analytical level, they maintain that in the realm of practice the six elements are anything but distinctive. In articulating this, one of their key insights is the suggestion that the boundaries between the formal, non-formal and informal are, in fact, rather porous and blurred.

⁸³ Hodkinson, P. and Hodkinson, H. (2001). Problems of measuring learning and attainment in the workplace: complexity, reflexivity and the localised nature of understanding. Paper presented in the conference *Context, Power and Perspective: Confronting the Challenges to Improving Attainment in Learning at Work*, University College Northampton.

This blurring of distinctions is similarly explored by Stern and Sommerlad (1999).⁸⁴ Examining learning opportunities in the workplace, they present the differences between formal and informal learning as a continuum (Figure 3.1):

Figure 3.1. Stern and Sommerlad's learning continuum

Informal 	Unanticipated experiences and encounters that result in learning as an incidental by-product, which may or may not be consciously recognised
	New job assignments and participation in teams, or other job related challenges that are used for learning and self-development
	Self-initiated and self-planned experiences – including the use of media (print, television, radio, computers), seeking out a tutor or coach or mentor, attendance at conferences, travel or consulting
	Total quality groups/action learning or other vehicles designed to promote continuous learning for continuous improvement
	Planning a framework for learning, which is often associated with career plans, training and developing plans, or performance evaluations
	Combination of less organised experiences with structured opportunities, which may be facilitated to examine and learn from those experiences
	Designed programmes of mentoring and/or coaching, or on-the-job training
	Just-in-time courses, whether they are delivered as classes or through self-learning packages, with or without the assistance of technology
Formal	Formal training programmes
	Formal training programmes leading to a qualification

Whilst the extremes belong in particular categories (unanticipated experiences and encounters belong in 'informal'; formal training programmes leading to a qualification belongs in 'formal'), the eight descriptors between them involve varying degrees of formality or informality, and thus defy clear categorisation. The underlying case is that formal, non-formal and informal are ultimately not definable. They may be useful analytical categories, but in practice, education and learning are more complex than the terms allow.

⁸⁴ Stern, E. and Sommerlad, E. (1999). *Workplace Learning, Culture and Performance*. London: Institute of Personnel and Development.

Alan Rogers (2004) similarly uses the continuum idea, albeit in a slightly different manner.⁸⁵ His suggestion is that all educational programmes can be located somewhere on a continuum marked by three main points: (i) formal education (or de-contextualised education) – i.e. “schooling which is characterised by a high degree of standardisation” in which “participants are called upon to adapt to it” and “the same learning programme is provided for all members of the group”; (ii) flexible schooling – i.e. “standardised educational programmes adapted in limited ways to meet local needs”; and (iii) participatory education (contextualised) – i.e. highly participative programme “adapted to the needs of the particular set of participants in every respect” where “participants learn what they want to learn, when they want to learn it, where they want to learn it and in their own mode, and for as long as they want to learn it.” These three categories are ultimately equated with formal, non-formal and informal education, although Rogers is quick to argue that “these are not hard and fast categories – any particular education will involve movement [in both directions] along the continuum.”

Like Stern and Sommerlad, Beckett and Hager’s work (2002) also focuses on learning in the workplace, but unlike them, it is underpinned by a stinging critique of the Cartesian idea of the superiority of the mind over the body, or intellect over emotion.⁸⁶ They claim that most of our assumptions about learning have been heavily influenced by this notion, and as a result, we tend to adopt a certain set of self-evident ‘truths’ that are both empirically and philosophically untenable. These include the ideas that the best learning resides in individual minds not bodies, that it is propositional (true, false, more certain, less certain),

⁸⁵ Rogers, *Non-Formal Education*, pp.259-261.

⁸⁶ Beckett, D. And Hager, P. (2002). *Life, Work and Learning: Practice in Postmodernity*. London: Routledge.

that it is capable of being expressed verbally and written down in books, that the acquisition of the best learning alters minds not bodies, and that all such learning can be applied via bodies to alter the external world. For Beckett and Hager learning is organic and holistic, engaging the whole person, so that intellect, emotions, values and practical activities are blended. Informal learning does this, which makes it far more effective than formal learning which resides within the Cartesian paradigm. To clarify further, they present the differences between formal and informal learning in the following tabular form (3.2):

Table 3.2. Distinguishing between formal and informal learning (Beckett and Hager)

Formal	Informal
Single capacity focus – e.g. cognition	Organic/holistic
De-contextualised	Contextualised
Passive spectator	Activity- and experience-based
An end in itself	Dependent on other activities
Stimulated by teachers/trainers	Activated by individual learners
Individualistic	Often collaborative/collegial

Beckett and Hager don't use the term non-formal education or learning, so no specific description of NFE emerges from their work. Nevertheless, their analysis offers a valuable lens through which to examine the *nature* of learning. Their rejection of Descartes and embrace of organic and holistic learning sits comfortably alongside much of the growing literature on emotional intelligence, multiple intelligences and learning/thinking styles (Gardner 1983, 1993, 1999; Sternberg 1999), which posits that learning is both cognitive and

affective, and that people learn in multiple ways in accordance with those styles they find most compelling and accessible.⁸⁷

Examining these parts of the literature as a whole, it is striking to differentiate between two distinct approaches: the first, in which there is a deliberate attempt to distinguish between types of education; and the second, where the boundaries between different forms are deliberately blurred. This distinction, rather like the one outlined in the more philosophical literature above, constitutes an important element in the analysis of *Limmud*: is it an example of a single type of education, does it deliberately seek to blur the boundaries between different types, or, implicitly, is it engaging in this entire debate in a alternative way? These questions will be explored later on.

Educational criteria to examine when labelling an educational endeavour

In the analysis presented so far, one of the most glaring observations is that researchers conduct their work in different contexts including workplace learning, adult and continuing education and mentoring, not to mention different cultural settings in Britain, the United States, the developed and the developing worlds. These contextual differences may go some way towards explaining the differences in thought (Colley, Hodkinson & Malcolm,

⁸⁷ One might also add to this school of thought the concept of “tacit knowledge,” and the notion that science is not value-free as scientists inevitably bring their personal feelings and commitments to the endeavour (Polanyi, 1998), as well as some of the gender issues that have been raised in a range of studies that indicate the centrality of a family atmosphere or cultural background in different ways of knowing (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule, 1997).

2002).⁸⁸ Nevertheless, brought together, the emerging definitions allow us to abstract a range of criteria that distinguish between formal, non-formal and informal learning. This task has been undertaken by Colley, Hodkinson & Malcolm (2002) as follows (Table 3.4).

Table 3.3. Formal, non-formal and informal: distinguishing criteria (Colley, Hodkinson and Malcolm)

- Teacher-learner relations
- Location (e.g. educational or community premises)
- Learner/teacher intentionality/activity (voluntarism)
- Extent of planning or intentional structuring
- Nature and extent of assessment and accreditation
- External determination or not
- Purposes and interests to meet needs of dominant or marginalised groups
- The nature of knowledge
- Whether learning is seen as embodied or just 'head stuff'
- The status of the knowledge and learning
- Education or non-education
- Part of a course or not
- Whether outcomes can be measured
- Whether learning is collective/collaborative or individual
- The purposes of learning
- Pedagogical approaches
- The mediation of learning – by whom and how
- The time-frames of learning
- The extent to which learning is tacit or explicit
- The extent to which learning is context-specific or generalisable/transferable

The authors then searched for ways to group the criteria within this somewhat unwieldy list, and concluded that most, although not all, can be clustered together as follows:

- 1) Process. Includes learner activity, pedagogical styles and issues of assessment: i.e. learning practices, and the relationship between learner and others (tutors, teachers, trainers, mentors, guides).

⁸⁸ Colley, Hodkinson and Malcolm (2002).

- 2) Location and setting. Includes where the learning takes place: i.e. specific educational framework, community or workplace; whether learning takes place in the context of fixed or open time frames; and whether there is a specified curriculum, objectives, certification; etc.
- 3) Purposes. Explores whether learning is secondary to other prime purposes, or the main purpose itself, and whose purposes are dominant – the learner's, or others?
- 4) Content. Covers issues about the nature of what is being learned, and whether it is acquired through expert knowledge/understanding/practices, or the development of something new? Also: whether the focus is on propositional knowledge or situated practice, and on high status knowledge or not?

As I developed my thinking about my central research question, I began to see that this categorisation could be valuable for my research insofar as it offered four lenses through which to analyse *Limmud*. Because almost all major distinctions drawn between different educational approaches could be found within these four areas, I began to see that they could constitute an excellent conceptual framework for this study. As my goal was to understand *Limmud's* implicit educational philosophy, I regarded these four categories – all drawn out of the definitional literature – as particularly valuable ones to consider as guides in my research. I will explore this issue further in chapter 4, but prior to that, will examine briefly each of the four in turn.

Colley, Hodkinson and Malcolm's four criteria: 'process'; 'location and setting'; 'purpose'; and 'content'

In considering the learning *process*, the teacher-student relationship (one of the elements identified by Colley, Hodkinson and Malcolm), has been previously explored by the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber amongst many, particularly in reference to his literature on dialogue (Buber, 1947).⁸⁹ Buber's ideas are based on a certain conception of the individual which is not dissimilar to Dewey's idea that people are active centres of impulse, and that they learn best when they are engaged in experiencing an idea of an event (Dewey, 1937). Carl Rogers has also written of the importance of "prizing the learner, prizing her feelings, her opinions, her person," a certain "non-possessive caring" and basic trust for the learner in which he is regarded as "an imperfect human being with many feelings, many potentialities." (Kirschenbaum and Henderson, 1990). In the non-formal Jewish education (NFJE) literature, Chazan equally describes the individual as "an active dynamic organism who grows and is shaped through his/her own active engagement in learning." Raviv (2000) similarly argues that "the educational process should raise young people's awareness of their right to discover inner meanings, while adults power their unique way toward that discovery." This notion has also been explored by Knowles (1975) in his work on andragogy where he highlights the importance of "self-direction" in adult learning. Drawing on the aforementioned work of Buber, Chazan also stresses the importance of social interaction in education, noting that "the active dialogue back and forth with others is not simply pedagogically useful; it is, in a more basic sense, a pivotal factor in shaping our ideas,

⁸⁹ More recent work on dialogue is also of importance in this context, notably Freire (1972), Gadamer (1979), Bohm, Factor and Garrett (1991), Burbules (1993) and Taylor (1994).

beliefs, and behaviours” (Chazan 2002). Drawing on his research about Birthright Israel, the single largest informal Jewish educational programme in the world today, Saxe (2009) highlights the value of the group of students itself, noting that the interactions between them form an essential part of the educational process, and serve to maintain communal involvement after the programme has ended. This element of the learning process will be particularly important to examine when considering *Limmud*.

Exploring the ideas of *location and setting* as essential criteria calls to mind Bruner’s (1996) emphasis on the educational cultural environment, and his idea that “culture shapes the mind... it provides us with the toolkit by which we construct not only our worlds but our very conception of ourselves and our power.” Eisner (1994) similarly stresses the importance of creating a varied and stimulating environment in which learners may become immersed, as a means of developing knowledge. Palmer (1998) explores spaces for learning, and describes six “tensions” or “paradoxes” that need to be built into them. They should be (i) bounded and open; (ii) hospitable and ‘charged’; (iii) capable of inviting both the voice of the individual and the collective; (iv) able to honour the personal stories of those involved, and the larger stories of the disciplines and traditions; (v) supportive of individual solitude but surround that with the resources of the community; and (vi) welcoming of both silence and speech. Writing in the field of psychology in reference to the Orthogenic School he created for emotionally-disturbed children at the University of Chicago, Bettelheim similarly places a heavy premium on the importance of educational context, stressing the need to create a “therapeutic milieu” (Fox 1997). This area of educational context has also been examined in the non-formal Jewish education (NFJE) literature, and the need for educators to “create an environment which invites learners to

listen to each other and to react with dignity and decency” (Chazan 2002). Chazan also adds that “it is the total cultural milieu that teaches by presenting, creating, and reinforcing values, ideas, experiences, norms, and ultimately a worldview.” Raviv (2000) argues that the educational space may be particularly important in Jewish education as there is a need “to involve our students in the truly complex mechanism of tradition shaping, instead of presenting those traditions on a silver platter, as if they are a given that had always been this way.” Borrowing the language of Reisman (1990), such an approach must allow a “safe space” in which people know that “they are not only allowed but actually encouraged to exercise critical thinking over their past and its transmitted knowledge.” Saxe (2009) uses the term “cultural island” to describe the context of Birthright Israel, and argues that taking young people away from their normal environments and putting them in a unique setting and group context, the “twenty-four-hour-a-day nature of the experience makes it possible to produce [the desired] change.”

No consideration of Colley, Hodkinson and Malcolm’s third criteria – purpose – would be complete without some reference to Freire’s ideas about education, most notably his expectation that once people have learned, they must become active participants in the wider world. As he stated, “education cannot be a neutral process; it is either designed to facilitate freedom [which Freire certainly favoured] or it is ‘education for domestication,’ which is basically conservative” (Freire 1996). This, in turn, brings to mind Arendt’s statement that “education is the point at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it and by the same token save it from that ruin which, except for renewal, except for the coming of the new and young, would be inevitable.” (Arendt 1968). Purpose in a Jewish context tends to focus both on the internal needs of the

Jewish community (transmitting Jewish values and beliefs and a need for collective self-perpetuation), and a wider desire to affect change in the world (Wertheimer 1999, Raviv 2000, Saxe 2009).

Concerning their fourth criteria – content – it has been important to look to Dewey (1937) again who highlights the importance of the experience in education, as well as Kolb’s experiential learning circle (Kolb and Fry, 1975), in contradistinction to the Tyler view (1949), or the more recent “cultural literacy” approach (Hirsch, 1987). Philosophically, the distinction between objectivism and constructivism is essential; whether there is one true and correct reality and body of knowledge that ought to be taught, or whether there are multiple realities and knowledge is constructed by the individual (Vrasidas 2000).

Non-formal Jewish education

Whilst there is some recent literature on Jewish educational philosophy (for example, Fox, Scheffler, Marom, 2003), most of the more recent discourse tends to be divided up according to educational institution – day school, supplementary school, or non-formal Jewish educational framework (summer camp, travel programmes particularly to Europe and Israel). The philosophical literature on informal Jewish education is dominated by Chazan.⁹⁰ He rejects the negative definition of the term (i.e. education that takes place outside of the school) on the grounds that it lacks precision, and proceeds to identify eight

⁹⁰ Chazan uses the term ‘informal’ rather than ‘non-formal’ Jewish education, although he is not referring to incidental or casual learning, but rather an organised form of education outside of the formal educational frameworks that is most commonly found in Jewish youth activities, retreats, community centres, travel programmes and adult education initiatives.

key features of the endeavour: (i) it is person-centred in a way that allows the individual to “grow and find meaning as a Jew”; (ii) experience is central – “participating in an event or a moment through the senses and the body enables one to understand a concept, fact or belief in a direct and unmediated way;” (iii) there is a curriculum (in the generic sense of “an overall blueprint or plan of action”) that is comprised of Jewish experiences and values and is highly flexible and dynamic; (iv) it is an interactive process – “informal Jewish education is rooted in the belief that the active interchange between students and between student and educators is a critical dimension of Jewish learning;” (v) the group is “an integral component of the learning experience;” (vi) the cultural milieu reflects and values the Jewish values and behaviours deemed important; (vii) the educational experience engages the learner and is enjoyable; and (viii) the informal Jewish educator is “a total educational personality who educates by words, deeds, and by shaping a culture of Jewish values and experiences.” Chazan concludes his analysis with the following brief definition of informal Jewish education:

“Informal Jewish education is aimed at the personal growth of Jews of all ages. It happens through the individual’s actively experiencing a diversity of Jewish moments and values that are regarded as worthwhile. It works by creating venues, by developing a total educational culture, and by co-opting the social context. It is based on a curriculum of Jewish values and experiences that is presented in a dynamic and flexible manner. As an activity, it does not call for any one venue but may happen in a variety of settings. It evokes pleasurable feelings and memories. It requires Jewishly-literate educators with a ‘teaching’

style that is highly interactive and participatory, who are willing to make maximal use of self and personal lifestyle in their educational work.”⁹¹

Thus, Chazan’s use of the term “informal Jewish education” does not accurately mirror the way in which the term “informal education” is most commonly used, and may be more accurately equated with NFE, or as other commentators have argued would be better defined by usage of the term “experiential Jewish education” (Riemer and Bryfman). It is not incidental or unanticipated learning, but rather structured programming with a curriculum in a non-formal setting and clear distinction drawn between teacher and learner. Nevertheless, following Chazan’s lead, the term “informal Jewish education” has become common parlance for what is more typically referred to as NFE, as can be evidenced by the work of Brandeis University’s Institute for ‘Informal Jewish Education.’⁹²

In his analysis of Chazan’s work, Riemer (2003) points out that Chazan’s definition is not empirical but normative: it is a description of what NFJE ought to be rather than what it actually is in practice. Furthermore, Riemer argues in response to Chazan’s heavy emphasis on experience that one should not confuse programme with experience. For him, not everything that happens to us constitutes an ‘experience,’ experience counts for little without narration and interpretation, not all experiences are necessarily educative or easy

⁹¹ Chazan, B. (2002). *The Philosophy of Informal Jewish Education*. Jerusalem: Jewish Agency for Israel, pp.15-16.

⁹² The Institute for Informal Jewish Education at Brandeis University In Massachusetts, USA, is the leading academic centre for the study of informal Jewish education in the world, yet its areas of interest (for example, leadership training seminars for summer camp directors, experiential educational techniques within formal educational structures, the study of leading educational travel programmes like Birthright Israel) would all be more typically associated with non-formal educational endeavours. Indeed, the predominance of American (and Israeli) culture in Jewish educational thought have created a situation in which most individuals involved in NFJE, irrespective of where they live, employ the term “informal” to describe a phenomenon most academics in Britain would probably term “non-formal.”

to interpret, and the experience doesn't necessarily end when the programme or event is over. Indeed Riemer and his co-author suggest that there are three defining features of the education to which Chazan is referring: *recreation* (enjoyable leisure-time activities that provide safe space for Jews to enjoy the company of other Jews in pursuing common cultural activities, socialisation and challenge); *socialisation* (encouraging participants to identify with a Jewish group and the larger Jewish People, and to internalise those behaviours, attitudes and feelings that characterise members of that group); and *challenge* (motivating individuals to stretch beyond their comfort zone and creatively explore a variety of Jewish modes of expression, in order to deepen and personalise individuals' Jewish experiences so they feel they are on an extended Jewish journey and are not simply a member of a Jewish club) (Riemer and Bryfman).

As is the case in broader NFE discourse, several thinkers – all of whom are associated principally with NFJE – maintain that there is a growing acknowledgment that informal and non-formal educational philosophies, modules and methods are valuable tools in the formal setting (Reisman, 1979, 1990; Ackerman, 1986; Israel, 1986, Chazan, 1997), and Raviv (2000) goes so far as to argue that the terms 'formal' and 'informal' education are "inseparable" and an "unnecessary dichotomy" exists between them. He writes: "the integration of informal educational tools into formal settings is not enough. The change at hand needs to go far deeper and should revise this formal-informal dichotomy while embracing the simple and beautiful word 'education' as the epitome of our joint endeavours."⁹³

⁹³ Raviv, Z. (2000). "On Truth, Tradition and Respect in Jewish Education." *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, Summer 2000, pp.288-289.

Together, the range of definitions, the distinguishing criteria and clustering above, and the philosophical literature, offered a valuable set of perspectives from which to conduct my research. In seeking to examine and uncover the educational philosophy implicit with *Limmud*, I utilised most, if not all of the concepts highlighted in this section.

Social capital

Amongst the key elements of informal education identified by Chazan above, are two that seemed particularly worthy of further exploration in the context of my study: the idea that “the active interchange between students and between student and educators is a critical dimension of Jewish learning,” and the notion that the group constitutes “an integral component of the learning experience. They received similar, if not even greater billing in Riemer and Bryfman’s work, and pepper much of the philosophical literature discussed earlier which concentrates heavily on human relationships. Through a combination of observation of *Limmud* and analysis of its organisational literature, it quickly becomes evident that interpersonal relationships appear to be similarly important to the organisation, and thus I sought out literature that might lead me towards findings both a conceptual framework for my study and a basis upon which to deepen my understanding of *Limmud’s* educational philosophy. As has been stated previously, there were several possibilities. However, due to the space constraints, I had to be selective, and, as outlined below, the social capital literature seemed most pertinent to my research and offered the most compelling conceptual framework.

Expressed simply, the concept of social capital holds that social networks and relationships have value, in a similar way to other forms of capital – notably economic, physical, cultural and human – in that it may be used to generate further wealth or wellbeing. As Portes (1998) and Nahapiet (2007) maintain, whilst the term itself is fairly recent, the ideas that underpin it are found in the works of many of the founders of social science including Weber, Durkheim, Simmel and Marx. Nahapiet further notes that five areas have been particularly influential in the evolution of work on social capital: social exchange theory, social network studies, research on communities, economic sociology, and neo-capital theories, all of which form an important backdrop.⁹⁴ However, the three thinkers most famously associated with the idea are Pierre Bourdieu, James Coleman and Robert Putnam. Of the three, Bourdieu's work contains the least empirical analysis; he wrote within the context of his critical theory of society, with a concern about people's unequal access to resources and the imbalances in power that exist in society. He differentiated between three types of capital: (i) economic ("immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalised in the form of property rights"); (ii) cultural ("convertible, on certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalised in the form of educational qualifications"); and (iii) social ("made up of social obligations which is

⁹⁴ Social exchange theory holds that many forms of social interaction can be conceptualised as an exchange of benefits (see, for examples, Simmel 1907; Blau 1964; Gouldner 1960; Homans 1958, 1961). Social network studies extended the discussion beyond dyadic relationships into the realm of complex networks in which the structure of relations rather than the actors themselves become the central focus (Emerson 1972; Cook and Emerson 1978). Research on communities shifts the motivation for these exchanges away from self-interest, and towards the less utilitarian logic of mutual support and collective engagement (DiMaggio 1994; Adler and Heckscher 2006). Economic sociology seeks to broaden and deepen understanding of economic exchange by locating it in its wider social context, and, of particular importance in this context, highlights 'embeddedness' – the idea that action is embedded in ongoing systems of social relations that exert a significant influence on behaviour and performance (Granovetter 1973, 1985). Neo-capital theorists (Schultz 1961, Becker 1964) added the idea of human capital to the more classical economic ideas of land, labour and physical capital as the three basic factors shaping economic growth. Human capital is concerned with the quality of the workforce, and the principle that investment in people through education, training and healthcare determine how productively the classical economic ideas can be utilised.

convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalised in the form of a title of nobility”) (Bourdieu, 1997).⁹⁵ Expressed succinctly, Bourdieu’s definition of social capital can be summarised as follows:

“the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or in other words, to membership in a group – which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively-owned capital, a ‘credential’ which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word.”⁹⁶

Bourdieu is one of the few thinkers to place significant emphasis on the problematic aspects of social capital – a source of power employed principally by the wealthy and powerful to maintain their position. He also understood it, in part, as a property the individual is able to possess to varying degrees: people “are sought after for their social capital and, because they are well known, are worthy of being known (‘I know him well’); they do not need to ‘make the acquaintance’ of all their ‘acquaintances’; they are known to more people than they know, and their work of sociability, when it is exerted, is highly productive.”⁹⁷

Not dissimilarly, Coleman (1997) theorised about social capital in order to better understand the nature of social structures that exist in society. A sociologist with a deep interest in

⁹⁵ Bourdieu, P. (1997). “The forms of capital.” In: A. H. Halsey, H. Lauder, P. Brown, & A. S. Wells (Eds.), *Education: Culture, economy, society*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.47.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p.51.

⁹⁷ Ibid., pp.52-53.

economics, he also differentiated between three types of capital: physical, human and social. Attempting to capture the differences between them, he wrote as follows:

“Probably the most important and most original development in the economics of education in the past thirty years has been the idea that the concept of physical capital as embodied in tools, machines, and other productive equipment can be extended to include human capital as well. Just as physical capital is created by changes in materials to form tools that facilitate production, human capital is created by changes in persons that bring about skills and capabilities that make them able to act in new ways. Social capital, however, comes about through changes in the relations among persons that facilitate action. If physical capital is wholly tangible, being embodied in observable material form, and human capital is less tangible, being embodied in the skills and knowledge acquired by an individual, *social capital is less tangible yet, for it exists in the relations among persons.* Just as physical capital and human capital facilitate productive activity, social capital does as well. For example, a group within which there is extensive trustworthiness and extensive trust is able to accomplish much more than a comparable group without that trustworthiness and trust.”⁹⁸

⁹⁸ Coleman, J.S. (1997). “Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital” in: Halsey, A.H., Lauder, L., Brown, P. & Wells A.S. (eds.), *Education: Culture, Economy, Society*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.83.

Coleman maintained that social capital is “defined by its function,” and argued that it “is not a single entity but a variety of entities, with two elements in common: they all consist of some aspects of social structures, and they facilitate certain actions of actors – whether persons or corporate actors – within the structure. Like other forms of capital, social capital is productive, making possible the achievement of certain ends that in its absence would not be possible.”⁹⁹ For Coleman, social capital appears to be any functional activity that facilitates individual or group action, and that is typically generated by “...*obligations and expectations*, which depend on trustworthiness of the social environment, *information-flow* capability of the social structure, and *norms* accompanied by sanctions.”¹⁰⁰ Where Bourdieu was rather suspicious of the concept, Coleman is more positive about it; whilst it can be variously applied to moral or immoral purposes, it is essentially a public good that allows certain ends to be achieved which would be unattainable in its absence.

Putnam (2000) is even less ambiguous about it, preferring to extol its virtues and maintaining that “the core idea of social capital is that social networks have value.”¹⁰¹ A political scientist, Putnam’s early work examined Italian political institutions and argued for the significance of social capital and the quality of civic life in the cultivation of democratic society. However, it was in the context of his examination of declining levels of community attachments in the United States that his name became inextricably linked to the concept of social capital. In his study, he distinguishes it, like Coleman, from physical and human capital, arguing that “Whereas physical capital refers to physical objects and human capital refers to properties of individuals, social capital refers to connections among individuals –

⁹⁹ Ibid., p.81.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p.93. The emphasis is mine.

¹⁰¹ Putnam, R. D. (1995). *Bowling Alone. The collapse and revival of American community*, New York: Simon and Schuster, pp.18-19.

social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them. In that sense social capital is closely related to what some have called 'civic virtue.' The difference is that 'social capital' calls attention to the fact that civic virtue is most powerful when embedded in a dense network of reciprocal and social relations. A society of many virtuous but isolated individuals is not necessarily rich in social capital."¹⁰²

In his most well-known book, *Bowling Alone* (2000), he uses a range of indicators including voting, political participation, newspaper readership and participation in local associations to demonstrate that America's social capital is in serious decline. According to his work, political and civic engagement, informal social ties and a sense of community-spiritedness, and levels of tolerance and trust can all be seen to be in decline. The reasons for this are clear: changes in the family structure, suburban sprawl and its impact on leisure time, electronic entertainment (particularly television), and, most notably, generational differences in civic-mindedness between those born in the first third of the 20th century and the post-World War II generations.

For Putnam, the benefits of social capital are clear. It "allows citizens to resolve collective problems more easily;" "greases the wheels that allow communities to advance smoothly;" widens "our awareness of the many ways in which our fates are linked;" helps to sustain "the flow of helpful information that facilitates achieving our goals;" and improves individuals' lives: "Mounting evidence suggests that people whose lives are rich in social capital cope better with traumas and fight illness more effectively."¹⁰³

¹⁰² Ibid., p.19.

¹⁰³ Ibid., pp.288-289.

In analysing the different types of social capital that exist, Putnam also differentiates between “bridging” (or inclusive) and “bonding” (or exclusive) social capital. The former are more “outward looking” and “encompass people across diverse social cleavages.” The latter are those forms of social capital that are “inward looking” and “tend to reinforce exclusive identities and homogeneous groups.” For Putnam, “Bonding social capital is good for undergirding specific reciprocity and mobilising solidarity. Dense networks in ethnic enclaves, for example, provide crucial and psychological support for less fortunate members of the community, while furnishing start-up financing, markets, and reliable labour for local entrepreneurs. Bridging networks, by contrast, are better for linkage to external assets and for information diffusion.”¹⁰⁴ Expressed more figuratively, “Bonding social capital constitutes a kind of sociological superglue, whereas bridging social capital provides a sociological WD-40.”¹⁰⁵

Michael Woolcock (2001), a Harvard University social scientist adds some depth to this distinction, both by sharpening Putnam’s analysis, and adding a third term. He describes bonding social capital as “ties between people in similar situations, such as immediate family, close friends and neighbours” and bridging social capital as “more distant ties such as loose friendships and workmates.” His third term, “linking social capital” is that form “which reaches out to unlike people in dissimilar situations, such as those who are entirely outside of the community, thus enabling members to leverage a far wider range of resources than are available in the community.”¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p.22.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p.23.

¹⁰⁶ Woolcock, M. (2001). “The place of social capital in understanding social and economic outcomes,” *Isuma: Canadian Journal of Policy Research* 2:1, pp.13-14.

Burt (2001) takes this analysis further in his differentiation of “structural holes” and “network closure.”¹⁰⁷ According to Burt, structural holes exist between networks, resulting in a competitive advantage for anyone whose relationships span those holes. Being able to link one network to another – and in that way serve as a bridge between them – allows the individual in the structural hole to broker flow of information and control any projects that bring the two groups together. In contrast, “network closure” describes a network “in which everyone is connected such that no one can escape the notice of others.” These types of very dense networks create a solid base for internal trust and values-based norms of behaviour, but limit the network’s capacity to learn from those outside the network. Ultimately, Burt maintains that the empirical evidence supports structural holes over network closure, although he concedes that “while brokerage across structural holes is the source of added value, closure can be critical to realising the value buried in the structural holes.”

Putnam’s assertion that social capital is in decline in the United States is not accepted by everyone. Notably Everett C. Ladd disputed his conclusions on the grounds that American civil life was not so much declining but rather “churning.” Wuthnow (1998) makes a not dissimilar claim, arguing that the ways in which civic engagement takes place has simply changed; looking at those forms that have become outdated does not necessarily mean that people are no longer engaging in civil society any more. Ann Bookman (2004) also argues that the nature of community participation has changed – particularly in terms of the roles women take on in today’s more equal society – and there are many new ways in which

¹⁰⁷ Burt, R.S. “Structural Holes versus Network Closure as Social Capital,” In Lin, N., Cook, K.S., and Burt, R.S. (eds) (2001) *Social Capital: Theory and Research*, Aldine de Gruyter.

working families reach out to one another and participate in community-based programmes.

Whilst Bourdieu, Coleman and Putnam can be regarded as the foundational thinkers in the field, it is important to highlight the contributions of several others. In a not dissimilar way to Bourdieu, and with a clear appreciation for his work, Portes (1998) accepts that “social ties can bring about greater control over wayward behaviour and provide privileged access to resources,” but simultaneously goes to great lengths to stress that “they can also restrict individual freedoms and bar outsiders from gaining access to the same resources through particularistic preferences.” As a result, he calls for sociologists to study the manifold forces at play within the concept of social capital “in all their complexity, rather than as examples of value.” As he argues: “A more dispassionate stance will allow analysts to consider all facets of the event in question and prevent turning the ensuing literature into an unmitigated celebration of community.”¹⁰⁸

Fukuyama (2001) makes a contribution to the discussion about social capital in his examination of how to increase its stock.¹⁰⁹ Defining social capital as “an instantiated informal norm that promotes co-operation between two or more individuals,” he offers seven important observations in the context of my analysis: (i) that social capital is “frequently a by-product of religion, tradition, shared historical experience, and other factors that lie outside of any government; (ii) governments are best placed to generate social capital within the educational arena; (iii) states indirectly foster the creation of social

¹⁰⁸Portes, A. (1998). “Social Capital: Its Origins and Applications in Modern Sociology” *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol.24.

¹⁰⁹ Fukuyama, F. (2001). “Social capital, civil society and development,” *Third World Quarterly*, Vol.22. No.1, pp.7-20.

capital by providing a safe and stable environment for public interaction, which in turn, allows trust to arise; (iv) states need to leave certain activities to the private sector or civil society, in order to create room for collective organising and cooperative work; (v) states should promote voluntary associations; (vi) religion has “historically been one of the most important sources of culture, and is likely to remain so in the future”; and (vii) globalisation is the bearer not just of financial capital, but also of ideas and culture.

Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) define social capital as “the sum of the actual and potential resources embedded within, available through, and derived from the network of relationships possessed by an individual or social unit. Social capital thus comprises both the network and the assets that may be mobilised through that network.” Seeking to summarise the various forms of social capital that exist in the literature, Nahapiet (2007) subsequently identifies three dimensions of social capital: *structural*, *relational*, and *cognitive*. The *structural* dimension “refers to the overall patterns and configuration of connections between actors” (which includes the common distinction between bridging and bonding ties.) *Relational* social capital “captures those dimensions which describe particular relationships between actors, such as trust and friendship, shared norms, mutual obligations, identification, that influence behaviour.” *Cognitive* social capital is “the representations, interpretations, and system of meanings shared between actors and that enable or restrict their exchange. This dimension reflects the idea that communities develop unique social and cognitive repertoires which both guide their interpretations of the world and influence their interactions with others differentially according to whether or not they share a common interpretive frame.”

Notwithstanding the references to some of the foundational literature from which the idea of social capital emerged, it is important to explore why the idea has become so prevalent in recent decades. The astute analysis “Just as community collapses, identity is invented” (Young 1999)¹¹⁰ draws on the observation that “Men and women look for groups to which they can belong, certainly and forever, in a world in which all else is moving and shifting, in which nothing else is certain” (Hobsbawm 1998).¹¹¹ It is this world that Bauman (2000) captures in his book *Liquid Modernity*, the very name of which describes a certain sociological reality. Much of the contemporary sociological literature discusses the fluidity of societal features that were previously the core building blocks of society – the fragility of the family-unit, the brittleness of companionship, and the fluidity of neighbourhoods. Furthermore, wherever one looks in the West, it is common to observe large numbers of people moving away from their family and home community, large numbers of couples separating, divorcing and re-marrying, thereby creating more complex, and often less homogeneous families than has typically been the case in the past, as well as growing levels of cultural mixing and integration as a result of immigration (Schivelbush 1986, Urry 2007).¹¹²

All of these factors affect people’s identities. The notion of identity relates to “the understandings people hold about who they are and what is meaningful to them” (Giddens 2001).¹¹³ Sociologists commonly discuss two types of identity: “personal identity” (or “self-identity”) and “social identity”, with the former relating to the process of self-development

¹¹⁰ Young, J. (1999). *The Exclusive Society*. London: Sage, p.164.

¹¹¹ Hobsbawm, E. (1998). ‘The cult of identity politics,’ *New Left Review*, 217, p.40.

¹¹² Urry, J. (2007). *Mobilities*. Cambridge: Polity, p.3; and Schivelbusch, W. (1986). *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization and Perception of Time and Space*. University of California Press, p.197.

¹¹³ Giddens, A. (2001). *Sociology*. Cambridge: Polity, p.29.

the individual undertakes in the course of formulating his sense of self and relationship to the world around him (through continual negotiation with the outside world, and interaction between self and society), and the latter referring to the characteristics that are attributed to an individual by others (e.g. their citizenship, religion, social class, skin colour, profession, etc.) Personal identity appears to be particularly relevant in this context: *Limmud's* strap line, "wherever you are going, *Limmud* will take you one step further on your Jewish journey", is highly suggestive of a process of self-development through which the individual may cultivate a new relationship with his Jewish identity. It is indicative of an event that prizes individual agency and choice. However, as will become clear, *Limmud* is also a collective experience, and social identities inevitably involve a collective dimension. They mark out commonalities between individuals, and can form bases for shared understanding, purpose and action. These two views of identity – the self seeking out her uniqueness, and the collective seeking out commonality with others – will become important elements of my analysis.

As Young's quote and Bauman's book title indicate, both types of identity have become more pronounced and more fluid as the transition from traditional to modern societies has taken place. If, in traditional societies, people's identities were almost entirely shaped by their membership of a particular group, modernity has caused the solidity of these identities to break down. Inherited rules and conventions have become weaker, the tight-knit communities of the past where traditions were passed down from one generation another have loosened, all of which has created greater scope for choice about who one is and aspires to be, and numerous opportunities for different types of identities to emerge.

These trends have inevitably reached the Jewish community. The ethnic, social and collective dimensions of Jewishness, often referred to as 'Jewish peoplehood' and seen as the glue that connects one Jew to another across space and time, is perceived by many to be losing its adhesive quality today. In their study of moderately-affiliated Jews in the United States, Cohen and Eisen (2000) write:

"More and more, the meaning of Judaism in America transpires within the self. American Jews have drawn the activity and significance of their group identity into the subjectivity of the individual, the activities of the family, and the few institutions (primarily the synagogue) which are seen as extensions of this intimate sphere. At the same time, relative to their parents' generation, today's American Jews in their thirties, forties and early fifties are finding less meaning in mass organisations, political activity, philanthropic endeavour, and attachment to the state of Israel. In broad strokes, that which is personally meaningful has gained at the expense of that which is peoplehood-oriented."¹¹⁴

Other American Jewish observers back up Cohen and Eisen's conclusions about individualism. In her insightful study, Horowitz (2000) contends that "the content of Jewish identity has expanded to include whatever is personally meaningful for each individual," a factor which makes it increasingly difficult to maintain a broad and robust central core of Jewish practice that serves to bind Jews together.¹¹⁵ Similarly, in his study of young American Jews' attitudes towards Israel, Luntz notes that those observed do not like "group-

¹¹⁴ Cohen and Eisen, *The Jew Within*, pp.183-184

¹¹⁵ Bethamie Horowitz, *Connections and Journeys*, p.183.

think,” “view themselves as free thinkers, and making their own decisions and choosing their own paths are very important.”¹¹⁶ Reboot’s study of 18-25 year-old American Jews entitled “Grande Soy Vanilla Latte with Cinammon, No Foam,” draws a sharp parallel between people’s capacity to order a coffee exactly as they like it from the vast array of options on offer at Starbucks, and the way in which young American Jews construct their Jewish identities today. So many options exist, so many complex familial, communal and general sociological factors influence individual experiences, preferences and possibilities, that their Jewishness has become “a complicated and often inarticulate tangle of spiritual, cultural, historical and ethnic dimensions.”¹¹⁷ Put more simply, they write: “standing in line by the battery of ‘baristas’ behind the counter at the ubiquitous coffee house is the quickest way to realise that we are living in an era where the possibility to have it ‘your way’ rules. The desire and ability of the individual to mix and match the contents of his or her Grande cup translates into the power to choose the way he or she defines personal identity in America.”¹¹⁸ Woocher (2005) similarly argues “Nearly all expressions of Jewish identity rooted in a sense of ‘peoplehood,’ from proportion of Jewish friends to membership of Jewish organisations (except the synagogue), to attachment to the State of Israel, have declined, especially among younger Jews,”¹¹⁹ and Cohen and Wertheimer (2006) maintain that “Mounting evidence now attests to a weakened identification among American Jews with their fellow Jews abroad, as well as a waning sense of communal responsibility at home. The once-forceful claims of Jewish “peoplehood” have lost their power to

¹¹⁶ Luntz, F. (2003). *Israel in the Age of Enimem*. New York: Andrea and Charles Bronfman Philanthropies., p.7.

¹¹⁷ Bennett, R., Potts, E., Levin, R., and Abramson, S. (2006). *Grande Soy Vanilla Latte with Cinammon, No Foam... Jewish Identity in a Time of Unlimited Choices*. New York: Reboot., p.7.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.3.

¹¹⁹ Woocher, J. (2005). “‘Sacred survival’ revisited: American Jewish civil religion in the new millennium” in: Kaplan, D. E. (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to American Judaism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.288.

compel.”¹²⁰ These are just a few of numerous examples, and given the amount of similar data that exists, we should, if anything, be surprised by Reboot’s discovery in their aforementioned report that young American Jews do continue to maintain some kind of connection with the global Jewish people, albeit a rather abstract one.

The mono-cultural Jewish family is similarly under threat. Cohen and Eisen (2000) note that 64% of their respondents would be either neutral or unsure of their opinions if their child was considering marrying a non-Jew who had no plans to convert to Judaism, a finding that would have been unthinkable a generation or two ago.¹²¹ They also discover that whilst 39% regard marrying a Jew as “desirable” and 28% as “essential,” 30% believe it doesn’t matter either way.¹²² The result of this, as pointed out in the international Jewish student organisation’s 2006 strategic plan, is that 47% of all Jewish students in the US do not have two Jewish parents.¹²³ Furthermore, it is amongst the Jewish student and young adult population that one sees growing evidence of this kind of cultural mixing and integration. Greenberg and Nussbaum Cohen (2005) write: “Time was when American Jews were a fairly homogeneous lot. As recently as two decades ago, most of them fit fairly neatly into a handful of identity categories. In contrast, today’s New Jew is a walking riot of diversity, representing a group that stubbornly defies pigeonholing – an unmovement populated by budding Yiddishists, green Jews, hip-hop Jews, Metrodox Jews, tattoo Jews, post-

¹²⁰ Cohen, S.M. and Wertheimer, J. “Whatever Happened to the Jewish People” in: *Commentary* (June 2006), p.33.

¹²¹ Cohen and Eisen, p.219

¹²² Cohen and Eisen, p.215

¹²³ “Enriching Lives, Inspiring Commitment, Delivering the Jewish Future: Hillel’s Five-Year Strategic Plan for the USA (Hillel, 2006), p.1.

denominational Jews, transgender Jews, Internet-wired Jews, T-shirt Jews, do-it-yourself Jews, and Jews that fit into none of those categories. Or into many of them at once.”¹²⁴

Limmud

All of the literature outlined above forms the backdrop and conceptual framework for this study. Yet one important area remains: the literature on *Limmud* itself. Surprisingly, given the amount of literature that has been written about Jewish education over the past two decades, this is extraordinarily sparse. This may be attributed, in part, to the fact that *Limmud* is a British endeavour that has only recently been exported overseas, and most Jewish educational literature comes out of the United States and Israel. It also may be a result of the fact that *Limmud* is not easily labelled institutionally, and much of the literature on Jewish education is concerned with education as it occurs within a particular type of educational institution – the school, supplementary school, summer camp, or educational travel experience. Furthermore, *Limmud* is not expensive; it does not require the costs associated with its own permanent premises or full-time faculty, so funders investing relatively small sums in it are less likely to demand expensive scientific studies than they might be if their investment was in a more formal established and costly educational institution. In addition, *Limmud* itself is not a wealthy organisation, and thus has limited funds available for social research. Thus, on the whole, comment has been made in the

¹²⁴ Richard Greenberg and Debra Nussbaum Cohen, “Uncovering the Un-Movement” (Bnai Brith, 2005). See: <http://www.adultjewishlearning.org/uploads/news/bnaibrith.pdf>, p.3. (accessed 22 October 2009).

realm of journalism rather than academia, and whilst a few articles stand out as particularly insightful, many are predominantly descriptive.

Nevertheless, both the insights and the descriptions serve to identify areas of interest worthy of further analysis. Commentators focus on a considerable range of such areas: the fact that it takes place over Christmas (Rocker 2002, Jeffay 2008, Kahn-Harris 2010); the exchange of ideas (Jeffay 2008); the growth rate of participation (Rettig 2007); its voluntary nature (Rettig 2007, Burg 2008, Kahn-Harris 2010, Hazony 2012); the widespread absence of right-wing Orthodox participants (Rettig 2007) yet the absence of denominational boundaries (Roth 2007, Kahn-Harris 2010); the normative involvement of women in senior leadership positions (Rocker 2002); the considerable variety of educational opportunities available (Rocker 2002) also referred to as “a marketplace” (Lopes Cardozo 2011); the “phenomenally complex scheduling” (Rettig 2007, Kahn-Harris 2010); the immersive nature of the experience (Morris 2004); and its general uniqueness and popularity (Rettig 2007, Roth 2007, Kahn-Harris 2010). Furthermore, many attempt to capture elements of *Limmud’s* ethos: its democratic and participatory nature (Jeffay 2008, Kahn-Harris 2010) and the lack of distinction between participant and presenter (Rettig 2007, Kahn-Harris 2010, Kolbrener 2012, Hazony 2012); its inclusive, “bottom-up” and grass roots spirit (Morris 2004); a culture of personalisation (Rettig 2007); a perceived absence of politics or ideology (Morris 2004); a sense that *Limmud* has no formal “owners,” but rather “belongs to its participants and its volunteers...,” “changes with the times,” and “has nothing fixed and no institutions” (Burg 2008); its “determinedly pluralistic” approach (Morris 2004, Burg 2008) and both non-encouragement and non-discouragement of any particular denominational Jewish approach (Rettig 2007, Kahn-Harris 2010); the notion that it is very “people-

orientated” (Jeffay 2008); a sense that it is “not just an event, it’s almost a movement (Ross 2008); its inseparable mix of “social, religious and intellectual stimuli” (Hazony 2012); its characterisation as “unique model of how to build a short-lived community” (Kahn-Harris 2010) or “the whole Jewish world in microcosm” (Lopes Cardozo, 2011); and the “infectious vibrancy within the community, tempered with a tolerance and respect, that’s upbeat and affirmative (Frieze 2004). Comparisons with other events are common: “a Jewish Woodstock” (Elgot 2012); “a Jewish learning festival” (Pfeffer 2012); the “Edinburgh Festival for the Jewish community” (Kasriel 2010), and “a cross between a retreat, an adult education institute, the Hay Festival, the Edinburgh Fringe, with a touch of Burning Man thrown in” (Kahn-Harris 2010).

The main issue with this literature is that it is non-critical almost by definition: those sufficiently compelled to write about an event in a newspaper, magazine or online are likely to do so either because they are impressed or disturbed by their subject matter, and in the case of *Limmud*, the vast majority of commentators fit into the former category, going so far as to describe it as “by far the most interesting thing happening in Jewish life” and “a revolution” (Hazony 2012). Even the more serious academic enquiries, such as they exist, fall into this trap. Jacqueline Nicholls’s brief study highlights several key components of *Limmud* (its culture of volunteerism, its desire to actualise people’s ideas, its non-hierarchical nature, etc.) yet it lacks any real hint of critique,¹²⁵ and Caryn Aviv’s short article, whilst including some particularly insightful analysis of *Limmud*¹²⁶ nevertheless

¹²⁵ Nicholls, J. “Case Study 2: Limmud”, in: Boyd, J (ed.) (2003). *The Sovereign and the Situated Self: Jewish Identity and Community in the 21st Century*. London: Profile Books.

¹²⁶ Aviv describes *Limmud* as “a manifestation of the emerging ‘Jewish innovation ecosystem,’ a postmodern, decentralised, and democratic form of Jewish identity, expression, and community building... *Limmud* could also be viewed as a Jewish test case for the repudiation of Robert Putnam’s thesis in *Bowling Alone: The*

concludes with the following revealing plea: “If I haven’t convinced you yet, let me be blunt: you should go.”¹²⁷ However, during the course of conducting my research, arguably the two most serious academic studies of *Limmud* to date were published. The first of these (Simonson 2011) in some ways mirrors my work insofar as it explores *Limmud’s* philosophy of Jewish education, describing it in the title as “a unique model of transformative Jewish learning.”¹²⁸ It is an insightful article, although both its strength and weakness is that it is written by the ultimate insider – Simonson is the organisation’s Executive Director – so whilst it contains a degree of insider knowledge unlikely to be matched by an external academic, it also lacks some objectivity. Its inclusion in the *International Handbook of Jewish Education* may perhaps indicate that *Limmud* has finally achieved prominence in the field, although even here, a degree of caution should be observed: one of the co-editors of the two-volume work is currently chairperson of *Limmud International*. Typically, Simonson describes *Limmud* as “a world-leader in cross-communal, multi-generational, volunteer-led Jewish learning experiences” that “has become British Jewry’s premier adult education initiative”, and he describes his article as an “attempt to understand why so many individuals and communities have chosen to embrace *Limmud’s* unique model of Jewish education.”¹²⁹ Whilst Simonson notes some of the criticism *Limmud* has received, he adopts a partisan position on it, and more generally, his article lacks objectivity and sufficient analysis of other similar endeavours to make his claims of uniqueness with any authority. Nevertheless, he does note that *Limmud* is “surprisingly under-researched”, and that there

Collapse and Revival of American Community (2001), in which he describes and analyses the collective costs of decreased civic engagement, the decline of social capital, and the shrinking of participation in the public sphere.” See: Caryn Aviv (2010). “Limmud UK 2009”. Association for Jewish Studies (AJS), Fall.

¹²⁷ Admittedly, Aviv’s article is included in a magazine for scholars as opposed to an academic journal, and thus constitutes more a report of her experience at *Limmud*, rather than a scholarly analysis of it.

¹²⁸ Simonson, R. (2011). “Limmud: A Unique Model of Transformative Jewish Learning” in: Miller H., Grant L. and Pomson A., *International Handbook of Jewish Education*. London: Springer.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.862.

is little empirical evidence to back up the claims of its leadership.”¹³⁰ Moreover, based on the data I have gathered, his analysis of *Limmud’s* principles is sharp. He stresses the value it places on diversity, the place of volunteerism and empowerment in its philosophy, and discusses the role of social capital and friendship in its organisational culture. He points out, as I will too, that its educational philosophy is “difficult to define”,¹³¹ and he discusses how the “warm and welcoming atmosphere” it constructs helps to create “a positive atmosphere conducive to learning and potential change”¹³² and how the breakdown of the teacher and student roles allows everyone to “learn with and from each other.”¹³³ He further highlights its “highly egalitarian and democratic approach to education which runs through *Limmud’s* DNA”,¹³⁴ and the role of time in the endeavour: “participants have the freedom to build their own timetable” and indeed “how they wish to make use of their time”.¹³⁵ He highlights the role of choice and self-directed learning, drawing on Knowles to argue that “where individuals take the initiative in their learning, they learn more, and learn better, than passive learners who are taught what other decide they should learn.”¹³⁶ Furthermore, he draws links between *Limmud* and the philosophies of several other thinkers – notably Dewey, Freire, Mezirow, Carl Rogers and Chazan – and whilst much more can and should be said about the nature and legitimacy of these links, he argues, as do I, that these thinkers’ works all relate in some way to *Limmud’s* philosophy of education.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.876.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p.867.

¹³² *Ibid.*, p.869.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p.871.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.870.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.871-2.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.872.

The second, authored by Professor Steven M. Cohen and Dr Ezra Kopelowitz, both well-respected Jewish sociologists, is based on a quantitative opinion survey of participants in *Limmud* initiatives around the world (i.e. including, but by no means limited to, the *Limmud* conference in the UK that is my topic).¹³⁷ It constitutes the only scientific study that has examined participant satisfaction levels, propensity to recommend the experience to others, and how, if at all, participation has inspired further involvement in Jewish life. Amongst its findings, it includes the following data:

Fig. 3.2. Satisfaction levels, *Limmud* UK

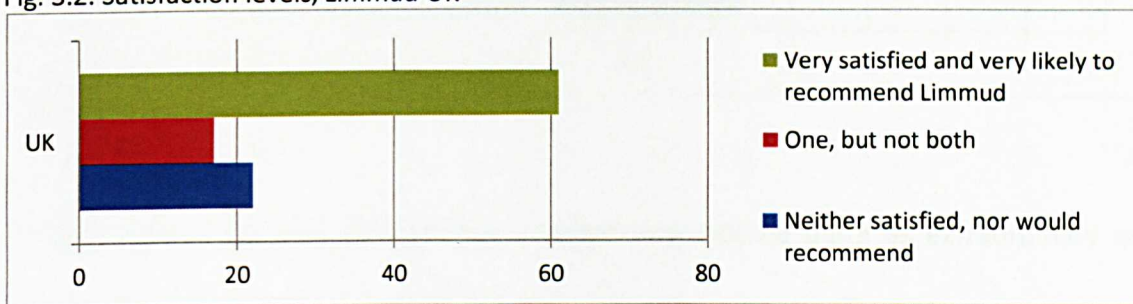
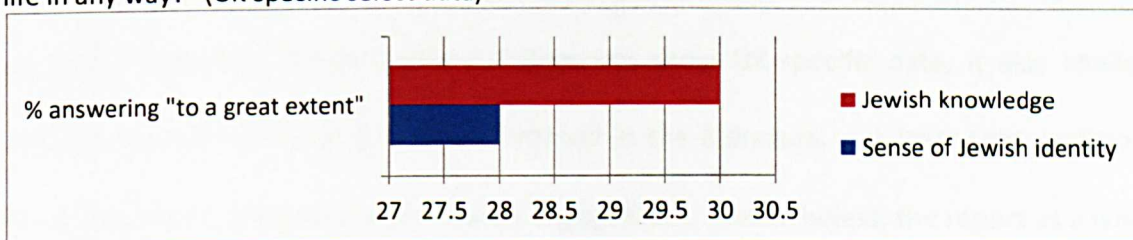


Fig. 3.3. “To what extent would you say that participation in *Limmud* has a positive impact on your life in any way?” (UK specific select data)



¹³⁷ Cohen S.M. and Kopelowitz E. (2011). *The Limmud International Study. Jewish Learning Communities on a Global Scale*. Jerusalem: Research Success Technologies, Ltd. Downloaded from: <http://www.bjpa.org/Publications/details.cfm?PublicationID=13459> (22 February 2012).

Fig. 3.4. “To what extent would you say that participation in *Limmud* has a positive impact on your life in any way?” (Complete data, all countries, where 1 = not at all, and 4 = to a great extent)



Intriguingly, these data indicate that *Limmud* may not be quite as extraordinary as the literature suggests. Figure 3.2 shows that only three in every five UK participants is very satisfied and very likely to recommend it to others, and figure 3.3 shows that fewer than one in three maintain that it has a highly positive impact on their Jewish knowledge or sense of Jewish identity. Whilst figure 3.4 does not show UK-specific data, it also challenges certain common assumptions about *Limmud* in the literature, not least that participation has a significant impact on wider Jewish engagement. Nevertheless, the report as a whole is rather celebratory in tone, concluding with the following three quotes from the data describing *Limmud* as “a smorgasbord of choose-your-own adventure goodness”, “an amazing opportunity to see just how diverse Jews and Judaism is”, and “my best Jewish experience – an excellent example of pluralism, not found elsewhere.”

However, the absence of critical literature should not be interpreted as the absence of a critique of *Limmud*; indeed several of the aforementioned writers point to the existence of an important negative assessment of *Limmud* from within mainstream Orthodox Judaism which is captured, in part, by the non-participation (or perhaps “boycott” is a more appropriate term) of either the British Chief Rabbi or the leading authority on Jewish law in Britain, Dayan Chanoch Ehrentreu (Rocker 2002, Rettig 2007, Wides 2007). The most in-depth analysis of Orthodoxy’s critique has been conducted by Sylvester in his MA thesis at the Institute of Education in London.¹³⁸ Sylvester is an interesting analyst insofar as he is both an Orthodox rabbi and an advocate of, and teacher at *Limmud*, a position that often placed him somewhat at loggerheads with his rabbinic colleagues. In the course of his research (part of which involved qualitative interviews with British Orthodox rabbis), he identified four key arguments against Orthodox rabbinic participation in *Limmud*: (i) the organisation’s neutrality on religious denominational beliefs undermines Orthodoxy’s claim to authoritative ‘truth;’ (ii) *Limmud* deliberately seeks to blur the distinction between Orthodox (*halachic*) Judaism and other progressive forms as part of its pluralist agenda; (iii) Orthodox participants in *Limmud* are given free access to non-Orthodox ideas and people, which can result in a decline in religious practice; (iv) people are able to gain access to Orthodox ideas and teachings in Orthodox venues – there is no need to bring Orthodoxy into a more neutral venue like *Limmud*. However, Sylvester also demonstrates that there are several highly prominent voices within Orthodoxy that support *Limmud*, principally on the grounds that the battle of minds cannot be won unless it is fought, and that initiatives

¹³⁸ Sylvester, G. (2004). “Preaching Alone: A study of the educational philosophy behind the decision of Orthodox rabbis not to debate or share platforms with Progressive rabbis.” MA thesis, Institute of Education, London. Ben Elton has also written on this topic; see: <http://limmudsolved.blogspot.com/> (first accessed: 25 February 2011).

regarded as problematic are not necessarily so – indeed, in certain cases (of which *Limmud* is one), quite the opposite.

Another particularly vocal critique of *Limmud* has come from those opposed to its open attitude to discourse about Israel. In an article in the Israeli newspaper *The Jerusalem Post*, Australian Jewish leader Isi Liebler wrote: “During a recent visit to London, I was depressed to observe that the utterly distorted PC-thinking about Israel prevailing in Britain has now begun to influence Anglo-Jewish leaders. This is reflected in the growing trend of providing respectability to marginal Jewish defamers of the Jewish state by honouring them with invitations to participate in leading community cultural and educational events.”¹³⁹ Directing his critique at the organisers of *Limmud*, he added: “It is surely grotesque for *Limmud* to justify such participation on the grounds that ‘for the sake of learning... we try to get a wide range of presenters.’” The debate here concerns the acceptability or not of certain ideas at *Limmud*, and whilst its organisers have rarely shied away from inviting speakers whose views challenge some of the orthodoxies of the Jewish community, that position has certainly had its share of critics.

A further critique has been expressed by Kahn-Harris, who, whilst expressing admiration for *Limmud* elsewhere, has argued that “*Limmud* is a fictional, delusionary space that, for a limited period of time, maintains the illusion of an entirely Jewish world in the same way as it maintains the illusion of a Jewish world without certain controversial differences. The difference embodied within *Limmud* is thus of an extremely limited kind. It turns its back on

¹³⁹ Liebler, I. “Don’t give a platform to Israel-bashing.” *The Jerusalem Post*, 29 January 2008, downloaded from: <http://www.leibler.com/article/302> (22 October 2009).

any engagement with inconvenient 'other' spaces. It reveals a deep desire on the part of British Jewry to wish away difficult, problematic and intractable conflicts."¹⁴⁰ Kahn-Harris is arguing that by creating a harmonious, pluralist environment for multiple Jewish opportunities, encounters and experiences – a factor which many identify as its key strength – it is denying a fundamental element of British Jewish life.

All of these, and other critiques, are worthy of further exploration, and my analysis touches on this. However, arguably the greatest gap in research about *Limmud* remains a serious and impartial attempt to articulate the educational philosophy that underpins the endeavour. Rettig (2007) notes that *Limmud's* "organisers can't quite articulate a broad theory of what they've created" (which, based on my research is a somewhat harsh judgment), but the absence of a written version of such a broad theory renders it not substantiated. This is the gap this thesis attempts to fill. No analyst or researcher has yet attempted to deconstruct the model, identify its component parts, and articulate it as a theory of contemporary Jewish education. Yet before undertaking that process and presenting that theory, attention should be given to research methodology and methods, which are outlined and explained in the next chapter.

¹⁴⁰ Kahn-Harris, K. "Exploring Jewish Space: A Critique of Limmud" in: Rabinowitz R. (ed), *New Voices in Jewish Thought*, London, 1998, pp.39-54. Downloaded from: <http://www.keithkahnarris.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/exploring.htm> (22 October 2009).

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

Introduction

The purposes, practices, teachers, content and contexts of Jewish education have become issues throughout the Jewish world over the past two decades, particularly since data demonstrating high intermarriage and assimilation levels became a major international Jewish concern. Numerous organisations and initiatives have been established throughout that period, and vast sums of money invested in the field. Together with the Jewish educational work that is taking place, researchers are seeking to understand the nature and effects of many of the existing educational programmes and frameworks, in an attempt to deepen understanding and evaluate impact on learning and identity development. Whilst individual research initiatives clearly attempt to address very specific concerns, the underlying motivation remains more or less the same in most instances: to what extent does the particular initiative contribute to a strengthening and deepening of Jewish identity and commitments? In the midst of all this educational activity, although surprisingly absent from much of the research literature, sits *Limmud*, a very modest endeavour when it was first established, that has begun to be seen – by some at least – as something of a flagship Jewish educational initiative.

As has been established, most of the anecdotal evidence that exists about *Limmud* suggests that it makes a highly significant contribution to Jewish identity and community

development. Certainly, based on this, it is reasonable to assume that many of those who have elected to participate in *Limmud* would maintain that their participation indeed impacted positively on their sense of Jewishness, although the only study examining this suggests that its impact may not be quite as pervasive as many believe. Nevertheless, this issue lies somewhat outside of this thesis, and I leave it to others to explore it in depth. In developing my research, I was less interested in evaluating its impact on participants, and more concerned to understand what *Limmud* seeks to be, how it seeks to function, and what values it seeks to uphold and promote in the course of its efforts.

As a result, and in order to investigate this, I used the following methodology:

- i) A survey of existing literature and documentation about *Limmud*, sourced variously from academic studies, media reports and the organisation's own material;
- ii) A series of qualitative face-to-face semi-structured interviews with key informants highly familiar with the work of *Limmud*, many of whom have been centrally-involved in the creation of the aforementioned internal materials and the running of the *Limmud* conference;
- iii) Semi-structured focus group discussions with *Limmud* participants, to explore the ways in which, and extent to which the ideas raised in the face-to-face interviews have been actualised in the participant experience.

The methodology I employed was exclusively qualitative. To gain a nuanced and detailed description of the nature of *Limmud* and its core principles, qualitative methods were used to construct a detailed portrait of the conference and its non-formal educational aims. This

portrait was then used to build an interview guide for use in the focus groups. The intention was to utilise the datasets from both sources to construct the richest possible description of what *Limmud* seeks to be, from which to then draw out the core philosophical principles.

This chapter explains in detail why I chose a particular methodology and methods. It begins by re-stating the purpose of this research, why I believe it to be important, and what qualifies me to undertake it. It goes on to outline key methodological issues in social research, examining some of the major epistemological and ontological issues, and the key differences between quantitative and qualitative research. After establishing the methodological basis of this thesis, it proceeds to examine the possible research designs that exist, and explain why I ultimately opted for a case study. It then outlines three different methods I could have employed to conduct my case study, and explains why I chose to use a combination of interviews and focus groups. Finally, it looks at some of the more specific components of my thesis, explaining the conceptual framework behind the research and how that informed the interview guide, sampling frame and research strategy.

Purpose of the research

The purpose of this thesis has been discussed in earlier chapters, yet it should be restated here briefly as methodology and methods are determined by purpose. It is to examine some of the implicit educational and social assumptions that underpin the annual *Limmud* conference in order to make explicit its educational philosophy. On the basis of the informal discourse that exists about the event, the considerable coverage it has generated in the

British and international Jewish media, and the fact that the British model has been widely replicated throughout the Jewish world, it is clear that *Limmud's* educational style and approach resonates with significant numbers of Jews on an international scale. On these bases alone, it is worthy of analysis. Yet in spite of this, and somewhat surprisingly, it has generated little academic interest.

There are numerous studies of *Limmud* that could be conducted. It would be valuable to examine the nature of the participant experience, and the manner in which the event affects participants' Jewish identities. It would be helpful to understand the motivations of those who teach at the conference on a *pro bono* basis, as this is far from an established norm elsewhere, yet is a mainstay of *Limmud*. It would be intriguing to explore volunteer motivation at the conference, particularly bearing in mind the general decline in levels of voluntarism noted by several social commentators. *Limmud* would make an interesting social anthropological study, where the inner workings of the event and preparations for it are carefully observed and analysed. However, I believe that all such studies and more would benefit from a thorough examination of *Limmud's* educational philosophy, as the findings of an illuminative evaluation of this nature will provide a valuable theoretical context from which to begin most other examinations.

Furthermore, given that the *Limmud* conference is being replicated around the world, it would be helpful to provide the volunteers running these events with a study that deconstructs *Limmud* in this way. Any attempt to learn from an educational model based in one national context and replicate it in another requires careful consideration of its goals, principles and practices, and I hope that this research will help to inform that process.

Further still, in a broader Jewish and general religious social context in which there appears to be a growing tendency towards religious extremism, *Limmud* is an example of religious, ethnic and cultural vibrancy that steadfastly rejects any form of fundamentalism. In theory at least, it promotes religious passion, depth and meaning amongst its participants, whilst remaining unwaveringly opposed to any behaviours that deny the truths of others, both within and beyond Jewish tradition. Whilst there are plenty of reasons to be wary of generalising from a single case study to a wider universe (many of which I explore in this chapter), the theory generated by my research, or elements of it, could be investigated in multiple contexts to construct similar initiatives. For this reason too, it is worthy of study.

My own interest in *Limmud* began in 1992, when I first started working as a professional in the field of Jewish education in Britain. Since that time, I have taught at, and participated in the conference on several occasions, and observed its growth and development. Over the course of the past eighteen years, I have worked for a range of organisations concerned with Jewish education, and have been a keen observer of Jewish educational changes and innovations, as well as a range of issues concerning Jewish identity and community. In particular, I served as the Director of Research and Development for the education department of the United Jewish Israel Appeal in London, which allowed me unique access to the individuals, organisations and institutions involved in Jewish education in Britain, including *Limmud*. In addition, I was privileged to receive a two-year fellowship at the Mandel Institute in Jerusalem where I studied Jewish and general education in some depth. Furthermore, during my spell in New York as Director of Educational Policy and Planning for the North American Coalition for Israel Education (now *Makom*), I was informally involved with a small group of volunteers who had participated in the UK *Limmud* conference, and

were working to replicate it in New York. Finally, I currently serve as Executive Director of the Institute for Jewish Policy Research, where much of my professional focus is on British Jewish social trends. Each of these positions, combined with the general experience of growing up in Jewish educational frameworks and observing formal and informal Jewish education in multiple national locations as an adult, positions me as a researcher well-suited to observe and analyse Jewish educational activity.

Nevertheless, being an insider also has its disadvantages. Being closely connected to, or associated with, one's research subject can lead to a diminishing capacity to be appropriately objective. This is an issue that is regularly raised in the more serious realms of Jewish educational discourse, particularly because some of those involved in Jewish educational policy development are funders who are often less than scrupulous in separating their own subjective experience of Jewish education from the necessity of objectivity. As a result of the training I have received – both at the University of Nottingham and the Mandel Institute in Jerusalem – I have been acutely conscious of my close relationship to my subject throughout the research process, and have sought to build some distance between myself and *Limmud*. However, I am also drawn to the feminist notion of “conscious partiality” (Mies 1993: 68) as contrasted with “value free research”, and I confess my partiality to *Limmud's* ethos and organisational tone. Indeed, my interest in *Limmud* stems, in part, from a personal belief that it represents a model of Jewish education that ought to be encouraged and replicated. I have endeavoured to ensure that my consciousness of this fact does not prevent me from recognising and appreciating existing critiques, broader issues, or important wider trends. I have always sought to address this concern in my professional work, and discussions with my tutor and other faculty members

in the course of completing this degree have certainly helped me to grapple with some of these important debates and gaps in my understanding.

Methodological issues: epistemology and ontology

In a discussion of research, it is important to differentiate between research *methodology* and research *methods*. Research *methodology* concerns the philosophical assumptions that underpin a particular research initiative, and the epistemological or ontological views held by the researcher. Research *methods* concern the mechanics of research: the technique employed to collect data (for example, a structured questionnaire, structured observation, participant observation, focus groups, etc.) This section is concerned with research methodology.

Probably, the most fundamental methodological issue is the epistemological one: namely, what is knowledge, how is it acquired, and how do we know what we know? This is a critical issue in research because the researcher is involved in a process of knowledge construction, and stands or falls on whether the findings generated pass as acceptable knowledge. One of the most significant debates concerns “the question of whether the social world can and should be studied according to the same principles, procedures, and ethos as the natural sciences” (Bryman 2008: 13). There are two major philosophical responses to this question, captured by the terms “positivism” and “interpretivism.” Positivism was very much social research’s orthodoxy for decades, and certainly informed the thinking and practice of early sociologists like Comte and Durkheim. Expressed simply, the positivist position answers the

question in the affirmative, advocating for the application of natural science methods to the study of social realities. However, the way this should be done can be broadly separated into two distinct approaches: 'inductivism' and 'deductivism'. Inductivism holds that knowledge is arrived at through the gathering of facts that test theories and provide the basis for the development of laws.¹⁴¹ "Facts" in this worldview are a description of the phenomena people experience; thus, a typical inductivist approach would examine a set of behaviours in a certain context or contexts, and then develop a theory based on an analysis of those behaviours. However, inductivism has been harshly critiqued, not least by Karl Popper, on the grounds that observation is always selective and requires a starting perspective which inevitably informs what is observed. In short, it is impossible to have theory-neutral observations.¹⁴² The alternative approach, deductivism, holds that theory precedes observation; that the purpose of theory is to generate hypotheses that can be tested subsequently through observation. In this view, there is no valid inductive logic because whilst general statements can be *disproved* from particular instances, they can never be conclusively proved.

In contrast, interpretivism is an anti- or post-positivist position that holds that the subjects examined in social science – typically, people and their organisational structures – differ significantly from those examined in the natural sciences. As a result, studies in this realm require a different logic of research procedure that recognises and reflects human distinctiveness as contrasted with the natural order. Interpretivism further maintains that all observation is somewhat fallible, not least because scientists are inherently biased by

¹⁴¹ The origins of inductivism can be found in Francis Bacon's *Novum Organum* (1620). His ideas should be understood in their historical context; Bacon's emphasis on observable facts was an important antidote to a medieval culture heavily influenced by supposition and superstition.

¹⁴² See: Popper, K. (1963). *Conjectures and Refutations*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

their personal worldviews and cultural experiences. The anti-positivist worldview began to emerge in the mid-20th century, and was heavily influenced by the work of Alfred Schütz on the application of phenomenological ideas to the social sciences. Schütz differentiated between the subject matters of the natural and social sciences, and maintained that the task of the social scientist is to access people's "common-sense thinking" and interpret their actions and social world from their perspective. Expressed simply, "the phenomenologist views human behaviour... as a product of how people interpret the world... In order to grasp the meanings of a person's behaviour, *the phenomenologist attempts to see things from that person's point of view*" (Bogdan and Taylor 1975: 13-14, their emphasis). Michael Polanyi's work on "tacit knowledge" is also important in this context. Polanyi (1967) argued that acts of discovery are charged with strong personal feelings and commitments, and thus the notion that scientific research is somehow value-free is highly questionable. Tacit knowledge is a type of knowing based on informed guesses or hunches often concerned with objective "truth," but not yet in a form that can be stated in formal terms. Nevertheless, by collecting together several sources of tacit knowledge, Polanyi maintains it is possible to construct a new model or theory.

In addition to these epistemological considerations, ontological issues (i.e. those concerned with the nature of existence – what is existence?; what are the essential attributes of a particular object?; what constitutes the identity of an object, etc?) must also be explored. Social ontology is concerned with the nature of social entities, and whether they should be considered objects with a reality external to the individuals concerned with them, or whether they are social constructions built up from the perceptions and actions of social actors. This distinction is typically articulated as "objectivism" versus "constructivism." An

objectivist stance maintains that an organisation or culture is a tangible object, with rules and regulations, procedures, divisions of labour, hierarchies, and so on. People within an organisational or cultural framework function in accordance with these; if they do not, they may be reprimanded or punished. In this understanding, the organisation serves as an external constraining force that acts on and inhibits its members. In contrast, constructivism maintains that an organisation or culture is continually being constructed by social actors. It holds that order in organisations is not a pre-existing characteristic, but is rather continually developed via a series of general understandings and agreed-upon patterns of action developed by the actors involved. Similarly, culture is not an external reality that acts on people, but is rather an emergent reality in a continuous state of construction and reconstruction. Constructivists rarely take this position to the extreme; they recognise that culture or the organisation antedates the participation of particular people, but stress, nevertheless, that neither can be treated as an inert object because they are continuously in the process of being formed and reformed.

Methodological issues: quantitative and qualitative research

Perhaps the most common distinction in discussions about methodological issues is that made between *quantitative* and *qualitative* research. The very basic difference might be articulated as follows: "On the face of it, there would seem to be little to the quantitative/qualitative distinction other than the fact the quantitative researchers employ measurement and qualitative researchers do not" (Bryman 2008: 21). Certainly, quantitative research seeks to quantify data: typically it results in figures (for example, x% of

all respondents did y, or exhibit z). It achieves this by asking closed questions, offering several response options which respondents are required to select or prioritise in some way, which can then be measured. Qualitative research, in contrast, uses language-based approaches such as discourse, conversation and narrative to generate research findings. It asks open-ended questions that allow respondents to speak freely from their own perspective, and researchers to probe responses for the purposes of clarification or adding depth or nuance. This captures the surface distinction; however, more detailed examination of both uncovers other significant differences.

Quantitative research

The preoccupation of quantitative researchers with measurement stems partly from an interest in delineating fine differences in attitudes or behaviours, which may be particularly difficult to ascertain in any other way. Quantitative research is also often concerned with causality: that is to say, both the extent to which something exists, and the factors that cause it to exist or why it is so. By examining various constants and variables in relation to one another, causality can be investigated. In addition, quantitative research often seeks to generalise by taking its findings and extending them beyond the context in which the research was conducted into a wider realm. Ensuring that the sample surveyed is as representative as possible is essential to being able to achieve this; the closer it is to being a microcosm of a larger population group, the more scope exists to generalise. Quantitative research also tends to be rather preoccupied with the issue of replication: for example, by asking a specifically-worded question with a specific set of response options to a specific

demographic, it is possible to replicate those conditions at another point in time, or in another context. By working in this way, the measurements procured by quantitative research generally provide researchers with a consistent device or yardstick for making distinctions over time and in relation to other research.

What all of this means from a philosophical perspective is that, epistemologically, quantitative researchers tend to be positivists. They draw on the methods of natural science research to investigate social phenomena, and place a high premium on objectivity and a value-free approach. From an ontological perspective, they tend to be objectivists, working on the assumption that it is possible to isolate a social entity (population group, community, organisation) and examine it as an objective reality in and of itself. Furthermore, their work tends to be deductive, where accent is placed on the testing of theory. Whilst these philosophical assumptions formed the basis of social research until the latter half of the twentieth century, an increasingly sharp critique has developed in recent decades, resulting in a growing appreciation for qualitative approaches.

This critique has four main components. First, critics argue that there is a clear distinction to be drawn between social entities and the natural world. People interpret the world around them and are thus notoriously difficult to capture in all their complexity if one asks highly structured questions and imposes limitations on answers. The objects of natural science may be studied in this way, because they have no capacity to self-reflect, but social entities are fundamentally different. Second, the application of clear measurements assumes that people understand and interpret language in precisely the same way as the researcher. Critics argue that this assumption is often false, thereby rendering a rather

artificial or even spurious sense of precision to the measurements attained. Third, the lack of connection between research and everyday life may bring a somewhat illusory component to quantitative research. Many quantitative methods rely heavily on administering research instruments to subjects, or creating controlled environments in which to conduct their research, which may result in respondents answering questions in ways that differ from their real-life beliefs or behaviours. Similarly, quantitative research creates a very static view of social life. It isolates individual beliefs at a particular moment in time, but fails to capture or explore the processes of interpretation or definition that go on continually in human groups.

Qualitative research

It is this critique that accounts for the interest in, and growing use of, qualitative research from the second half of the twentieth century. Unlike quantitative researchers, qualitative researchers are less concerned with the measurement of concepts like social attitudes, political beliefs or religious behaviour. Instead, they prefer to provide “a general sense of reference and guidance in approaching empirical instances” (Blumer 1954). For example, rather than using a Likert Scale to assess whether respondents strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree with a certain concept or proposition, quantitative researchers prefer to employ the concept or proposition in a very general sense, and in a way that seeks to uncover the variety of forms it can assume or ways it is understood. Qualitative researchers are preoccupied with whether they have seen their subject through the eyes of the people being studied, and whether they have probed beneath the surface of respondent

opinions. They tend to focus on “thick” and detailed description that locates behaviours, values and opinions in context, and achieve this by adopting a fairly general and open-ended research approach that deliberately does not impose what they might consider to be an inappropriate or inadequate frame of reference on the respondent.

Philosophically, this locates qualitative research in a very different camp to quantitative research. From an epistemological perspective, qualitative research tends to be interpretivist: it shuns the practices and methods of natural science research in favour of seeking to understand the social world by examining the ways in which it is lived and interpreted by people. Ontologically, it rejects the notion of social reality as object, embodying instead a view of it as a constantly-shifting and emergent notion created by individuals.

Of course, qualitative research is not without its critics either. They argue first that it is too subjective and impressionistic, and that the researcher’s views about what is important interfere with responses. Second, they maintain that qualitative research is notoriously difficult to replicate. As a result of the researcher’s heavy involvement in an unstructured or semi-structured research process, it becomes largely impossible to replicate a study because there are insufficient standardised procedures to follow. Similarly, third, there is often a distinct lack of transparency in qualitative research. It is often very difficult to establish precisely what the researcher did, and how the particular study’s conclusions were attained. Last, it is often highly suspect to use qualitative research to generalise. The idea that one or two cases can represent all or many cases is dubious at the very least, and most attempts at this must be regarded as such. However, it is important to note that this final point actually

fails to fully understand one of the core assumptions of qualitative research. Its respondents are rarely meant to be a representative sample of a particular population, so its findings are not typically designed to generalise to a larger demographic. Instead, as qualitative research is typically inductive, findings are designed to generalise to theory; that is, it may be appropriate to partially or fully apply the theory developed through the qualitative research process in a more general context than the very specific one investigated.

Bryman seeks to capture the key differences between the two approaches in diagrammatic form, as below (Table 4.1):

Table 4.1. Some common contrasts between quantitative and qualitative research (Bryman 2008, p.393)

QUANTITATIVE	QUALITATIVE
Numbers	Words
Point of view of researcher	Point of view of participants
Researcher distant	Researcher close
Theory testing	Theory emergent
Static	Process
Structured	Unstructured
Generalisation	Contextual understanding
Hard, reliable data	Rich, deep data
Macro	Micro
Behaviour	Meaning
Artificial settings	Natural settings

Mixed methods

One possible response to the claims and counter claims of the advocates of quantitative and qualitative research is to combine both together in a single project, an approach known as “mixed methods” research. Proponents of this view maintain that quantitative and qualitative data can be mutually illuminating, and that the findings generated by a quantitative study can be given greater depth and nuance by examining them qualitatively, or that a set of assumptions, attitudes or behaviours uncovered in a qualitative study can be subsequently measured quantitatively. This issue of sequence has been explored by Morgan (1998) among others, along with a second criteria about priority – namely, is the quantitative and qualitative method the principal data-gathering tool? Hammersley (1996) proposed three approaches to mixed methods research: (i) triangulation (i.e. the use of qualitative or quantitative research to corroborate the research findings of the other); (ii) facilitation (i.e. the employment of one research approach to support or aid the other research approach); and (iii) complementarity (i.e. using both research approaches so that the two different elements of an investigation come together to form a whole).

The case for mixed methods research appears to be compelling until one introduces some of the philosophical considerations that underpin it. If, as has been demonstrated, quantitative and qualitative research methods carry different epistemological and ontological commitments and represent fundamentally different ways of how one knows or understands the world, they may be incompatible. Thus, as one commentator notes, “...the decision to employ, for example, participant observation is not simply about how to go about data collection but a commitment to an epistemological position that is inimical to

positivism and that is consistent with interpretivism” (Bryman 2008: 604). Indeed, quantitative and qualitative research may be, as some argue, entirely different paradigms (see, for example, Guba 1985; Morgan 1998). Nevertheless, these are contentious arguments, not least because whilst research methods have different epistemological and ontological foundations, these are not entirely fixed. Furthermore, it is questionable whether qualitative and quantitative research are paradigms in the way Kuhn (1970) understood the term. Certainly, qualitative research has not replaced quantitative research as the new methodology based on the clear inconsistencies and failures of quantitative research, but is more often regarded as an alternative approach designed to function in an alternative way for alternative purposes.

Methodological principles in this thesis

Upon consideration of the purposes of this thesis alongside the methodological issues discussed above, a number of conclusions became apparent. Primarily, my concern was to uncover and make explicit the underlying educational philosophy of the *Limmud* conference. This suggested inductive rather than deductive means – I did not seek to subject a hypothesis to empirical scrutiny, but rather scrutinise an event to develop a theoretical understanding of it – albeit with a view that any theory developed should inform future observational work. Second, my concern was not to measure anything in particular, but rather to interpret what *Limmud* is, which pointed to the adoption of an interpretivist rather than a positivist position. Third, bearing in mind that the *Limmud* conference has no permanent faculty, student body, curriculum or physical building but is rather constructed

annually by a group of volunteers, it suggested a constructivist rather than objectivist ontological position. Based on this, and referring to Bryman’s table below (4.2) which outlines the fundamental differences between quantitative and qualitative research strategies, it became apparent that I should adopt a qualitative approach to my research.

Table 4.2. Fundamental differences between quantitative and qualitative research strategies (Bryman 2008, p.22)

	Quantitative	Qualitative
Principal orientation to the role of theory in relation to research	Deductive; testing of theory	Inductive; generation of theory
Epistemological orientation	Natural science model, in particular positivism	Interpretivism
Ontological orientation	Objectivism	Constructionism

Research design

Beyond these philosophical considerations, I had to consider the various possibilities for research design. A research design is a basic framework for the collection and analysis of data, and the adopted design model is directly related to the priority the researcher gives to a range of dimensions of the research process.

One possibility was to adopt an experimental design. In this instance, two groups would typically be investigated: one that receives the treatment or experiences the intervention

that the researcher wishes to investigate, and a second that does not (the control group). The researcher then investigates how the two groups differ in their behaviour, response or attitude. Whilst there may well be some merit in undertaking a study of this nature in regard to *Limmud*, my primary interest was to understand its implicit educational philosophy, and thus this type of design did not lend itself to my research interest.

Another research design is longitudinal. Longitudinal research surveys a sample more than once over time, to assess changes and developments over a given period. There are two main types of longitudinal design: a “panel” study (involving a randomly selected sample that is designed to be broadly representative of a much larger group), and a “cohort” study (involving people who all share a certain characteristic(s), or have all been through a certain experience). Again, given *Limmud’s* own rhetoric about individual learning journeys, it would certainly be interesting to conduct a longitudinal study that sought to track these over time. Nevertheless, in this particular instance, it was inappropriate for my research goals, as it did not lend itself to teasing out the philosophical underpinnings of the endeavour. In addition, longitudinal studies, by definition, take an extended period of time to complete, and are typically rather costly.

A cross-sectional design, whilst possible, would arguably fail to capture the nuance required of respondents’ opinions. This method – often referred to as a “survey design” – would typically involve collecting data from a number of individuals at a single moment in time in order to create a quantifiable dataset which could then be examined to detect various patterns of association. Applied to my study, it would have involved a survey of either the professional and voluntary leadership of *Limmud*, or a broader survey including participants,

teachers, volunteers and leaders. The weakness of a cross-sectional design in this particular context is that it is quantitative: it asks closed questions which are helpful if the researcher is eager to examine commonalities across a large sample, but less helpful when one is looking for the kind of more open, reflective analysis I was eager to uncover. I did consider a cross-sectional design as a secondary phase in my research, and believe it would be valuable, but I wanted to ensure that I paid sufficient attention to the qualitative data, and in the context of an EdD thesis with its own word constraints, I ultimately elected to focus exclusively on an analysis of the qualitative data.

A stronger case could have been made for a comparative design; that is, a study of two or more similar or contrasting initiatives using more or less identical methods. The assumption in such a design is that social phenomena may be better understood when examined in comparison to two or more other cases or situations. Certainly, in seeking to understand *Limmud*, it might have been valuable to contrast it with another similar endeavour, but I rejected this possibility due mainly to time and logistical constraints.¹⁴³ However, the most compelling reason to reject a comparative design was my desire to focus my attention on *Limmud* itself. Given the word limit of an EdD thesis, and my interest in examining the nature of the UK-based annual *Limmud* conference itself, it seemed germane to give optimum consideration to that.

¹⁴³ I did contemplate an examination of the *Eisteddfod*, an annually-held Welsh cultural festival, and *Greenbelt*, a Christian festival similar to *Limmud*. I visited the *Eisteddfod* in summer 2009 to investigate such a possibility, and spent some time researching *Greenbelt* online. However, to examine these alongside *Limmud* would have involved identifying and gaining access to the most appropriate respondents (many, if not all of whom are based in Wales in the case of the *Eisteddfod*, and outside London in the case of *Greenbelt*), and the complexities of this rendered it unworkable. Another possibility I considered was to contrast it with another Jewish educational endeavour, but I was unable to identify an obvious appropriate comparative initiative. Examining one of the other versions of *Limmud* that have been established in a variety of global locations might have been possible, although again, time and logistical constraints were a major consideration.

The only clear remaining option was a case study. A case study involves an “intensive examination” of a single case, typically a community, school, family, organisation, person or event (Bryman 2008:52-53). Bryman notes that “exponents of the case study design often favour qualitative methods, such as participant observation and unstructured interviewing, because these methods are viewed as particularly helpful in the generation of an intensive, detailed examination of a case” (Bryman 2008:53). That is not to suggest that quantitative methods are never employed in a case study; indeed, a mixed methods approach involving both qualitative and quantitative components is not uncommon. Nevertheless, fundamentally, a case study appeared to be the most obvious and appropriate design for a study about *Limmud* that aimed to uncover the implicit educational philosophy at its heart. It would allow me to focus exclusively on the topic at hand, and invest optimal energy in engaging with those best-placed to explain and deconstruct the workings and assumptions of the event. This pointed towards either an exclusively qualitative approach, or a predominantly qualitative approach tested against a secondary quantitative survey. The former was ultimately favoured, not because it would result in a more comprehensive and sound analysis (indeed, the addition of a secondary quantitative element would almost certainly make this a more robust study), but rather again because of the limits of space in an EdD thesis. The complexity of examining an initiative of this nature, in an analysis which seeks to draw on theories from the fields of NFE and social capital, ultimately rendered an additional quantitative component overly ambitious and impractical. I wanted to examine *Limmud* in depth, and to give due care and attention to the thoughts and reflections of those best-placed to analyse it. This eventually led to a clear conclusion: a case study involving interviews with key informants.

Research methods

In a qualitative case study, there are three principal ways to collect data: participation observation, one-to-one interviews, and focus groups. Each has its own advantages and disadvantages, and all were considered as potential options in this instance. Participant observation requires the researcher to immerse himself partially or fully in the particular case, and is favoured by some who argue that the researcher is able to greatly enhance his capacity to see his subject through the eyes of those most engaged in it. As the researcher is in particularly close contact with his subject for a long period of time, he is often able to learn the internal culture, language, behaviours and social norms of the subject in the way that a social anthropologist might when working intensively in a distant and foreign environment. It is also argued that this approach improves the chances of the researcher encountering unexpected issues, as these are far more likely to come out in informal conversations over the course of time rather than in a structured, time-bound interview. Furthermore, proponents of this method argue that participation observation results in the researcher developing a much greater degree of sensitivity to context: people's behaviours can be mapped out fully, with an element of depth and understanding that a limited interview is unlikely to capture. Due to the fact that the method has a more naturalistic emphasis (it sees people in their natural habitat and environment, and the data-gathering process does not unduly disrupt respondents' lives), it is often able to capture the more natural nuances of the particular case being studied.

Nevertheless, participant observation is only directly valuable when there is something to observe, and in instances where the case being studied is episodic in people's lives, those

moments are occasional and often difficult to predict. In such instances, there is a strong case for interviews, as these allow the respondent to discuss something that occurs in their lives in a somewhat infrequent and unpredictable manner. Interviews also allow respondents to reflect back on something; to reconstruct an incident, event or behaviour, and then deconstruct it. In this way, interviews are able to span both time and space: they create the possibility for the respondent to look back on something with the benefit of hindsight, or to discuss something that exists elsewhere, or to engage those who were involved in the past but no longer are in the present. Participant observation, in contrast, is heavily skewed towards the here and now, and only those incidents that occur, or players that exist during the course of the study, can be fully examined. Some maintain that interviews are often a more ethical approach to research, as they should always involve the giving of consent. In contrast, whilst participant observation often involves this element too, there are plenty of cases when it cannot (for example, when the observed is being watched interacting with someone whose consent has not been given), or when the researcher becomes so immersed in his case that the observed drop their guard, or are watched in a situation in which they would prefer not to be seen. Not unrelated to this, some maintain that participant observers, simply by their presence, disturb the reality they wish to observe, unlike interviews, which typically take place away from that reality.

A strong case may be made equally for focus groups. The focus group method is a form of group interview, where the moderator or facilitator explores a tightly-defined topic with a group in order to extract both individual opinions, and to explore the interaction between participants. They have the advantage of being able to elicit multiple responses in one session, and, employing the tenets of a theoretical position like "symbolic interactionism,"

they are based in part on the principle that individuals' understanding of social phenomena are often heavily influenced by and through their engagement with others. For these reasons, focus groups have become particularly popular in the field of media and cultural studies, where they are regularly utilised to gauge "audience reception" of a particular programme or product. They are helpful when seeking to understand why people feel the way they do, as both the moderator and other participants in the focus group are able to challenge and probe the opinions of others, often resulting in more qualified, nuanced and detailed responses. Furthermore, certain issues and concerns often surface naturally in focus groups, particularly when a skilled moderator relinquishes some control by retreating from her position at the front and centre of the group, and allowing the flow of the group discussion to highlight them without undue prompting.

In the case of this research on *Limmud*, I was particularly eager to interview individuals who had been involved in constructing, leading and managing the conference over several years. My belief was that interviews of this nature would allow me optimal time to discuss interviewees' experiences of *Limmud*, and allow them to reflect back thoughtfully on their work to extract implicit theoretical assumptions and underpinnings. Given the complexity of NFE philosophy and social capital theory, I felt it would be most effective to engage in face-to-face interviews, in which I could ensure that everything I was asking and everything I was being told could be carefully clarified as necessary, and clearly understood by both parties. Neither participation observation nor focus groups would allow for the intensity of a one-to-one interview, and I was eager to achieve that. I rejected participant observation as a formal part of the research process, although one could argue that my participation in *Limmud* conferences prior to and during the course of this research constituted an informal

version of this.¹⁴⁴ There was, however, a case for focus groups. Whilst one-to-one interviews would allow me to probe individual opinion deeply and thoughtfully, they would not capture the ways in which the theoretical principles identified in the interviews were being activated or understood by participants. For those individuals who were fairly new to *Limmud*, focus groups would capture which principles were clearly understood, which were in dispute, and which were simply not present. In this way, they would be able to test the assumptions or beliefs of the longstanding leadership against those of the participants to identify any dissonance between them.

Conceptual framework

In my analysis of NFE and social capital in Chapter 3, there are two particularly valuable constructs that I believed would benefit my research. The first, in the realm of NFE, comes from the work of Colley, Hodkinson & Malcolm (2002), where they first identify and then boil down the distinguishing criteria between formal, non-formal and informal education into four distinct categories: process, location and setting, purposes and content (see p.55). The second, in the realm of social capital theory, comes from the work of Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998), where they, not dissimilarly, attempt to pull together the various forms of

¹⁴⁴ Certainly, having participated in *Limmud* on several occasions in the past, I approached this study feeling that I had a good understanding of its internal culture and language, and thus did not feel a particular need to invest undue energy in this method. In this respect, I regarded my insider status as an advantage: whilst I would not include a formal element of participant observation in the thesis, I would bring my longstanding involvement in the conference as informal knowledge which would serve as valuable background. I was aware of the downside of course – namely, that this previous involvement may result in a certain loss of objectivity – but, in the final analysis, felt that of all three of the aforementioned methods, participant observation was the least valuable given my history.

social capital that are highlighted in the literature, and ultimately identify three “forms” or “dimensions”: structural, relational, and cognitive. As both of these studies attempted to capture a whole, I used their categories as a conceptual framework for my research.

Colley, Hodkinson and Malcolm’s four categories seemed particularly helpful, not least because as they were not limited to the field of NFE, they sought to capture all of the areas in which distinctions could be drawn between formal, non-formal and informal education. Whilst my starting point was to suggest that the *Limmud* conference might be located most accurately within NFE, I was conscious that it is difficult to define (Simonson 2011) and that elements of it may potentially be labelled ‘formal’ or ‘informal.’ Thus, an attempt to capture and identify where the distinctions lie would enable me to focus my questions and analysis on those areas of primary interest, and ultimately locate *Limmud* in the appropriate arena. The four categories are highlighted in the table below (4.3), alongside the questions that each category raised in relation to *Limmud*.

Table 4.3. Applying Colley, Hodkinson and Malcolm’s categories to *Limmud*

Category	Applied to <i>Limmud</i>
Process	Analysis of the learner activity and practices, pedagogical styles, nature of the relationship between the learner and others, assessment processes (if applicable)
Location/setting	Examination of environment in which learning takes place: use of space, use of time, understanding of notion of curriculum.
Purposes	Understanding of the purposes of the conference, and the place of learning within that.
Content	Exploration of what is being learned, and extent to which the learning focus is on the acquisition of existing knowledge versus the development of something new.

Nahapiet and Ghoshal’s three dimensions also seemed helpful as, based on prior experience and observation of *Limmud*, each appeared to point towards a particularly important element of it. It was important to examine the nature of existing relationships within the organisation, the defining features and norms of these relationships, and the systems of meaning between individuals that served to enable or restrict exchange, and Nahapiet and Ghoshal captured each of these. More specifically, their dimensions directed me towards the following areas of enquiry (Table 4.4):

Table 4.4. Applying Nahapiet and Ghoshal’s categories to *Limmud*

Dimension	Applied to <i>Limmud</i>
Structural	Analysis of the patterns and configuration of connections that exist between the leadership and volunteer networks, including bonding and bridging social capital, and “structural holes”
Relational	Descriptions of relationships that exist amongst the leadership and between the volunteers, and the underlying values, norms and mutual obligations that influence behaviour
Cognitive	Exploration of shared language and codes, myths, narratives, stories, metaphors that enable or restrict relationships

Brought together, these two frameworks created seven distinct areas of enquiry from which to construct an interview guide (see Appendix D). Each was sufficiently distinct to allow for focused interrogation, and sufficiently broad to maximise the chances of respondents being able to engage with it. Most importantly, because of their summative nature, application of these constructs seemed to constitute a comprehensive way to explore the key components of non-formal educational theory and social capital theory.

For the focus groups, I elected to draw on the same sources, but simplify the process. Researchers are divided on the question of how structured focus groups discussions should

be, yet it is important “to navigate the channel between, on the one hand, addressing the research questions and ensuring comparability between sessions, and, on the other side, allowing participants to raise issues they see as significant and in their own terms” (Bryman 2008:483-4). As a result, I decided to begin with two broad questions, one inviting an anecdote that captured for each individual the essence of *Limmud*, and a second that asked them to articulate what they believed *Limmud’s* core values to be. Both of these were intended to identify major elements of the endeavour. These were then followed by specific questions about the learning and social experience (to focus on the themes of NFE and social capital), and the session concluded with a deliberately broad question inviting any further reflections. The discussion guide can be found in Appendix E.

Resources and ethical issues

There are numerous ethical issues that can arise in social research. In some of the more notorious cases of social research, a wide range of alleged transgressions have taken place involving, for example, pseudo-patients in the study of mental hospitals (Rosenhan 1973), covert ethnography of a police force (Holdaway 1982, 1983), disguised researchers investigating a religious cult (Festinger *et al.* 1956), and the administration of electric shocks (albeit false ones) as a punishment for incorrectly responding to questions (Milgram 1963). Whilst these are extreme examples, they highlight many of the major questions: who is to be interviewed, have they given their consent, what do they know, and what is expected of them; and who is the researcher, what is he consciously *not* sharing with interviewees, for

what reasons and with what potential consequences? In the realm of educational research, some of these issues become particularly pertinent when children are involved.

In the case of my research, there were few ethical issues of concern. All interviewees and focus groups participants were mature, university-educated adults who had freely agreed to participate. In accordance with university regulations, I read the British Educational Research Association's *Revised Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research* (BERA, 2004), and abided by its guidelines, as well as the *Research Code of Conduct* of the University of Nottingham and the *Data Protection Act* (1998). The appropriate paperwork was submitted to the University of Nottingham's School of Education Ethics Committee, and approved. All participants were provided with an "Interview Guide" about the research in advance (see Appendix B), and required to sign a participant consent form prior to the interview or focus group (Appendix C). The only major ethical issue which emerged in relation to interviewees and focus group participants concerned confidentiality: some respondents were concerned that, given the close ties that exist between *Limmud* leaders and volunteers, it would be easy for those involved to recognise the views or quotes of others even if I did not attribute them to specific individuals. In all cases, I raised this issue in advance of the interview or focus group, and advised individuals first, that all references to respondents would be anonymous, and second, that all respondents retained the right to withhold perspectives, insights or critiques during the course of the interview process.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁵ Note that the initials used to identify respondents in Chapter 5 are based on a formula which allows me to identify them, but conceals their identity to any other reader.

It could be argued that there might be an ethical issue relating to the analysis of the specific organisation itself – that by subjecting the conference to this degree of scrutiny without retaining the organisation’s anonymity, *Limmud* could potentially be compromised in some way. However, none of the respondents raised this as an issue, and none of the invited interviewees (who included current senior professional and voluntary leaders of the organisation) refused to participate in the study on these, or any other grounds.¹⁴⁶ Indeed, on the contrary, their most common response was to express some pleasure in the fact that their creation was the subject of a doctoral dissertation, and that it was considered worthy of academic study.

One issue, which I had not considered in advance of my research and which is somewhat ethical in nature, was raised by one respondent. Despite agreeing to an interview and participating fully in one, she expressed considerable scepticism both about social research in general, and the particular goals of my study. She commented:

“I am deeply, deeply suspicious of trying to capture this in any linear, analytic way and I think if you didn’t in your research somewhere indicate that, whilst you’ve done your best to use research tools to try to capture one lens of this, you cannot understand *Limmud* without experiencing it... If people somehow think they could read a paper about it and get it, it is the equivalent of falling in love, you cannot do it, you cannot capture this... I respect attempts to do it because I think it is really important to try and pin this down in some way

¹⁴⁶ In many respects, the absence of this concern reflects aspects of the organisation itself – whilst it has voluntary and professional leaders, a degree of ambiguity exists around who actually ‘owns’ *Limmud* – the organisers, the presenters, or the participants (see the section on “Purposes” in Chapter 5 for a discussion of this issue). On reflection, whilst this ambiguity allows actors involved in *Limmud* to continually determine what *Limmud* is thereby creating a very fluid and flexible educational body, it may also make it vulnerable to critical analysis with an insufficiently robust infrastructure to protect its interests.

so that we can talk about it and understand it and analyse it, and also at the same time to accept there is an experiential piece of what is going on here that is at the heart of it. It's like music also. Whenever I read a paper about music I just think okay, that was a beautiful analysis of that Bach Partita, but now I have to go listen to it because it misses that transcendent piece of what music does to the human soul. So I would just want somewhere for you to try to capture that there is something missing with any analytical attempt to describe this phenomenon."

I acknowledge her argument, and, given her comments, regard it as ethically important to do so. Nevertheless, no other respondent raised this as a concern, and whilst I fully accept that observation of, or participation in *Limmud* would increase one's understanding, I do not believe that renders an analysis of it redundant. However, it does raise an important epistemological issue about this research: whether it is possible to "know" *Limmud* without having an experiential dimension to that knowledge.

Gaining access to respondents for interviews and focus groups was straightforward. Given my past involvement in *Limmud*, I knew some of the characters involved, and in instances when I did not, I secured the support of the Executive Director to supply me with contact details and, where necessary, introductions to particular interviewees or focus group participants. All respondents were professionals based in the United Kingdom, so it was reasonably easy to set up face-to-face interviews, all of which took place at a variety of mutually convenient locations in London, most commonly their homes or workplaces. The focus groups took place at the *Limmud* conference itself.

Developing the research strategy

In assessing *who* to interview, a number of sampling issues needed to be considered. The term 'sample' refers to the segment of the population that has been selected for investigation. All research projects have a 'sampling frame' – a listing of the units in a given population from which the sample will be selected. A 'representative sample' is a group that is an accurate microcosm of a larger population; by examining it, it is possible to draw generalisations that may be applied to that larger population. 'Sampling bias' occurs when that microcosm is distorted in some way; for example, when there is a disproportionate gender balance in the research sample as compared to the population it seeks to represent. In some instances, researchers use a 'probability sample,' a sample that has been selected at random, in such a way that each unit within the population has a chance of being selected. In contrast, in a 'non-probability sample' there is a much higher chance that certain units within the population will be selected than others. When errors occur in research, they may be due to mistakes within this realm: a 'sampling error' refers to the existence of a mismatch between the sample and the population from which it is selected; a 'non-sampling error' typically refers to other problems such as non-response, poorly worded questions, poor interview technique, or flawed data-processing and analysis.

In qualitative research, sampling is often *purposive*: an approach designed to reach units most closely related to, and concerned with the research questions being posed. Such an approach does not allow the researcher to generalise to a larger population, as it is not, by definition, a microcosm of something larger than itself. If purposive sampling is used, it is essential to have clear goals in mind, and to establish clear criteria by which interviewees

will be included or excluded. Alternatively, qualitative researchers may seek out a *convenience sample*: units selected on the basis of their availability to the researcher. A third approach is *theoretical sampling*, whereby the researcher develops the sample during the course of the research.¹⁴⁷

In the case of this study of *Limmud*, I adopted purposive sampling for the one-to-one interviews. The overarching purpose of the research, as has been stated, was to develop a detailed understanding of *Limmud's* educational philosophy. Thus, the sample needed to be selected with a clear eye on this purpose: i.e. it needed to be comprised of individuals best placed to offer a rich, detailed and reflective view on my central research question. A case could have been made for theoretical sampling (namely, that its iterative nature is arguably the most appropriate means of developing theory as it emerges), but it would have required returning to certain respondents on more than one occasion in order to clarify or build on insights they had shared previously, and ultimately, I regarded such an approach to be unnecessarily complex and time-consuming for the task, as well as demanding on the respondents. Purposive sampling allowed me the opportunity to interview all key respondents once, which, given their general level of experience and intelligence combined with my use of a semi-structured interview schedule, would almost certainly derive enough data for my purposes. The semi-structured interview, which my tutor Professor Morgan described as “a conversation with a purpose and destination,” also gave me sufficient latitude during interviews to pursue the specific interests and insights of individual

¹⁴⁷ As described by two proponents, theoretical sampling “is the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyses his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his theory as it emerges. The process of data collection is *controlled* by the emerging theory, whether substantive or formal.” (Glaser and Strauss 1967: 45). Theoretical sampling is therefore, an on-going process, defined during, rather than prior to data collection.

respondents in accordance with their most relevant and insightful remarks.¹⁴⁸ Thus, in the final analysis, I selected and interviewed twenty individuals, all of whom have held senior leadership positions within *Limmud* the organisation and/or *Limmud* the conference, and constructed an interview schedule in such a way as to allow them optimum freedom to share their most pertinent perspectives.

In selecting them, I also took into consideration several factors. First, I was eager to ensure an equal gender balance in order to see if any gender-based insights might emerge during the analysis phase. Whilst gender was not a particular focus of my study, I wondered whether there might be any gender-based patterns of response, particularly bearing in mind the egalitarian and respectful ethos found in *Limmud's* mission statement (see Appendix G). I also took into consideration respondents' denominational positions – both in terms of their upbringing and their current affiliation – with a view towards achieving an equal balance between Progressive respondents (i.e. members of Liberal, Reform or Masorti synagogues), Orthodox respondents (i.e. members of Orthodox synagogues), and unaffiliated respondents. I considered the possibility of the sample reflecting the known denominational affiliation proportions in the UK Jewish community instead (see Graham and Vulkan, 2010), but favoured an equal split between the three groups in order to maximise the chances of identifying any patterns of response within each group. Given *Limmud's* emphasis on Jewish journeys (see Appendix G), I was also eager to ensure a balance between respondents whose denominational position had remained largely static throughout their life (e.g. people who grew up in a particular denomination and remained within it in adulthood), and those who had moved from one denomination to another over time, in order to ascertain

¹⁴⁸ In a tutorial, 1 February 2010.

whether this factor might play any part in their articulation *Limmud*. Thus, in developing the sample, each respondent was given two symbols – O (Orthodox); P (Progressive); or X (unaffiliated) – to reflect their denominational position during their upbringing and at the time of the interview (40 symbols in total). In building the sample, I sought to achieve an equal balance between these two groups too – i.e. those whose position had remained static over time, and those who had changed. Achieving all of these goals proved difficult, particularly bearing in mind that the most important priority was to interview people able to offer significant insights into my research questions, and ultimately I had to make some compromises, most notably in the number of unaffiliated.¹⁴⁹ The eventual sample is characterised in the table below.

Table 4.5 Sampling factors

Factor	Intended sample	Final sample
Gender	10 male	10 male
	10 female	10 female
Denominational balance	14 Orthodox	18 Orthodox
	14 Progressive	18 Progressive
	12 unaffiliated	4 unaffiliated
Denominational movement over time	10 static	10 static
	10 movement	10 movement

¹⁴⁹ This is a common problem in quantitative studies of Jews in Britain due to the absence of lists of unaffiliated Jews from which to draw a sample (see: Graham, D. (2011). *Survey minority groups online. An assessment of the methodological approach used in the 2010 Israel Survey*. London: Institute for Jewish Policy Research). Whilst it was possible to identify a sufficient number of unaffiliated Jews for this study, I judged their depth of understanding of *Limmud* to not be equivalent to those ultimately included in the sample on the advice of *Limmud's* Executive Director.

Interviews were held either in interviewees' homes or workplaces, and each interview lasted for approximately ninety minutes. Each one was recorded and transcribed, and, on the advice of my tutor, I kept a research diary throughout the fieldwork phase to inform the focus group interview schedule and data analysis. I used the diary to write down any particular insights I considered noteworthy following each interview, and reviewed it prior to, during and following the analysis phase. It alerted me to the prevalence of certain themes and ideas (notably the common discussion of individual freedom, community and the perceived power of the overall experience – see Chapter 5), and served as a valuable post-analysis tool to ensure that I had not missed any major points.

There are two main approaches to qualitative data analysis: “analytic induction” and “grounded theory.” Analytic induction is particularly rigorous; it seeks to identify universal explanations for particular phenomena by gathering data until there are no inconsistent cases – every single response confirms a hypothesis. It typically begins with a research question, moves to a hypothetical explanation of the problem, and then continues to collect data until the hypothesis is proven. If, at any point, the hypothesis is disproven, the analyst either redefines the hypothesis to exclude the deviant case, or reformulates the hypothesis and continues with further data collection until that one is proven. If the second hypothesis is disproven, the analyst must again choose either to redefine the hypothesis, or reformulate it and collect yet more data. In contrast, grounded theory seeks to draw theory out of the data; rather than beginning with a hypothesis, the analyst uses the data to develop a theory. This often happens in an iterative way, so that data collection and analysis occur in tandem, continually referring back to one another. Theory is developed through a process of reviewing transcripts and notes, and ‘coding’ or labelling parts that

appear significant. There are various approaches to coding discussed in the literature – for example ‘open’, ‘axial’, and ‘selective’ (Strauss and Corbin), and ‘initial’ and ‘selective’ or ‘focused’ (Charmaz)¹⁵⁰ – but as Bryman notes: “Although there are slight differences in the way in which the phases of the coding process is supposed to occur in grounded theory according to its practitioners, there is a basic understanding of it as involving a movement from generating codes that stay close to the data to more selective and abstract ways of conceptualizing the phenomenon of interest.”¹⁵¹ In the case of this study, I used grounded theory, first reading through all of the interview transcripts and coding every idea described by each respondent in order to identify ‘concepts’ (i.e. labels for particular phenomena that could serve as the building blocks of theory); second, looking for connections between each of the codes, clustering them into groups or ‘categories’, and either confirming or altering the name of the code to capture the common theme; third, looking for commonalities between each of the categories, and clustering them together to identify a ‘core category’, or fundamental idea, that could help me to build my hypothesis; and fourth, reviewing the interview data and conducting the focus groups to assess whether my hypothesis could inform a substantive theory.

For practical reasons, I used a combination of purposive and convenience sampling for the focus groups. I used purposive sampling to the extent that I sought out participants who had only attended *Limmud* once or twice; I used convenience sampling because it proved to be difficult to organise the focus groups without administrative support, so I ultimately opted to run the focus groups at the *Limmud* conference itself in 2011. I advertised the

¹⁵⁰ See: Bryman, A. (2008). *Social Research Methods* (Third Edition). Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.543.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

sessions at the event itself, noting that it was part of this study and that each group was limited to ten participants, all of whom had to be attending *Limmud* for either the first or second time. The focus group interview schedule was heavily shaped by the same conceptual frameworks used for the interviews (Colley, Hodgkinson and Malcolm, and Napahpiet and Ghoshal – see Appendix E), it took further shape during the course of the interviews, and was finalised after all had been completed. I conducted two focus group sessions in total, each lasting for one hour and ten minutes, and both of which were attended by ten people as planned, all of whom had participated in the conference once or twice (a few had volunteered to help run the event after attending once). These were particularly designed to test the theoretical insights gained through analysis of the one-to-one interview transcripts, and, to a lesser extent, to ascertain whether the emerging substantive theory was understood by participants or being passed onto emerging leadership. Whilst I used the focus group data for these purposes, I ultimately chose to concentrate my analysis on the interview data for the main part, not least because of their quality and depth.

Conclusion: the research strategy

In sum, in analysing my subject, I adopted an interpretivist approach that sought to understand *Limmud* from the perspective of the respondents and to develop a common understanding of it based on their observations and analysis. In addition, I took a constructivist position as *Limmud* is clearly formed and reformed on an annual basis, and my pre-existing assumptions about its educational philosophy (based both on the literature and

my experience) undoubtedly positioned it in the constructivist camp.¹⁵² These philosophical positions inevitably led me to a qualitative methodological approach. Of all qualitative methods available, I opted for a single case study as this would allow optimum time for an intensive examination of my subject, and employed face-to-face interviewing as my primary technique. In so doing, I used a purposive sampling approach for the interviews, deliberately selecting individuals with high levels of familiarity and current or previous involvement in *Limmud*. This was supported by focus group work based on a combination of purposive and convenience sampling involving individuals who were new to the endeavour. Prior to conducting the interviews, I carried out two separate pilot interviews with individuals familiar with the field of Jewish education, if not *Limmud* itself. These were particularly valuable as they helped me to rehearse the interview process, sharpen my questions, and place a time frame around the interview, and I subsequently made some minor alterations to question language to aid comprehension.

In drawing up the research protocol, I was guided by the writings of Colley, Hodkinson and Malcolm on NFE, and Nahapiet and Ghoshal on social capital. The former identified four areas of inquiry: educational purpose, process, content and setting; the latter identified a further three: structural, relational and cognitive social capital. I employed these seven concepts to shape the one-to-one interview guide (see Appendix D), and to inform the focus group discussion guide (Appendix E). All interviews were recorded and transcribed, and I

¹⁵² Vrasidas has written that the major philosophical and epistemological assumptions of constructivism are: (1) There is a real world that sets boundaries to what we can experience. However, reality is local and there are multiple realities. (2) The structure of the world is created in the mind through interaction with the world and is based on interpretation. Symbols are products of culture and they are used to construct reality. (3) The mind creates symbols by perceiving and interpreting the world. (4) Human thought is imaginative and develops out of perception, sensory experiences, and social interaction. (5) Meaning is a result of an interpretive process and it depends on the knowers' experiences and understanding. See: Vrasidas, C. (2000). Constructivism versus objectivism: Implications for interaction, course design, and evaluation in distance education. *International Journal of Educational Telecommunications*, 6(4), 339-362.

kept a diary throughout the process to record any notable insights. On completion, the data were analysed using grounded theory – careful and thorough reading and coding of the transcripts, identification of key concepts, collation of concepts into core categories, leading to the development of a hypothesis. This was then tested back against the interview transcripts and in the two focus groups, before being written up in a coherent manner for presentation.¹⁵³ In this way, I gradually developed an answer to my central question: what is the implicit educational philosophy of *Limmud*?

¹⁵³ In the first instance, I used NVivo software to analyse the data, but ultimately found it more beneficial to use non-technological means – e.g. highlighting key passages, sentences, turns of phrase or words on paper copies of the transcripts, and noting down codes in the margin.

CHAPTER 5: DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction to research findings

This chapter analyses the data gathered during the research. As outlined in the research methodology and methods chapter, they are based on twenty qualitative interviews conducted with key informants – individuals closely involved in organising the *Limmud* conference over several years – and two focus group discussions with individuals who have participated in *Limmud* once or twice.

The structure of analysis follows the interview guide, and contains five key sections. The first, *purposes*, explores how respondents understood the core aims of *Limmud*, and how they articulated its goals. The second, *content*, examines whether there is a particular proposition *Limmud* attempts to teach, and what content means in this context. The third, *processes*, explores the practices and procedures *Limmud* participants experience, and examines the lessons implicit in these. The fourth, *context*, surveys the *Limmud* conference environment, and looks at the relationship between its design and its educational messages and goals. The fifth section, *social capital*, investigates the place of relationships and social networks in *Limmud*, and explores their place in the internal culture of the organisation.

In all five sections, I quote extensively from respondents to capture the essence of their comments. I dedicate limited space to commentary based on existing academic literature until chapter 6, when I explore the theoretical ideas and constructs that underpin *Limmud*'s educational philosophy, and present my thesis.

PURPOSES

The paradox of purposeful purposelessness

The question about the core purpose – or purposes – of *Limmud* was identified as a challenging one during the very first interview, when the respondent described the question as a “Frankenstein” one (SR).¹⁵⁴ Two subsequent respondents hinted at reasons why: one noted that he was “not sure it is clear what its purpose is” (BE); the other remarked “I don’t think *Limmud* has purpose.” (BF) Several others spoke along similar lines: “It’s very vague... intentionally so” (KH) and “I think it is very hard to pin it to a single thing” (NJ). Their struggle may be related to a certain discomfort around the organisational nature of *Limmud*: if an organisation’s purposes are traditionally determined by those at the top of its hierarchy, *Limmud* is anything but traditional. One respondent noted: “I think *Limmud* suffers from a perception that there is something called the organisation. No-one quite knows what this organisation is or who this organisation is...” (LR). Similarly, another asked “who really owns *Limmud*? Is it the people who actually organise it, the volunteers? Is it the kind of cast of presenters who are actually responsible for delivering the content of their sessions in the programme? Or, is it the participants themselves...?” (KM).

Nevertheless, *Limmud* has all of the standard functionaries of any other charitable organisation – an Executive, Executive Director, paid members of staff – so one might assume that these individuals hold the organisational purpose.¹⁵⁵ Yet one respondent was

¹⁵⁴ Initials used after quotes refer to the particular respondent(s) to whom the quote is attributed. They are not the respondent’s actual initials; they have been deliberately anonymised.

¹⁵⁵ An organisational chart is included in Appendix F.

quick to blur the lines between these individuals, the volunteers who run the conference, and even the conference participants themselves: “Who is the *Limmud* executive? They’re *Limmud* participants who have built their community for themselves. They’re not outsiders brought in. In fact, even the choice of executive director isn’t a complete outsider brought in” (SR). Indeed, he continued, “there’s such a thin line between what’s top-down and what’s bottom-up in *Limmud* simply because there isn’t really an establishment within *Limmud*.” (SR)

For some, this lack of clarity is one of the defining features of the organisation. One respondent described it as “a good thing”; in explaining why the absence of a clearly articulated purpose may be critical, a second remarked: “It is not that there is some educational purpose that is being, you know, instilled from on high. It is that it actually bubbles up from the bottom. I don’t know whether that is supposed to be one of the purposes or it is a nice by-product or an unintended consequence or an intended consequence. I don’t know, and I think if I did know, then actually it wouldn’t be *Limmud* anymore” (TF).

This notion of purposes being driven by participants rather than “from on high” was noted by several others. One stated: “I think the individuals have purpose. I don’t think *Limmud* has purpose” (BF). Another remarked: “I think one of the beauties actually is that lots of people have slightly different aims for the conference” (LR). As a result, as one respondent remarked, “It’s got different purposes within it” (BE). Another said: “Clearly they [*Limmud*’s purposes] are multiple. Clearly also there are both explicit and implicit purposes there, and some of the implicit ones are possibly even barely articulated” (TL).

The absence of coherent purpose, or its deferral to the participant base, may indicate an organisation devoid of ideological vision or mission. One respondent expressed this explicitly: “I don’t think there’s any ideological piece there” (BF). Another, somewhat cryptically, claimed that *Limmud* has “an agenda of no agenda” (VA). Yet when this theme was explored further, almost all respondents identified an organisational direction. One commented: “There is an argument that says *Limmud* doesn’t have a purpose at all other than learning and you finding your own way. My view is more... I think if somebody came and was untouched, it would be a shame, it would be a failure in some way even if they had a perfectly nice time” (DR). Another remarked: “I would say that there’s a low level *kiruv* thing going on.¹⁵⁶ The term *kiruv* isn’t entirely appropriate because it is not about wanting to ramp up people’s observance necessarily, but [rather wanting to ramp up] some sort of Jewish identification, self-identification possibly, by giving access to information, culture and the social aspects” (AR).

Jewish journeys

The metaphor most commonly employed to capture this phenomenon, both in *Limmud’s* literature and by almost all respondents in the interviews, was “Jewish journey.” Indeed, the opening line of *Limmud’s* mission – values and principles’ statement is “Wherever you are going, *Limmud* will take you one step further along your Jewish journey.”¹⁵⁷ This statement is not simply consigned to paper; one respondent commented: “Jewish journey...

¹⁵⁶ The Hebrew term *kiruv* literally means “bringing near” or “rapprochement.” In recent times it has become common parlance for the practice of reaching out to secular Jews in order to turn them towards Orthodox Judaism, and it is increasingly regarded as a religious obligation for many Orthodox Jews.

¹⁵⁷ See: www.limmud.org/home/mission/ (accessed 1 August 2011).

is explicit. It's on the website, the literature. When the chairperson stands up at the end [of the conference], I'd be shocked if they don't use that phrase. But I think it's also not a trite phrase. I think it's actually used and meant and felt" (SR). The "Jewish journey" concept (Horowitz, 2003) captures the notion that Jewish identity, interests, and community engagement inevitably shift over the course of one's lifetime. Within it, there is clear acknowledgment of the reality that identity is fluid and changing; as one respondent remarked: "The explicit aim of another step on the journey is very important. What it is doing is recognising that everybody there is at a different place... and taking their next steps..." (TL).

In expressing the idea, there is an implicit understanding that the simple act of being on such a journey is valuable, and certainly, this was a given in all of the interviews. However, the most intriguing component of this journey, certainly contrasted with many other Jewish organisations, is that it lacks specificity about a destination or preferred means of transportation. Indeed, it barely offers a map; the programme booklet, an inch-thick document listing every activity taking place during the *Limmud* conference, is less map than browser; it offers a vast array of possibilities with little, if any, suggestion of which pathway to select during one's journey through the programme. Typically, Jewish educational organisations profess a clear ideological preference for their students: they ought to become more Orthodox, or more knowledgeable of a particular body of literature, or more politically active, or more proficient at being able to perform a particular task or ritual. *Limmud* appears to profess no such preference beyond the basic idea that one should be on a Jewish journey, which suggests an implicit recognition of the internal diversity and complexity of Judaism.

Several respondents expressed this very clearly: “I don’t think we prescribe what that [Jewish journey] should be” (DR) and “there isn’t a particular direction that you are supposed to take” (KH). Similarly: “...it’s the idea that it should encourage you to be enquiring about your Judaism by engaging, learning, experiencing, taking a step further whatever that means, in whichever direction, which is the kind of interesting bit” (NF), and that “most people feel that *Limmud* is a place where they will be in a non-judgmental setting” (NJ). However, whilst most respondents related to the Jewish journey concept in neutral terms, two offered particular interpretations of the journey’s destination. For one, the emphasis is on the self, and the journey is towards Jewish self-understanding rather than anything prescribed from outside: “Rather than being directed down one particular path, you can develop yourself more along the lines of whatever you are, so you end up being more you than you started off to begin with” (LR). For the other, the journey ought to progress towards a higher level of Jewish engagement and commitment: “The statement that we take people one step further on their Jewish journey is a form of *kiruv*,¹⁵⁸ a feeling that progressing on a Jewish journey that equals something. The difference is that we’re not stating where that person should go. *Limmud* doesn’t claim it even knows or has the right to determine that for anyone” (VA). These distinctions are subtle: in the former, it is conceivable that the individual’s Jewish journey could legitimately lead to a distancing from community affairs and engagement; in the latter, the notion of “progressing on a Jewish journey that equals something” suggests a desire to see the individual become more

¹⁵⁸ See footnote 139.

engaged in Jewish life, albeit without any prescription of what “more engaged” might mean.¹⁵⁹

The individual/collective balance

The common ground in the two statements concerns the relationship between the individual and the collective. In both instances, the individual is undertaking a journey in the context of a collective experience. Thus far, most of the statements we have seen have focused on the freedom of the individual. So is *Limmud* purely concerned with the individual? Or does it have any goals in mind for the collective as a whole?

Certainly, ‘the individual’ featured heavily in the interviews. Several respondents made very similar comments: “Each individual experience is a different version of *Limmud*” (IL); “People come to *Limmud* for their own reasons and... they are going to find at *Limmud* whatever it is that they are looking for” (KH); and “it will do different things for different people.” One respondent even commented: “...if there are three thousand people at *Limmud* conference, then there are three thousand different purposes there. That is the purpose of *Limmud* in my opinion. It is not that there is some educational purpose that is being, you know, instilled from on high. It is that it actually bubbles up from the bottom” (TF). All of these statements place a strong primary emphasis on the individual, and indicate that *Limmud* exists to allow each one to pursue his own interests. Nevertheless, whilst

¹⁵⁹ It is possible that this delicate distinction reflects the Jewish backgrounds of the two individuals involved: whereas the latter respondent grew up within a traditional Orthodox community, the former came from a far more assimilated background.

many respondents clearly sympathised with this view, many also pointed to a sense of shared purpose: “I think the purpose of *Limmud* is about giving that space and opportunity for individuals to seek their own path... [but] I think there is a collective sense of what direction that might be” (LR).

Indeed, rather intriguingly for an event that appears to prize the freedom of the individual, the notion of the collective – or the community – was the idea mentioned most frequently by respondents during the discussion about *purpose* in the interviews. One respondent expressed the tension clearly: “I keep going back to that word “community,” which is funny because the explicit purpose of *Limmud* is to take you, singular you, on the next stage of your journey. But I think the magic of *Limmud*, that bit that people try to talk about and can’t quite capture, is the fact that that journey happens in the context of a very, very powerful sense of being part of a group. Not a coercive group, and I think that is the balance that *Limmud* gets right.” (TF)

“Maybe,” suggested another respondent, “it’s just a natural human craving to be a complete part of something bigger that really only occurs very fleetingly in our lives. And *Limmud* is one of those places where it can happen...” (DR). Another respondent went further, arguing that *Limmud* is actually “a unifying communal experience” (FF). Indeed, for this respondent, *Limmud* “is a conference about Jewish community as much as about Jewish education” (FF). Community may even be the prime motivator behind participants’ reasons for attending: “I think participants come to *Limmud* to be part of the community” (KM). For another, *Limmud* is more community enabler: “*Limmud* creates the space and within that space, the community is able to operate” (BF). Yet another described it as follows: “*Limmud*

is really one of the best examples of a temporary community. You know, it pops up and then it goes. But it's not just a group of people, and it's not really a conference. It is a community, because I think everybody shares a purpose, because it's a very narrow purpose of kind of let's get some learning and be enriched by that" (KV).

However, for some respondents, this notion of community was simply an outcome of the experience. One commented: "I think people come to *Limmud* because they want to have a good time and they want to have a good experience, and I think if they have [that] then yes, they are full of community" (KM). However, others spoke of it in far more compelling ways. One respondent went so far as to endow the concept of community with the term "peoplehood," a more powerful and all-encompassing notion, not dissimilar to the idea of family, grounded in a belief that all Jews have a shared history and shared fate, and all have a responsibility for the welfare of one another.¹⁶⁰ In his articulation of *Limmud's* purpose, he argued that "*Limmud* is all about, and what it achieves is, a sense of peoplehood. They [the participants] are coming to conference and having a collection of diverse people where we accept and celebrate difference. We're not unified, but having a sense of unity amongst people is what people walk away from *Limmud* with" (VA). Furthermore, "I don't even think it [peoplehood] is an implicit goal. I think it literally *is* the effects of what has happened and what happens. No one planned it in that way. I think that is just what happens when you get that many people together in a way that is open" (VA).

¹⁶⁰ The term 'peoplehood' has become particularly common in Jewish educational discourse in the past decade, in response to concerns about dissolving ties between Jews, and apprehensions about a growing emphasis on spirituality and religious meaning (see for examples: Cohen and Eisen, 2000; Brown and Galperin, 2009). The term refers to the ethnic or tribal dimension of Jewishness as opposed to the religious one – the idea that the Jews are a people, nation or ethnicity as well as, or over and above, a religious group. The peoplehood concept has deep historical roots (for example, Jewish status is determined by one's parentage rather than acceptance of religious dogma or belief), and the classical Zionist thinkers of the late 19th/early 20th centuries used it, among many other ideas, to formulate their ideas (Herzberg, 1959).

Another respondent expressed the same idea in less grandiose terms: “the community [at *Limmud*] is the community with a small ‘c’, it’s not the official Jewish community” (BF), and ultimately described it as “a conference of the Jewish community letting its hair down” (BF). Nevertheless, the most striking articulations of *Limmud*’s purposes touched on this notion of the collective; irrespective of one’s own particular interests or educational session choices during the course of the conference, the collective was paramount. One respondent concluded that the ultimate purpose of *Limmud* is for individual participants to have “a sense of I belong to a much bigger thing than either where I come from, or my community or my country. I belong to a Jewish people, and this is what we can achieve together” (VA).

The “wow” factor

In order to achieve that sense of collective, *Limmud* seeks to create an extraordinary event within the context of Jewish community activity. Approximately 2,500 people attend per annum, almost one per cent of the UK Jewish population (Graham et. al., 2007), and it is clear that the simple fact of their convening for an intensive five-day experience packed with a wide range of cultural, educational and social activities, creates a powerful impression upon the participant base. As one respondent remarked: “it kind of thrills me to be with two thousand Jews. It thrills me so much that it gives me a certain level of energy which takes me into the rest of my year, my Jewish year and my life year” (TL). Indeed, for many, this impression sits at the heart of the event’s purpose. One respondent described *Limmud*’s purpose as being variously “to wow people Jewishly,” “blowing people’s mind Jewishly,” “a big bang,” and “where you go for inspiration” (FF). Others expressed similar

sentiments: *Limmud's* purpose is to “create a celebration of being Jewish” (SR), “to make people feel good about being Jewish” (KR), to give people “a transformational experience” (DR), and to provide “our Jewish fix” (BE). Another simply remarked: “I can’t imagine God would have wanted it any other way” (NF). “In the end,” concluded one respondent, “it’s not the sessions, it’s not the learning, all these things get you there on the journey, but what is it that gives you that special high or a wow or a ... it’s a fairly fleeting feeling, I think, of unity and peoplehood and that’s I think, certainly for me, that’s a common experience of the *Limmud* high you can get” (DR).

Volunteering

If this collective communal powerful experience is genuinely at the heart of *Limmud's* purpose, of what is it comprised? Several components have already been identified – the numbers, the varied programme, the individual freedom, the non-judgemental culture – but one that was repeatedly discussed was volunteerism. Indeed, one respondent remarked: “You really get a sense of what the connective tissue of community is about... How often, in our regular lives, do people say ‘Oh yes, I haven’t volunteered yet today, I have to go and do that. It is on my ‘to do list’ for today.’ And it’s a really good reminder of shouldn’t that [volunteering] be on my ‘to do list’ every day in some way, shape or form? So that’s part of the connective tissue of creating real community” (TF).

Nevertheless, for others, the primacy of volunteering in *Limmud's* self-understanding is a relatively recent development. One respondent remarked: “I think participants come to

Limmud to be part of the community; I think that is an outcome – that is why people come to *Limmud*. But, for the volunteers I think that has become a new purpose. That has become an attribute which *Limmud* has invested in; they spend money not on... they call it training but it's really about group bonding and about creating a kind of good experience for the volunteers, so it's almost like they are a separate group. So that has become a new purpose which I think is much stronger than it was when I first got involved" (KM).

Irrespective of when it was identified as a purpose rather than a mechanism, the idea that volunteering is central to *Limmud's* purpose was articulated most clearly by one respondent when recounting an experience the leaders of *Limmud International* had whilst negotiating with a group of Jewish community activists from Washington DC who wanted to establish a *Limmud* there. According to her, "they [the Washington DC activists] had no intention of making it volunteer-led. And *Limmud* rejected it, and they said, you can do whatever you like, but you can't use the *Limmud* word. So the volunteering is absolutely key..." (NJ). Others pointed to it too: "if you read the kind of value statements and so on, *Limmud* emphasises volunteerism" (IL); "*Limmud* is about building a community of volunteers" (KM); and "from the organisational point of view, one of the key things is this volunteering thing" (NJ).

However, whilst one-third of all respondents pointed to the development of volunteers as an essential purpose of the conference, one was particularly dismissive of it as a unique feature of *Limmud*. He correctly pointed out that first, "it's not true everything's organised by volunteers", and second, even if it was true, "so what? How do they think the rest of the Jewish community works? Everybody volunteers, and from the perspective of many

communal organisations, that's the whole purpose" (BE). Another suggested that whilst part of the core purpose was undoubtedly about encouraging volunteering, there was considerable dissonance between the volunteers who undoubtedly recognised this, and most of the participants who did not (NJ). However, *Limmud* does have a particular view of volunteering which combines the concept with participation.¹⁶¹ In many voluntary organisations outside *Limmud*, the two roles are separated and bounded – volunteers give to participants and participants benefit from the contribution of volunteers. At *Limmud*, there is a clear attempt to combine them; everyone is invited and encouraged to *both* participate and volunteer.

Learning and education

For a conference whose very name means "learning," the place of learning in *Limmud's* overarching purposes is rather intriguing. Whilst it certainly formed the backdrop of most of the interviews, only one-third of all interviewees discussed it in any detail, and even among them there were differences in how they understood the term, and differences of opinion about its place within the event and its quality.

For some, it is clearly paramount: "The education, or the learning, is the purpose for which we come together. And it's the higher purpose. It's a value in itself. It's something that Jews value doing" (VA). This respondent appears to be using the term "learning" not simply

¹⁶¹ Indeed, the terms "volunticipate", "volunticipation" and "volunticipants" have been created by *Limmud* organisers, and are commonly used to capture this (KM, NJ, SR).

to refer to the formal learning sessions during the conference, but rather as a higher value. For him, convening a group of Jews to experience the value of learning is a core purpose of *Limmud*. Others positioned it alongside, or possibly just beneath, other more fundamental purposes: “Obviously the whole purpose of it is I say celebration. Jewish learning is at the heart. It’s developing oneself through learning in its broadest sense. So a big purpose is about exposing more and more people to positive, exciting, dynamic, transformative Jewish learning” (SR). In this case, the respondent appears to be highlighting the learning *experience* as core, and for him, that experience should be a celebratory one. Learning that is dull, or that fails to inspire, is not core to *Limmud*; rather, there is a particular type of learning (“positive, exciting, dynamic, transformative”) that *Limmud* intends participants to experience. However, the same respondent later remarked: “People aren’t looking for a missionary experience or a magical experience to be transformed. I definitely believe a significant number of the people are going for a positive Jewish learning experience” (SR). This suggests that there is a distinction to be drawn between the hopes and expectations of *Limmud’s* organisers, and the desires and wishes of its participants. Whilst most participants certainly want to be exposed to interesting and engaging learning opportunities, they are not necessarily seeking to be “transformed” by them. Yet much of *Limmud’s* leadership hopes to see some kind of transformation take place via the learning experience during the conference.

Some respondents related to learning at *Limmud* as something for which participants ought to develop a passion. One noted that *Limmud* is “trying to enthuse people about Jewish learning, to turn them on to Jewish learning” (KR); another maintained that *Limmud* is concerned with people “developing a love for Jewish learning, a connection to Jewish

learning, a feeling that being in Jewish time and space and engaging in Jewish stuff is a positive thing” (SR). In these cases, respondents appear to be referring to learning as an activity *Limmud* seeks to position more centrally within Jewish life; a practice that one ought to engage in and come to value or even love.

However, for others, whilst there was no question about the importance of learning, it was neither a central purpose nor necessarily a practice participants ought to come to regard as a value in and of itself. One, hinting at a more functional purpose, argued that *Limmud* “couldn’t exist without the formal learning or the formal experience [but] it is not all learning” (TL). Similarly, another respondent commented: “It’s way more than learning, the learning is kind of what we go for, that gives it reality and content and that attracts people. But it’s way more than that. It’s kind of like what does it mean to be hanging out with two and a half thousand people in a purely Jewish environment in this country? You know... what does that do for our identity in a positive way?” (NF). In this latter case, the learning is expressed as the excuse for convening a large group of Jews; it provides them with a *bona fide* reason for wanting to attend *Limmud*, but the greater purpose is to experience the collective “wow” of Jewish community discussed above.

Some of the interviewees who had been involved in *Limmud* over many years discussed a shift in its purposes over time. One pointed at that: “...when *Limmud* started it was a conference for Jewish educators and their families. It was modelled on the CAJE conference in the United States¹⁶² which was very clearly a Jewish education conference” (IL). Certainly,

¹⁶² CAJE (Coalition for the Advancement of Jewish Education, originally called the “Coalition for Alternatives in Jewish Education”).

whilst *Limmud* always understood the term “Jewish education” in its most broad sense, *Limmud*, in its early years, was specifically intended for Jewish ‘educators’ – i.e. individuals who saw themselves as playing a Jewish educational role, albeit irrespective of whether that role was a professional, voluntary or familial one.¹⁶³ Thus, whilst learning was certainly going on, the primary purpose at the time appears to have been about creating change within the field of Jewish education. Most of *Limmud’s* founders were professional educators: two were qualified teachers and one was a rabbi. As a result, the depth of thinking about educational philosophy, educational practice, teacher training and curriculum development was quite sophisticated. One respondent talked about one of the early goals being “about democratising learning” and, referencing Illich, maintained that was “very clearly an outgrowth of the training you got at the time to be a teacher... the big issues for people training to be teachers were issues around authority, and to some extent class, and all kinds of issues which have disappeared now. So I had a sense about making things more open in some way” (BE). However, he went on to claim about *Limmud* today that: “...part of its purpose is around Jewish education which seems to me is the weakest part” (BE). The implication is that the original intention – to create a sea change in the field of Jewish education – has been rather lost over time, in favour of a shift towards individual and collective learning for its own sake.

¹⁶³ From its genesis, *Limmud’s* definition of education included those forms taking place within day schools, supplementary schools, youth clubs and movements, synagogues and even the home.

Diversity, equality and egalitarianism

In an extraordinary recounting of the early years of *Limmud's* existence, one respondent shared the following experience:

“...the only people who saw it [*Limmud*] as threatening were the London Board [of Jewish Religious Education]¹⁶⁴ who every year, we used to go through this ritual... We had this kind of ritual and we'd talk with them about what *Limmud* was and they'd say, 'Yeah, it's a very good idea, blah blah blah, but are there going to be Reform people there?'¹⁶⁵ We said, 'Well, there are, but they're not going to have labels,' and he said, 'No, well, we can't support it.' And we said, 'Yeah, but lots of people come and ...' 'No, I'm sorry, you know...' That clash had happened early on...”

Contrary to this quotation's rather blasé tone, this “ritual” was anything but a nonchalant exchange of opinions. Indeed, the same respondent maintained that “the London Board of Religious Education tried to kill the first *Limmud*” (BE). One of the clear reasons for *Limmud's* on-going tensions with the Jewish Orthodox establishment in Britain is Orthodoxy's longstanding antipathy towards progressive forms of Judaism and opposition to any blurring of boundaries between Jewish denominational positions. *Limmud* blurred these distinctions from the very beginning. As the same respondent noted about the early years: “We tried to work very carefully about how you get people in a community which was

¹⁶⁴ The London Board of Jewish Religious Education was the authoritative body overseeing Jewish education in the mainstream Orthodox community in the UK at the time of *Limmud's* establishment.

¹⁶⁵ The term “Reform” relates to Reform Jews, understood critically in this context as Jews who do not accept the divine origins of the *Torah*, and who have made liturgical alterations that seek to remove many of the more particularist ideas of Jewish tradition.

very clearly divided, how you get people from across the division,” and added that “*Limmud* was about neutralising the potential for discord by leaving aside labels, and focusing on the process of education” (BE).

These early motivations, driven in part by a rejection of an existing communal norm, appear to serve as the fuel for the organisation’s strong emphasis on diversity today. Indeed, over one-third of respondents talked about this issue in response to questions about *Limmud’s* purpose. Their understanding of diversity is multi-faceted: it was variously discussed in relation to organisational values, programme options, participant backgrounds, and event tone. Yet, for all who raised it, they spoke of it as a central component of the event and an essential part of its fabric. For one respondent, the emphasis on diversity reflects a concern that each individual will be able to find her own way through all the versions of Judaism on offer; without diversity, this would simply not be possible. As he stated: “...the commitment to diversity is an absolute commitment to the individual finding what they need, rather than the organisation providing what we think people ought to have” (DK). Another respondent spoke of it in more ideological terms, noting that *Limmud* “...is a pluralist organisation, in the sense that they invite Jews of all stripes from different denominations or none, and their mission statement is quite clear about the way that those denominations should interact in a co-existent but non-competitive kind of way” (KR). For a further respondent, the idea that boundaries should be crossed is a defining feature of the event. For her, the purpose of *Limmud* is concerned with “providing some sort of educational, cultural, social experience for all Jews in one place at one time, across denominations and beyond, and across the generations... across the, across the, across the...” (NJ). Nevertheless, whilst there is no

question about the importance of diversity in the organisation,¹⁶⁶ it seems to be an area that is primarily practised rather than preached. One interviewee commented: “One of the things that happens at *Limmud*, and everyone knows it and everyone values it, is that there are conversations that happen between the different boxes and there are very few other places where that can happen. I don’t know to what extent that is an explicit purpose of *Limmud*, but it is very much an implicit purpose” (TF).

Yet its importance to the organisation is clear. One respondent commented that *Limmud* is “a place where people have chance encounters and I think that those are possibly the most important thing of all” (TL); another said “we’re in the business of Jewish connection, Jewish interaction, and to make it work we enrich it as much as possible” (BF). In this instance, the educational purpose of *Limmud* is being characterised as internal Jewish dialogue across difference.

Access point and catalyst

The final area that was referred to in relation to *Limmud*’s purposes is its role as an access point into, and catalyst for Jewish life. Neither of these were a particularly common response in this regard – three respondents referred to *Limmud* as an access point, and a further three to it as a catalyst – but both issues came up sufficiently regularly during the other parts of the interviews to merit their inclusion here.

¹⁶⁶ It appears, for example, as one of its core values in its mission statement.

For some respondents, part of *Limmud's* purpose is to provide Jews with a way into Jewish communal life and learning. One noted that *Limmud* exists: "...to give people access to Jewishness in a very broad way and to give them a non-threatening exposure" (AR). Another argued that *Limmud*: "...is a major access point into either the Jewish learning *per se*, or an access point into the mass of what is the Jewish community and exposure to that" (DL). Not dissimilarly, a third said that *Limmud* "is all about... giving people access to learning and getting them involved" (KV). Again, this suggests that *Limmud* is not neutral in its ambitions for individual participants; whilst it is non-prescriptive about how people choose to express their Jewishness, there is clear evidence of a desire to see people engage.

Limmud is also concerned with its role as a catalyst for developing Jewish life. One respondent, noting a difference between *Limmud's* products (the individual sessions and activities) and its by-products (the outcomes of those sessions and activities), argued that: "...the by-products are probably more important than the actual product itself" (FF). For him, one of those by-products is that *Limmud* should function as "a catalyst that then acts for them [participants, volunteers] to engage with their community" (FF). He also referred to *Limmud* as an "innovation hub," a place within which participants might be inspired to come up with new ideas for the Jewish community. Not dissimilarly, another respondent described *Limmud* as "one of the great ways, cheap ways we can actually get lots of Jews together and make things happen" (BF). A third respondent summed up the theme neatly: "it is a kind of recharging, it is an inspiring, it is a 'we'll go to and we'll take away and we'll do other things because we've been inspired.'" For some people it's going back to their own communities and starting similar programmes, for others it's just kind of going back and getting more involved in their synagogue, or whatever it is that they're doing" (NF). Yet

again, in all of these quotations, there is a clear sense that *Limmud* seeks to affect communal change; it is a model through which individual participants should go on to influence change on a larger – or at least different – scale. Evidence suggests *Limmud* has had some success in this regard; 11% of participants have been involved in setting up a new Jewish initiative or organisation.¹⁶⁷

Summary: key elements of Limmud's educational purpose

Determining how respondents articulated the purposes of the event was one of the means identified to explore *Limmud's* educational philosophy. Whilst they were fully able to engage with the question, it is striking that there was a degree of ambivalence in doing so. This ambivalence very much reflects a common discomfort around the idea that purpose should be directed from “on high,” and a strong emphasis on the importance of individual freedom. However, individual freedom is not limitless within *Limmud*; the idea that individual Jews should be progressing forwards on “a Jewish journey” indicates a clear desire on the part of the organisers to see participants engage in Jewish communal life. Yet this desire is very deliberately understated; it is possible to detect a distinct uneasiness around anything coercive, and a strong preferential belief that the desire for Jewish engagement should be driven by the individual’s search for meaning, inspiration and community. In navigating the relationship between individual and community, *Limmud* appears to emphasise the individual’s right to choose, whilst simultaneously stressing the importance of those choices being made within the context of a powerful communal

¹⁶⁷ See: Cohen and Kopelowitz (2011), p.27.

experience. Indeed, the power of the experience is essential – the use of dramatic language by several respondents (“wow,” “thrill,” “inspiration,” “blowing people’s minds,” “transformational,” etc.) clearly demonstrates that. Nevertheless, there is no consensus on how this relationship between individual and collective ought to be balanced: some lean towards the individual, others towards the collective, and some regard the interplay itself as the essential feature. This lack of clarity may also be characterised as part of *Limmud’s* purpose – it offers an opportunity within which both the individual and the collective may experience, examine and come to understand the dynamic that exists between them.

Whilst unanimously acknowledged as a core *Limmud* activity, volunteering is not always regarded as part of its purpose. Some choose to elevate it in this fashion, others do not; one respondent’s articulation of it as the “connective tissue” of community may ultimately best capture its place – volunteering is *Limmud’s* ideal mechanism through which the individual contributes to the community, and through which the community serves the individual. Intriguingly, learning may well occupy a similar place within the conference: whilst some argue that *Limmud* exists to develop in the individual a passion for Jewish learning, others see it as the means by which individual transformation may occur, and others go so far as to relegate it simply to the excuse for which people come together. Ironically, for an organisation whose very name means “learning,” it is in no way regarded as the commonly agreed purpose of the event. Similarly, diversity: some, using the ideological term “pluralism,” believe that *Limmud* exists to work towards a pluralist Jewish community; others see it as a necessary condition to facilitate the individual’s journey; still others see it as a vital means to bridge intra-Jewish difference and encourage dialogue across existing

boundaries, not in order to blur or dissolve those boundaries, but rather to openly explore the terrain that exists on either side.

In many respects, the fact that all of these views can co-exist within *Limmud* reflects a core part of its purpose. *Limmud* seeks to give participants access to multiple perspectives on Judaism and empowers them, in turn, to develop their own. In seeking to make this experience dynamic and social, it creates the possibility for innovation and creativity, both within itself and within the wider Jewish community.

CONTENT

Content undefined

If a degree of ambivalence was evident in interviewees' responses to the questions about purpose, it was even more marked in how most understood content. Indeed, one respondent remarked that "purpose is a lot more tangible in *Limmud* than content" (SR). Presented with the question "What are participants expected to learn at *Limmud*," initial responses included "Anything" (KH); "something" (FF); "Explicitly, nothing. Absolutely nothing" (BF); "whatever they like" (KM); "whatever it is they want to learn" (TF); and "absolutely no idea" (NJ). Some really struggled with the question: "I don't how I would articulate what they are expected to learn... I find it really hard to answer what they are expected to learn" (DL). Others rejected it outright: "That's not a question I think is a *Limmud* question," and continued "Haven't got a clue. I refuse to know" (DK).

The reason for the reluctance to answer the question in a more concrete fashion relates back to the theme of individual freedom discussed above. As one noted: "the power must lie with the learner in *Limmud*, and therefore any attempt on my part to say they should know this or they should do that or something, is a diminution of that power" (DK). Others expressed a similar sentiment: "It's left very much up to the individual" (AR); and "I think that expectation [to learn x or y] is removed, because I think you have to work out your own path" (NJ).

Thus, content is not a fixed notion at *Limmud*. Certainly, there is no formal curriculum: “There isn’t a set of skills, knowledge and values, or any one of those things that we are hoping that every participant dips into. There isn’t a bunch of topics that we hope everybody grapples with... The idea of curriculum in any sense that I think I’m used to, is kind of out the window...” (SR). Another respondent commented “There is just not a curriculum in the way that we use the word curriculum, and there is a resistance to there being a curriculum so it is just not the right word” (TF).

However, a more subtle and non-explicit desire to engage with *something* was discernible: “...we want people to grapple – I can only say it in a really almost inarticulate, sort of a non-intellectualised way – we want people to be learning and engaging in ‘Jewish stuff.’” The same respondent also hinted, albeit rather cautiously, at a very loose content agenda: “I want people to engage with whatever it is that somehow is going to be either the catalyst for them to want to explore more Jewish stuff” (SR), although, as another remarked: “You can’t make anybody do anything, I think that’s the point” (KM).

The absence of a coherent structured curriculum could be regarded as a weakness; certainly it reduces the possibility of in-depth learning. However, the existence of learning ‘tracks’, for example on ‘history and politics’, ‘arts and culture’, ‘*Torah* and spirituality’ and ‘Israel’ lends coherence to an otherwise disjointed programme. In addition, the freedom presenters have to choose what they wish to teach tends to lead to a certain degree of educational dynamism within the formal learning parts of the experience. As one respondent remarked: “You can’t take your credentials into the classroom. All you can do is

take your passion into the classroom. And that just changes everything” (KV).¹⁶⁸ By building a programme wherein all presenters are free to teach whatever they wish (as long as it fits into the broadly drawn parameters set by the *Limmud* programming team), teachers tend to be both passionate and knowledgeable about their subjects. Nevertheless, due to *Limmud’s* belief that “everyone can be a teacher and everyone should be a student” (see section 5.3 below), the quality of educational sessions can vary tremendously and there is no real system of quality assurance – sessions are selected by participants principally on the basis of pre-existing knowledge of the presenter’s credentials or reputation, interest in the subject matter, recommendations from other participants or analysis of the presenter’s biography in the programme book.

Community as content

It is clear that *Limmud’s* notion of content is very different from a formal educational institution’s understanding of the term, where one studies a particular content-based curriculum in order to become qualified to later perform a set of tasks (Dewey, 1938). Indeed, one respondent went so far as to suggest that *Limmud* “is not about session content” (TL). If he is right, what is it about? What is *Limmud’s* conception of content? Expressed differently, what *shared learning* is taking place at *Limmud*, without which the event would be deemed a failure?

¹⁶⁸ In the interests of minimising the gap between participants and educators, no one at *Limmud* has their academic, rabbinic, honorary or other title on their name tags (see Context, pp.182-198).

The overarching response, which came from most of the respondents albeit expressed in different ways, was that community – and one’s place and role within it – is the core educational proposition that *Limmud* seeks to teach. Different interviewees approached the theme in different ways: some respondents focused on the importance of encountering Jews who are different from oneself; others emphasised the centrality of self-learning in a communal context; still others spoke of the fundamental importance of experiencing community vitality, breadth and depth. However, the common thread was that *Limmud* offers participants an opportunity to experience a version of Jewish community that seeks to transform their understanding of what Jewish community is and ought to be. It is worth examining respondents’ comments in greater depth on this theme because it will become an increasingly central focus of the thesis as my argument develops and evolves.

The emphasis on encountering ‘other types of Jews’ is an idea that has been a central part of *Limmud* since its genesis. One respondent commented that there are “some common learning experiences that many people have and that’s not normally to do with the content of sessions. But it would be more to do with – you know ‘those are the Jews with whom I don’t agree, they are much more sincere than I thought they were,’ that kind of thing, or ‘actually you know we’ve got some pretty good people in this community,’ or ‘I never realised that, you know, a rabbi could say that’ and those kinds of things I think are quite common experiences and they are all about broadening possibilities” (DK). Similarly, another respondent suggested: “it’s an explicit aim to bring people together, but not to bring them together to say ‘Yes, you’re right. It’s okay to be that kind of Jew.’ We say ‘We’re not interested in that conversation.’ We’re saying, ‘You’re a Jew, I’m a Jew. Let’s ‘Jew’ together” (SR). A third respondent argued: “I think there’s a shared learning that is

about Judaism and Jewish social networks and learning networks that transcend denominational bickering and barriers and so on. There's definitely learning around that" (IL). Thus, in this way, certain preconceptions about the Jewish community are challenged through the experience of participating in the *Limmud* community; these are not messages that comprise the formal content of a curriculum, but are rather part of the fabric of the experience.

Intriguingly, one respondent even suggested that formalised content may, at times, be compromised to uphold this "broadening" of community. She claimed that an emphasis on ensuring cross-communal involvement when developing the conference programme is "sometimes to the detriment of the content. [For example] when I've edited the *chavruta* books, the first thing I look at is the gender balance, the denominational balance, the age balance, and I've rejected really good people, and I've landed myself with *nudniks* in order to make sure I've got that damn box filled" (NJ).¹⁶⁹ Another, approaching the same issue from a different angle, suggested that the learning gained from the content of the sessions is secondary to the learning that occurs through the experience of community: "I'm just trying to think after thirteen years and probably two hundred sessions, I'm trying to think what I've actually learned in a session... I've learned community actually through *Limmud*, that before I would go to Jewish events, I wouldn't know anyone and now actually at *Limmud*, I've been going to so many events out of the two and a half thousand people there, I probably know four or five hundred people to speak to by name. The name badges help,

¹⁶⁹ The "*chavruta*" book contains traditional and modern texts, largely from Jewish sources, on a common theme. Participants examine and discuss the texts each day "in *chavruta*" – i.e. in pairs – learning from one another's interpretation. "*Nudnik*" is a derogatory term for someone who is annoying or irritating.

but you realise actually how many people you do know. So that's probably what I've learned" (LR).

Again, some respondents chose to endow this notion of community with the loftier concept of 'peoplehood': "I suspect really they are learning something about Jewish peoplehood. So I think the real learning happens when you're standing in a corridor looking around like, 'Oh my God, all these people. I don't know them, where have they come from?' 'I didn't know there were Jewish people in the world I didn't know.' That kind of thing" (DR); and "I think the peoplehood question is the thing that is learned, the actual experience of feeling that we can achieve something bigger by cooperating together and laying down the fight that happens. That kind of 'I'm in my community and you're in yours' attitude makes people learn. The thing that I've learned is that people can achieve something if they choose to do that together" (VA). Others articulated the same concept in a more down-to-earth manner: "learning to get on with fellow Jews and to focus on what unites us as Jews and not focus on what divides us. There's a lot of that that goes on there. That's not 'let's find the weakest link...'" (SR).

Given the degree of emphasis on collectivity, togetherness and unity, it is striking to note that no respondent spoke of a deliberate or explicit attempt to coerce people into engaging across difference. Efforts to deliberately 'stage' cross-communalism appear to be in short supply, and to the extent they exist, the cross-communal element is almost always secondary to something else. Perhaps the best example is the *chavruta* project; as one respondent remarked: "*Chavruta* is a nice example of it because you literally can see it in front of you. You can see a table of sixteen people in little pairs of all types and that goes

across not just the obvious one which is the religious or... denominational split, but also ages, which is a key thing which I love seeing at *Limmud*" (SR). For most participants, the *chavruta* programme at *Limmud* is primarily seen as an opportunity to study a particular set of traditional and contemporary Jewish texts on a set theme, but the manner in which it is done ensures that the encounter and dialogue with others forms a core part of the experience.¹⁷⁰ Thus the engagement across difference, which is rarely conveyed as the central part of the endeavour, implicitly becomes so through the nature of the experience itself.

Nevertheless, experiencing community can be quite alienating. Indeed, in many communal experiences, the individual's needs and interests are overwhelmed by the collective. *Limmud*, it appears, is not immune to this. One respondent noted: "I think it is saying communities are a wonderful and marvellous thing and it means throwing a lot of people together and letting them rub against one another and see what happens... A lot of people love that and find it really exciting, but there are plenty of people who actually don't like it at all" (AR). However, another suggested that the self-learning that takes place in such a context is paramount: "Honestly, I think they [participants] are expected to learn something about themselves, because the types of sessions that *Limmud* provides anyway are not dogmatic, you are not going to come out with facts necessarily, but you are going to come out with ideas and discussions and debates. So, I think the participants are expected to come out learning how to have challenged themselves and to have learnt something about the Jewish community in the UK" (KH). Thus, whether intentional or not, part of the

¹⁷⁰ *Chavruta* sessions at *Limmud* involve encouraging individuals to study in pairs around a table of up to sixteen people, prior to a round-table conversation involving all.

experience of *Limmud* involves finding oneself within community, and how one responds to that is inevitably part of the self-learning that takes place.

However, *Limmud's* intention is that the encounter with its model of community is a positive one that challenges any existing negative preconceptions. Indeed, one respondent suggested that part of the content of *Limmud* involves "unlearning": "[there are a] lot of people who are, I would say, scarred by their Jewish education... their Jewish experiences; they went to Jewish schools, they went on [Israel] tour,¹⁷¹ they went to *cheder*;¹⁷² they haven't done anything for twenty years, you know, they have very preconceived opinions of what Judaism, or Jewishness, Anglo-Jewry is. You come to *Limmud* you unlearn a lot of those things... the experience is very much an unlearning about what Judaism is, and relearning that it's something different without even the content being relevant" (FF). This critique of British Jewish community life – and *Limmud's* response to it – was evident in other respondents' comments: "...we are part of a disempowered Jewish community. We are part of a Jewish community of ignorance. And in this process we need to be made, helped to think, to learn, to have our eyes opened... ...the richness of Judaism, understand what's out there" (BF); and at *Limmud* "you see a Jewish universe which is different, very often, from the Jewish universe that you experienced as a child or that you experienced in most of the rest of your Jewish life" (TL).

¹⁷¹ An Israel tour refers to an organised group programme in Israel, most commonly run by a Jewish youth movement. Trips to Israel of this type have become a rite of passage for many in the British Jewish community, and usually take place during the summer after pupils complete their GCSE examinations.

¹⁷² Literally "room". A *cheder* is a Jewish supplementary school, typically run under the auspices of a synagogue.

Content as experience

The notion that the content of *Limmud* is embodied in the experience itself was discussed explicitly by three respondents. One suggested that “when it comes to content, it’s nearly secondary to the totality of the experience” (KV); another compared it to a *seder*, the ritual meal Jews traditionally participate in during the festival of Passover.¹⁷³ His core argument is that *Limmud* constitutes a Jewish immersion experience similar to a Passover *seder* – it is a multi-sensory encounter with Jews and Judaism which, for a brief period, serves as an all-encompassing mechanism to engage with Jewish life, history, ritual and community.

Yet another respondent compared it to a restaurant: “You don’t go to a restaurant for the food, even though, of course, that is what you do in a restaurant. If you were going for the food, you would stay at home just to eat. People go to restaurants usually because they want to be with other people for an experience, for all sorts of things. But if they didn’t serve any food there, they wouldn’t go. And that’s what the education – that’s what the learning part, or certainly the more formal aspects of learning is” (VA). His suggestion is that *Limmud* is fundamentally about having an experience of Jewish community where the

¹⁷³ The Passover holiday (“*Pesach*” in Hebrew) celebrates the biblical exodus from Egypt. The “*seder*” (lit. “order”) takes place on the first (and often second) night of Passover, and involves a multi-sensory retelling of the biblical story around the dinner table, during which participants eat symbolic foods representing key elements of it. The respondent referred to in the text said: “I’ve come to define it as is a contemporary take on the *seder* experience... “...you meet people you’re familiar with again who you haven’t seen since last year or there might be other people you meet like family who you do meet up with and get together...”; “you’re in a Jewish framework – you’ll do interesting stuff during the day and you’ll learn interesting stuff and you’ll pick up interesting stuff...”; “it gives you all the good feelings about a *seder* in that you feel, in the nicest possible way I’m trying to say this, kind of good about yourself. I’m engaging in something which is a good thing to do, it’s reconnecting me with my roots in some kind of way...”; it has a ‘Gosh, if our neighbours only knew what we were doing as we eat our *matzah* [unleavened bread, traditionally eaten during the Passover festival]. Gosh, wouldn’t they think we were funny that we’re doing this, that we changed our plates...’ element about it [many observant Jews change their crockery during the Passover festival]; “*Seder* is about the point at which you disconnect from the rest of the world and reaffirm your sense of identity as Jews in a nice family-friendly way...”; “it’s a kind of a retreat from consumerism in an interesting way which it always was and that seems to have got bigger and people want that for their families...”; and it is “our Jewish fix” (BE).

formalised opportunities for learning serve as a critical, but not necessarily core, part of it. Of course, his comparison could be challenged – a case could certainly be made that, in certain instances at least, the food a restaurant serves is absolutely core, particularly at top restaurants known for their exceptional cuisine. However, one respondent suggested that *Limmud* does not sit in that category: “I don’t think its education in that sense is very good... I think *Limmud* is great Jewish experience, terrible Jewish education”; “...It creates a very real sense of community. People engage in Jewish learning. You might say that’s very surface living but it may not matter. I think it does that well” (BE). In essence, the suggestion is that *Limmud* does not offer ‘gourmet’ Jewish education; indeed, it would probably be more accurate to suggest it offers fast food: as one respondent claimed “any form of in-depth learning for me is very difficult”, and as another said “once you get to a certain level [of knowledge]... then you might not be stretched.” However, the experience within which this sustenance is offered is particularly powerful, and it is this element of *Limmud* that leaves the critical and lasting impression over and above the content of any particular formal session.

Navigating community

Several respondents suggested that a central component of the *Limmud* learning experience involves making choices. One of the respondents who was involved in *Limmud* in its earliest days suggested that the concept of educational choice was an important and innovative element of the endeavour from the beginning: “There were four sessions, four choices at any stage which was considered quite unusual because in most conferences you went to

there was one thing to do. So there were four things and you could choose which you want to go to" (BE). This has remained a core part of the experience: "I think the powerful learning that goes on at *Limmud* is about making choices" (TF); and "Lots of times during the day and during the week there's an activity that is repeated, and that is having to make a choice. That's one thing as a learner that I'm doing. I am having to [make a choice]..." (SR). In this way, learning is in no way linear; the individual is constantly required to make a choice about what she is going to learn next, and her learning programme, if it was to be examined at the end of the event, would almost certainly be unique.

Two respondents used the term 'navigation' to capture this phenomenon. As one commented, *Limmud* "wants you to navigate this big community, and it really fervently believes that there's something for everyone... There's definitely a sense of this being a multi-faceted thing where everybody can find something that's good for them and it's good for people to also sometimes be exposed to stuff that they wouldn't naturally want to encounter... That's part of the message and the skills that are being taught, as it were, are to be confident in your ability to navigate a big community, to experience what it has to offer, to find things that suit you, and to contribute towards making it as well" (AR). The suggestion is that the experiential necessity of navigating community is part of the learning about community. Certainly, the fact that participants need to constantly chart and re-chart their way through the programme is a core part of the experience; indeed, much of the discourse throughout the event involves discussion with others about the activity one has just completed or is about to attend. This *Limmud* 'chatter' creates an environment in which the range of choices on offer is constantly being assessed and debated, and the

choices participants make allow them to continually investigate and express different elements of their Jewish identities.

Several respondents suggested that, in the course of navigating the community, *Limmud* deliberately attempts to push participants to experience versions of Judaism they may not have encountered before. “I think it seeks to push the boundaries of what kind of people we should be listening to. And in that sense, it looks for the excitement of the more controversial people, not for the sake of publicity” (VA); “I think an expectation is that people engage with something they haven’t engaged with before; that they kind of grab opportunities that they might not previously have had” (DL); and there is something “probably lurking unspoken which is that exposure to new stuff is good for you and not to be feared... It believes that you shouldn’t be scared of encountering difference and that that can change you, but that’s okay” (AR). It also appears to engage participants in the most pressing Jewish issues of the day: “*Limmud* certainly identifies the kind of hot topics in Jewish life and education and tries to make sure that they pay attention to them” (IL). Thus, there is some indication that the navigation process includes several subtle signposts pointing participants in the direction of the new and contemporary, albeit without enforcing any movement in these directions at any stage. This too might be regarded as part of the ‘content’ of *Limmud*: participants learn about how to navigate their own path through Jewish community and learning, and, in this way, have to actively engage in *Limmud*. Irrespective of whether the individual sessions are passive experiences in which nothing is required of the learner, the very act of determining how to spend the day involves active participation in the event.

Empowerment and change

For several respondents, this notion of active participation in community and learning was regarded as pivotal to the *Limmud* experience. In response to the question about what is *actually* being learned, one respondent commented: “informed, empowered Judaism... You have a responsibility to make choices about who you are going to be as a Jew and you cannot defer that to some authority figure to make your choices for you” (TF). The inference is that the active decision-making that takes place on a continual basis throughout the event has a deeper purpose to it: it is meant to empower the individual to take responsibility for, and control of their Jewishness. Continually practising decision-making as the event unfolds – what to learn, from whom to learn, in what form to learn – has the effect of teaching participants to take ownership of their Judaism. For a religion that, in its most traditional forms requires a high degree of deference to rabbinic authority, this is a radical proposition.

The result of this phenomenon was outlined by another respondent. She maintained “I think the *Limmud* people come home just feeling strong and ‘I can do anything. We can do anything’”, and went on to argue that *Limmud* “is about people being the people they can be, and being more than they think they can be. You know, challenging people from thinking small to thinking big, and you know, we can do anything if we put our minds to it.” Furthermore, she suggested: “I think it’s about taking it home... I think... the idea that if you go home from *Limmud* unchanged, in a sense it’s failed a bit. And if that changedness [sic] doesn’t result in some action happening differently, not just internal change but some external change as well, however small, that would also be a bit of a failure I think. It does

need to lead to some kind of action, whether it's about transforming the Jewish community or the world. I don't think anyone is fussed really. I think it's just about change." Another similarly remarked: I think *Limmud* is unspokenly very convinced with the power of the educational process. That is, give people the opportunity to learn in as non-judgmental, open and facilitating way as possible, and you have no idea what glorious things will emerge, and I would say that's kind of largely the *Limmud* position" (DK).

Summary: key elements of Limmud's educational content

Continuing to explore elements of *Limmud's* educational philosophy, respondents were strikingly reluctant, or, in some instances, unable, to articulate a clear and coherent sense of *Limmud's* conception of content. Whilst each *Limmud* conference follows a common content formula and has certain established educational 'tracks' and activities, it has no established formal curriculum. There is no set content within the formal part of the programme – presenters are entirely free to determine what and how they wish to teach. It could be argued that this is part of what makes the programmatic content compelling; by giving presenters freedom in this respect, they tend to teach their passion, which often results in dynamic and enthusiastic presentations. Equally, this can result in poor education; as everyone and anyone is equally free to teach, the quality of what is on offer varies tremendously, and participants' capacity to assess the credibility of any particular presenter is limited by the absence of a common basis upon which to make such an assessment.

However, much of the discussion about educational content focused on content as *experience* rather than curriculum. That is to say, the most important educational ideas being taught at *Limmud*, as reported by most of the respondents, are those that exist within the fabric of the event itself rather than within the formal classroom. These ideas can be clustered together into the overarching notion of 'community': *Limmud* is primarily concerned about teaching participants about a particular version of community, sometimes referred to as 'peoplehood', and it does this by enacting it throughout the course of the event. Its notion of community is one that values Jewish diversity; there is no sense that any one particular expression, understanding or teacher of Judaism is more correct or authentic than another. It is also a community within which the individual is free to take responsibility for the content, form, intensity, depth and breadth of his learning, and the predominant hope is that the participant takes advantage of what is on offer and is shaped and inspired in some way by it. Indeed, learning how to navigate a pathway through the formal programme is an important component of the learning that takes place. In the same way as one continually practises freely choosing what and how to learn during the event itself, the macro-message is that freely choosing what and how to learn about Judaism should be a continual activity, and the individual has both the right and the responsibility to navigate their own pathway through that. This right is not a legal one, and this responsibility is in no way coerced; instead *Limmud* attempts to work on a model of praxis, immersion and inspiration. Through a process of frequent and repeated decision-making about one's learning within an all-encompassing vibrant and dynamic communal experience, respondents argued that participants are likely to reach these conclusions on their own. *Limmud's* notion of 'community' is further one that seeks to convey the strength and richness of Jewish content; in direct contrast and response to the way in which Jewish

learning is often stereotypically understood, *Limmud* works to build an episodic micro-community within which Jewish learning is a dynamic, vibrant and compelling activity. The overarching outcome, as understood by the respondents, is that *Limmud* participants experience an opportunity to journey freely within a Jewish community, and in so doing, they learn a new conception of community that has the potential to positively transform their understanding of what it means to be Jewish. Boiled down to its fundamentals, this is the 'content' of *Limmud*.

PROCESS

Learner portraits

Both the individualised and collective natures of the *Limmud* experience have been established above. To develop a deeper understanding of the event, I was interested to understand the educational processes participants undergo. This section aims to deconstruct participants' behaviour to gain some further insights into the internal dynamics of *Limmud*.

In the first instance, respondents were quick to draw distinctions between different learners at the event: "...you can't say that there is a typical participant because everybody is different" (IL); "I reject the notion that there is an average participant" (TF); and "there is diversity about how people sample *Limmud*" (TL). This reflects the individualised culture that has been discussed in the previous sections; the idea that individuals are free to determine how to participate, and to build their learning experience on their own terms. Nevertheless, several respondents attempted to categorise the learners, suggesting, for example "I think there must be five or six *Limmuds* happening" (TF), and typically casted one type against another. Distinctions were drawn, for example, between "newcomers" and "old hands" ("newcomers are just so startled, blown away and confused... when they come into this place [they] see all these different people, all doing it differently"; "for the old-hand, there's the re-establishment of former relationships... there's the re-exploration of things you don't get a lot of chance in your own community to do..." (DK)); by age: "you get

the... under 30s who you don't see until lunchtime because they've been in the bar all night" (IL); and by strength of social network: "if they know people there or they have come on their own" (KM). Similar distinctions were also noted between Jews from different size communities: "I think for people from small communities to encounter the sort of vibrancy it gives us, I think that's important. But from people from large communities, it's important to discover the diversity of it" (DK). Several respondents further pointed out that those volunteering to run the event have a very different experience from those who come as participants. Arguably, from an educational point of view, the most intriguing division offered was between "experiencers" and "learners": "The learners are there to learn; they sit there with their [programme] book, normally work out who they want to hear, and then they tick the sessions, and they start at 8, finish at 8, they're knackered, they've gone to ten sessions during the day, grabbed a sandwich for lunch, and that's it; they'll get an early night so they have a fresh day's learning the next day... Then you have the 'experiencers' who are much more about the social time, social spaces. They too will select sessions; often they're less educated in how to select sessions – so they will go for title as opposed to content or presenter; they may select sessions because they're nearest where they're going to be. They will take time for dinner, time for lunch, because social time is important for them. They will go to the coffee shop, they will go to the bar, they will go to concerts; there's will be a very different type of *Limmud* experience, but... it's about how you soak up the maximum amount of atmosphere with a smattering of learning. So I would say on average an 'experiencer' might go to two or three sessions a day, a learner might go to eight sessions in a day, and then you have some spectrum in the middle" (FF). This portrayal is intriguing insofar as it may depict "experiencing" and "learning" as two positions along a continuum at

Limmud, and indicate that both “informal” and more “formal” styles of learning are possibilities available in equal measure at the event.

The discussion with respondents about learning processes offered another opportunity to examine the place of the ‘ought’ at *Limmud*: if participants are free to engage in the programme in multiple ways with varying degrees of intensity, does the organisation hold any type of preference in terms of desired behaviour?

Predictably, some respondents struggled with the question: “When you say ‘How do you think *Limmud* thinks you should behave?’ it doesn’t make any sense. Like, because it... you know..., but what is *Limmud*, right?” (KV). Similarly, several argued that the organisation holds no official position: “I think the *Limmud* view is that it’s really entirely up to them what they do. Everyone is a grown up” (DR); and “Remarkably, I don’t think it does. I honestly don’t think it does and I don’t think it’s ever been a subject of any meeting that I’ve attended and I’ve been to a lot of them” (NF). Nevertheless, again, there were some indications of the organisation being rather less neutral than it first appears to be: “I haven’t heard judgmental language on it [non-/minimal participation in the formal programme], like ‘Who do they think they are?’ It’s more ‘Oh, they just missed out. They have really missed out on something wonderful and what a shame’” (TF). On further examination, two key principles of preferred participant behaviour could be discerned: engage and connect.

Engage and connect

Several respondents indicated that participants should engage in the programme, although the extent to which this was considered desirable varied: “I think the only expectation is that you will do stuff” (NJ); “there is a sense that they should be engaging in the programme. Maybe not going to a study sessions, to go to every slot, but going to some things” (KM); “the idea is that it would be good to apply yourself wholeheartedly to the stuff that you’re doing at *Limmud* whilst you are at *Limmud*” (AR). In essence, *Limmud* creates a vast array of opportunities for individuals to engage in their own learning, and it hopes that participants will take full advantage of those opportunities. However, as has been seen already, it is rather careful not to state this explicitly – there is no sense that the organisation is coercing participants to participate in the formal learning sessions. The model is rather based on inspiration and variety – if the quality of the programme is sufficiently high and the range of opportunities sufficiently broad, every participant should be able to find something of interest.

Second, other respondents focused on the importance of developing social connections: “There is this sort of hope that people will be sociable and make new friends and have those informal exchanges as well as the formal ones inside the sessions but actually outside as well, and engage socially with each other and not just be isolated selves going around” (KM); “...when the learners are having the experience we want them to have, they are having as many active conversations with other participants and with presenters. That forms as much of the learning, if not more, as the sessions” (SR); and “a good *Limmud* is one where you have lots of, whatever this means, exchanges, so there is this idea that the real

learning goes on outside the sessions, that you meet interesting people, and sometimes I think you can get into amazing life-changing conversations” (NJ). Again, the desire for participants to connect with one another is in no way forced or coerced; it is rather encouraged by creating an environment (see section on ‘Context’ on p.182) within which a natural and implicit desire for informal discourse and debate exists.

Making informed, empowered choices

If the hope and intention is for participants to engage and connect, is that what they are actually doing? The nature of the experience is such that it would be difficult to go through it and not engage in some Judaic context and socially connect in some way with other participants. However, as discussed in the section above on ‘Content’, arguably the most intriguing insight about learner behaviour during *Limmud* relates to the act of making choices.

One respondent commented: “Lots of times during the day and during the week there’s an activity that is repeated and that is having to make a choice. That’s one thing as a learner that I’m doing. I am having to [make a choice]... It’s an informed choice, but how informed it is, is actually partly down to me. So *Limmud* is providing me with a basic bit of information, a blurb of the session – what time it is, what it’s up against, a brief blurb on the presenter. But actually it’s not a full biography of the person, it’s a few lines. So, first of all, my very first choice is do I want to find out more before I make the choice? There are formal and informal ways. The formal way I go to the help desk... and I can ask. The

informal way and for people that get more involved is “Do you know so and so...?” – having conversations with other people.” Furthermore: “There’s even the choices of... if I’m going to go to the dining room and sit and take an hour break and eat a hot lunch sitting down, or if I’m going to be grabbing early in the morning a bunch of sandwiches and stuffing them in my bag and sitting and blasting through session after session. I think that sounds trivial to people, but that decision – I like seeing the angst on people’s faces in that decision and in that choice because that says to me, ‘Who am I going to be today? Am I going to be the person in my normal life, 9 to 5, stop for lunch?’ Or, if I’m a school student or a university student, ‘Am I going to block my day like that, an hour, a break, an hour, a break?’ Or am I going to say ‘No I need to just immerse myself in this *mikve* of learning and I’m going to have to leave aside my normal [self]?’” (SR).¹⁷⁴

This suggests that the decisions being made go far beyond the relatively simple ones about session choice. Certainly, decisions of that type are being made – participants need to determine the content about which they are interested and select their preferred speaker from the list available at any given moment. However, participants are further determining the form of learning in which they wish to engage – lecture, discussion, active, passive, theoretical, practical, etc. – as well as the intensity of their learning experience – continual from morning to night, or occasional between morning and night. Together, these decisions require the participant to say something about themselves – distinctions may be drawn between the individual who continually opts for highly intellectualised opportunities on a particular theme or issue, and the individual who engages in practical sessions focused, for example, on music, art or poetry. Thus, the very act of decision-making suggests to both

¹⁷⁴ A *mikve* is a bath used for the purposes of Jewish ritual immersion.

oneself and others who the participant is – her knowledge, her interests, and what type of person, and Jew, she is.

The tools at one's disposal to help make such decisions are the programme handbook, which contains basic details about each session and presenter, and the community, any member of which can theoretically be tapped at any point for an opinion or insight. Both of these sources, whilst largely treated as practical tools in the decision-making process, actually serve to support the two desirable 'oughts' outlined above: working one's way through the dense and varied programme handbook it is difficult not to find something compelling which, in turn, encourages one to engage; turning to others for advice, even if simply the individual the participant happens to be sitting next to at any given moment, fuels social interaction.

Several respondents indicated that these processes are not always easy. One, in particular, noted: "you constantly have to be adjusting that because each time you think you've made a decision as to what you're going to do next, you've still got to make decisions about what comes after that and what comes after that. So the main experience, I think, of *Limmud*, actually, was that constant decision-making about what to go to next. And you barely get a chance, really, to process this stuff that you've been to because you want to make sure you don't miss the next thing. Most people go into a bit of a tailspin, I think, at some level from all of that deciding upon deciding." Another maintained that "Socially, it's very overwhelming, and that kind of frenetic buzz can be, I think, both enlivening and terrifying. I think you've got to be very confident to find your way around" (NJ). A third pointed to the psychological challenge of this experience: "There's some struggle, it's hard. It's lonely...

And then hopefully the journey is that that all gets transformed at some point. And I don't know that you can have a really good *Limmud* without the tears at some point. If you go in and it's all great from the very beginning and all is happy and wonderful, it's kind of nice but I'm not sure you have the same profound experience as if at some point it's awful and it's... you want to go home and at some point it changes" (DR).

The teacher-learner union

The distinction between teacher and student is deliberately blurred at *Limmud*; one of the organisation's core principles is that "everyone can be a teacher and everyone should be a student."¹⁷⁵ Indeed, one respondent went further still: "there's no separation – learner is teacher, teacher is learner" (SR). Certainly, in *Limmud*'s early years, the two roles merged into one; as one respondent remarked: "when *Limmud* started, the learner and teachers truly were indistinguishable, and there were no stars" (IL). However, she argued that the reality has changed – "As *Limmud* has invited more people from overseas and as *Limmud* has got bigger... people do see particularly the overseas people as stars, and will go to their sessions almost regardless of what they're teaching, but because of who they are" (IL). Indeed, another interviewee maintained that this blurring of distinction is "patently untrue", "patronising" and "twee", adding "some people are much more qualified than others to be giving sessions" (VA). Nevertheless, the principle remains. Indeed, it is fundamental: as one respondent remarked about *Limmud* today "it is very, very explicit... everyone insists that everyone is a teacher and everyone is a student" (TF). Considerable effort is made to create

¹⁷⁵ See: www.limmud.org/home/mission. Accessed on 3 November 2011.

parity: "There's a dozen things that are done to minimise the distance. The non-use of titles. The same coloured badge and type of badge. No green room, no VIP room, no faculty lounge, no separate dormitories. You're just as likely to bump into the person in the shower block as over coffee as sitting in a 500-seat lecture room realising that person is a Nobel Prize winner. The fact that they're not introduced. It's a small thing that people don't necessarily realise, but I don't go to any conferences ever where some major teacher is not introduced by someone and given this glowing endorsement..." (SR). Another added: "...for a lot of people I think the power is what happens in the dining hall, what happens in the pub at night. That is where I think all the barriers break down. People really get to see people whose books they have read, people who have been their role models, just sitting and having a beer and chatting. The informality of it is very, very powerful" (TF). Similarly, "...everyone is in very casual clothes, everyone's queuing up together, everyone's cold, the low comfort level of *Limmud* I think provides a kind of blitz mentality, where people are all in it together and will talk about the crap soap, you know, in the rooms, when everything is actually quite nice" (NJ).

The reasoning behind this appears to be partly about the principles of equality and egalitarianism (there should be no distinction between people as everyone has something to contribute), and partly about the nature of learning itself. One respondent argued that its importance was about accessibility: "One of the big pluses, I think, is that firstly the person is accessible to you, in those precious few minutes on the way in and on the way out" (NJ). Another noted similarly: "I think familiarity with the educators, realising that things aren't really that daunting... talking to people maybe who have been involved in the [Middle East] peace process, hearing their perspectives actually gives you quite a lot of

confidence” (LR). A further respondent maintained that “that absolutely makes it the most interesting place to be because you just don’t know who you’re going to end up having a conversation with in a queue or over a coffee or over a beer. It really is that kind of sense of there’s special people all around us, they’re not just on the platform” (NF).¹⁷⁶

All of this has a bearing on the type of teacher (or “presenter”, *Limmud’s* preferred term) who is deemed to have been successful. One respondent, reflecting on a conversation with an overseas presenter at the end of one *Limmud* event, commented: “...I said ‘who else did you see, what did you go to? And he said ‘nothing’; he said he liked the dining room, dinner was okay and he didn’t go to one other session and he only taught his own sessions, he didn’t experience anything else at all, and I felt that was not... I felt that was kind of like he hadn’t really done *Limmud* properly. He hadn’t really got it or hadn’t been that kind of give and take – it is kind of expected of speakers and presenters to see what’s out there, to explore a little bit and to be open to learning and getting to different things” (KR). Another commented: “there has occasional been a presenter who said ‘I don’t stay in accommodations that don’t have x, y or z’ and the committee sort of would have a conversation about whether they should put them up in a hotel in order to have the benefit of them being at the conference. Usually the committee is like ‘It doesn’t matter what they have to teach, how good their content is, they are not going to get it, they are not going to understand what it means to teach at *Limmud* so let’s not do it’” (TF). Interestingly, given some of the ambiguity around other aspects of *Limmud*, most respondents were quite particular about how presenters should behave: they should be “open-minded” and

¹⁷⁶ This has resonances of Carl Rogers’s ideas. He notes that “the facilitation of significant learning rests upon certain attitudinal qualities that exist in the personal *relationship* [his emphasis] between the facilitator and the learner.” See: “The Interpersonal Relationship in the Facilitation of Learning”, in: Kirschenbaum and Henderson (1989). *The Carol Rogers Reader*. Boston/New York: Houghton Mifflin Company.

“prepared to listen” (KH), “respectful”, people who “will go to other people’s sessions” and are on their “own Jewish journey” (DR). They should “engage in the programme”, “muck in as participants” and not be separated off – or separate themselves off – as a “separate sub-species” (KM); the relationship between teachers and participants should be “very close” (KH). Somewhat surprisingly, the quality of presenters’ scholarship rarely, if ever, featured as a major issue during the course of the interviews; whilst it would be incorrect to suggest that this is not a significant consideration during the course of selecting presenters to invite, the primary evaluative measure appears to be whether or not “they get *Limmud*” (VA). As a corollary to the blurring of the teacher/student distinction, the behaviours expected of presenters largely mirror those of participants – they too should engage in the programme and seek to connect with other people. Presenters are not paid; in that sense, they are volunteers too, and as one respondent remarked: “there is a frustration sometimes that ‘Oh, we could pay and we could get a much better programme.’ I think, yeah, if we could pay we could get a much better programme, but we would have a much different relationship with the presenters and the presenters would have a very different relationship to the event”, so much so that a shift in this direction would no longer render the event *Limmud*” (KM).

All of this indicates an extremely heightened awareness of the importance of the teacher/learner relationship over and above content quality. It is not that outstanding scholars and personalities do not appear at *Limmud*; it is rather that their performance is appraised by *Limmud* on the quality of their interactions with other participants and the extent to which they are open to self-learning and development, as well as their mastery of their subject.

Individual and collective learning

The notion that the individual is free to determine her own learning but that the collective environment forms an essential part of the learning process has been discussed in previous sections. Respondents reflected on some of the processes going on at the individual and collective levels during the event that both support and undermine learning. One observation was expressed as follows: "What *Limmud* does is break down nuclear family structures, so you're literally on your own. Your kids have gone, they're off on a kids' programme, you're not necessarily with your partner during the course of the day, you go to a session and in that session there's x number of individuals, so if you happen to be somebody who is single, divorced, not married, whatever, and they're the people who are traditionally often out of the community, suddenly a number of people I've spoken to have said this, then you're just who you are. Doesn't make any difference what your marital status is. Marital status is a hugely powerful thing in terms of how the Jewish community structures relate, how you relate to Jewish community structures. I think it's hugely powerful stuff, so it doesn't make any difference, you're just you and therefore you can start from a completely almost blank sheet" (BE). Not dissimilarly, another respondent said: I think people do get the chance to be a bit Utopian. I think that people can envision themselves as what they aren't yet so they can sort of say, "I'm a sculptor," or "I'm a poet," when they're not really sculptors or poets. They might be a bin man or a postman or whatever but you could say, 'I'm a sculptor or poet,' because at *Limmud* you could be and you could talk about your sculpture or your poetry and you'd be who you said you were" (AR).

In both of these ways, the individual is offered a degree of freedom that is uncommon elsewhere. The opportunity, for example, to be a presenter of a topic that is a hobby rather than a profession affords one the possibility of trying on a different identity for a brief period. Similarly, the opportunity to learn from someone who sees or practises Judaism in a way that is challenging or unfamiliar affords one the possibility of becoming a new or different person for a while. The first observation in the paragraph above – that much of Judaism is conducted in communities within which the nuclear family is the most important building block – is often cited by those who are single, divorced, widowed, etc. as a particularly alienating force;¹⁷⁷ the notion that status may be minimised during *Limmud* is likely to help those who feel marginalised in other Jewish community contexts.

Nevertheless, there is another side to this. A few respondents pointed out that *Limmud* can be quite isolating. As one noted: “when you get there, you look around, you may well look around for people you know, and again, depending on how well-placed you are, I think it must be a very lonely place to come on your own, actually...” (NJ). *Limmud* is undoubtedly conscious of this, and creates formal and informal ways to support and encourage interactions between people, many of which are described in the section on social capital that follows. However, fundamentally, the organisation has no means of genuinely addressing any individual’s feelings of marginalisation or loneliness. Whilst it seeks to create a warm, supportive and caring communal environment within which connections between people may be forged, the onus of responsibility is ultimately on the individual.

¹⁷⁷ This insight is based on my experience being part of the Jewish community rather than anything more empirical.

It may be that a combination of these forces – the capacity, albeit limited, for individuals to reinvent themselves, a communal environment that is comprised of individuals over and above family units, the feelings of loneliness or insecurity that this may instil – help to build a creative space within which new ideas and initiatives emerge around which individuals coalesce. Certainly, one respondent indicated that *Limmud* facilitates a certain type of collective learning: “I think *Limmud* attracts groups. So you’ll have groups of people who have a shared agenda interest and they will learn together and... use the opportunity of being at *Limmud* to get together people who have got that interest and do something together and learn from each other and make something. So definitely that’s shared learning” (KH).

Measuring effectiveness

Almost all respondents were overwhelmingly positive about *Limmud* and the impact it has had on event participants over the past three decades. Nevertheless, when asked how learning is measured or assessed, it quickly became clear that *Limmud* has few, if any, formal procedures of this type. Indeed, one interviewee’s initial response to the question was to laugh, as if to suggest that the very idea of an assessment of learning simply does not fit the organisation’s culture. Another reacted similarly: “I am trying to think why that question... it has taken me aback. I was going to say it’s just not the right question” (TF). She went on to add: “It’s like asking, you know, how do you know that love is a good thing? How do you assess it? Okay, I guess if you want you can hook somebody up to electrodes and see what happens when they fall in love and I know all those studies have been done

and it doesn't really tell you anything about what it feels like to be in love. And I think this is a similar sort of thing. So you're right, there is something happening and we need to try to figure out what it is and we need to try and measure it because it is being replicated all around the world and what are they replicating and why. All those questions are valid questions. But I think we also need to accept hooking *Limmud* up to electrodes is the wrong tool to describe what it is about."

Thus assessment, in any formal sense, does not take place, and is even regarded by some as suspect. *Limmud* has no way of measuring what participants have learned. As one respondent said, "I don't think that happens really" (VA), and as another added "it is quite interesting how unusual, if not unheard of, it is to go into a session with some sort of outcomes expected at the start of it" (LR). A cynical analysis of why this is the case might point to *Limmud's* amateurish infrastructure and its volunteer team's lack of educational expertise, and there may be some truth to that assertion. However, several respondents maintained that evaluation was neither possible nor appropriate. One said: "There's a whole load of stuff that happens that if you try and quantify, evaluate, you're going to get a nice sociological study and you won't get anything that is helpful" (FF). Another similarly remarked "Now six months later [since the last *Limmud* conference] we're still hearing things that happened at *Limmud*. It isn't a controlled community... Much much less is known by *Limmud* and at times they want to go and run after and find out what's happening. But it's so difficult to track" (BF). Moreover, "You wouldn't be able to formally assess the quality of learning that's going on. It's not that sort of event" (AR), and "it's not important because it's such an individual experience... people come with such different levels of learning and understanding and because it's difficult to assess things that don't

have right and wrong answers like opinions and thoughts... I think it's about the experience of learning as opposed to learning content. And it's very difficult to assess the experience of anything" (KH).

However, the common claims of success are based on some evidence. *Limmud* does send out an online "Participant Survey" to every participant after each conference, which generates a response rate of approximately 10%.¹⁷⁸ Interestingly, however, the questionnaire offers no clear opportunity for participants to assess or reflect on their own learning. Indeed, most of the questions about content are concerned with delivery pragmatics.¹⁷⁹ The only slightly more substantive questions focus on whether or not participants felt there were enough or too many sessions on particular topics, and which presenters they would most like to hear again. Analysing the questionnaire, it soon becomes clear that it has been assembled by event managers and organisers over and above individuals genuinely concerned with participant learning.¹⁸⁰

It is revealing that in the course of conducting my interviews and asking the specific questions about evaluation, no respondent referred to the survey or its data. Instead, they tended to speak about broad evaluative measures. One of the most important indicators they discussed is whether participants come back from one year to the next. "I think *Limmud* probably measures its success by, firstly, whether or not people come back..." (FF);

¹⁷⁸ Based on telephone conversation with the Executive Director of *Limmud* on 16 November 2011. In the course of my research, I examined the survey questionnaire and the data it generated. I was struck, however, by its limitations (as outlined above), and found it of limited use for the particular purposes of my analysis.

¹⁷⁹ For example, questions using a Likert Scale of 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree' on whether or not there were too many choices in each time slot, or whether or not there were sessions the respondent wanted to attend in each time slot, etc.

¹⁸⁰ According the organisation's Executive Director, the Participant Survey is used in the early stages of planning each conference, although the volunteer groups who value it most tend to be those concerned with participant care. In contrast, the programming team seems to derive minimal value from the findings.

or, as another respondent remarked: "...We know it because of the effect it has. The fact that they're coming back. The fact that we cram a programme full of sessions and people are going to them and they're not saying, actually, we're not getting anything from this" (VA).¹⁸¹ Willingness to volunteer for the organisation is further viewed as evidence of success: "I think also a new generation of volunteers offering to volunteer is to some extent a sign of success for *Limmud*. That means that people got the message" (AR). Interestingly, no respondent referred to any internal empirical data on either of these factors;¹⁸² rather, there appeared to be a commonly-held assumption amongst respondents that significant numbers do return from year to year, and the volunteer base continually replenishes itself.

In terms of the formal educational content of the event itself, assessment appears to be governed by meritocratic rules. According to one respondent: "the only assessment that's done is the free market which is burns on seats. We will programme for someone whose sessions are getting so big they need a lecture theatre because the word's got around that this guy's worth hearing, although we also sometimes get worried about the cultish side of that, which does happen. At the same time it should become pretty clear to someone who keeps coming back year after year and only gets sort of six newcomers who didn't realise that their session was pretty awful last year. So in a way the free market does the assessment" (NF). According to several respondents, this is shaped by the internal discourse during the event; as one remarked: "Is the learning assessed? There are casual conversations, where if you said 'did you enjoy so-and-so', and somebody will say 'they

¹⁸¹ Data from Cohen and Kopelowitz (2011) suggest that my respondents may believe *Limmud* is more successful than reality indicates: they demonstrate that whilst 61% of *Limmud* UK participants were "very satisfied and very likely to recommend *Limmud*" to others, a surprisingly high 22% was "neither satisfied nor would recommend".

¹⁸² Cohen and Kopelowitz (2011) was published after all of my fieldwork had been completed, so it would not have been possible for respondents to refer to it.

were fantastic', or if someone says 'actually, I didn't understand a bloody word', then in that way, you see people sussing out the levels of other people when they're chatting" (NJ). Furthermore: "The only way it's assessed is whether you get more... if you're doing a two-parter [i.e. a session that comprises two distinct, but related presentations occurring at different times], whether you get more people to your second part. Then you think you've done well. But that's more about the teaching though, being assessed, not the learning" (NJ).

Limmud's impact on the wider Jewish community is a further evaluative factor. Whilst this was mentioned explicitly in this particular context by only two respondents, the comments discussed earlier about *Limmud's* role as a catalyst for communal change (section on 'Purpose') suggests that it may be a commonly-held perspective. One of them commented: "It's very hard to know what affect *Limmud* has had on the wider community, but *Limmud* would like to claim the success of a lot of things that it's affected, and more adult education in the community could very well be one of those things" (VA). The other remarked: "the assumption is that for many people it [*Limmud*] is a catalyst to them doing more learning afterwards in my experience. So it is not assessed but I think there is a tangible increase... *Limmud* is not the only element by a long way in this. I think that you could say that a chunk, I don't know how large a chunk of the Anglo-Jewish community is definitely more knowledgeable now than thirty, forty years ago. There are lots of players in this. *Limmud* is part of the landscape" (TL). Whilst some work has been done to measure this, it has not yet been measured in a robust scientific way.¹⁸³ This is clearly a shortcoming and fundamental

¹⁸³ Cohen and Kopelowitz (2011) concluded that of all *Limmuds* taking place across the world, "European *Limmudniks* are the most likely to cite impact on their Jewish learning and community involvement as a result of their *Limmud* participation". They further report the results of the question "To what extent would you say

gap in the research literature: the notion that *Limmud should* affect individual and communal growth and change is one of the factors identified regarding how it might be adequately assessed.

Nevertheless, these respondents' attitudes appear to indicate that *Limmud* is far less concerned about formal knowledge acquisition than it is about the quality of the experience as a whole. Indeed, one respondent maintained that organisers assess *Limmud* "... just from the general participant feedback like how... did it meet your expectations, etc., not on the actual output of the learning" (FF). Or, as another explained: there's a question we ask which is an oddly worded... which is something like "What impact has this made on you for the year to come?" That's about us wanting explicitly to have this transformation experience, but they don't necessarily get that and then we ask them it, and they stop and think. That for me is about learning assessed because that's about saying 'What have I learned? How have I changed because of this learning experience?' But we're not necessarily asking them 'What have you learned?' or the quality of it or whatever" (SR).

Intriguingly, I could find no evidence of such a question in the Participant Survey, although the *Limmud International Survey* (Cohen and Kopelowitz, 2011) offers some insights into

that participation in *Limmud* has a positive impact on your life in any way?" and demonstrate that on a scale of 1-4 (where 1 = Not at all, and 4 = To a great extent), participants in *Limmuds* globally score 1.7 for "Observance of Jewish holidays or ritual", 2.0 for "Participation in organised Jewish groups", and 2.2 for "Connection to the organised Jewish world" and "Involvement with Jewish community". Higher scores were reported for "Connection to Jews who are different than me" (2.5); "Sense of Jewish identity" (2.8); and "Jewish knowledge" (3.0). However, this assessment is based on Jews attending different versions of *Limmud* in different parts of the world (as opposed to British Jewish participants of *Limmud UK*), and self-reporting which can be subjective and unreliable. Furthermore, the research fails to locate *Limmud* in the wider context of other factors that may have influenced any reported behavioural changes.

how *Limmud* seeks to assess its impact and demonstrates again that the ideas of 'engage' and 'connect' are paramount.¹⁸⁴

Summary: key elements of Limmud's educational process

Understanding the processes through which *Limmud* participants go is an important way of understanding the event's educational philosophy. In many respects, the *Limmud* experience is a very individualised one. Whilst it is possible to characterise different groups of participants, each individual creates a unique learning experience for himself. The extent to which one focuses on formal 'learning' as opposed to informal or non-formal 'experiencing' varies from one individual to the next. Indeed, respondents intimated that it may be possible to locate these two terms along a continuum at *Limmud*, whereby the participant is free to locate herself wherever she chooses at any given point. In effect, one can either find a comfortable and stable position on the continuum and continually return to it, or one can select and reselect one's preferred learning style over and over again, trying out a range of possibilities throughout. Nevertheless, the continuum does not extend into the furthest reaches of formal learning (there is no possibility of formal assessment or the acquisition of formal qualifications); rather it offers a broad range of formal, non-formal and

¹⁸⁴ The question reported in Figs. 6 and 7 (p.81) and footnote 166 above ("To what extent would you say that participation in *Limmud* has a positive impact on your life if any of the following areas?") offers a range of answers with options to tick "To a great extent"; 'To some extent'; To a little extent'; and 'Not at all'. Many of these are concerned with participants' continuing practical engagement in Jewish life (participation in organised Jewish groups; attendance at Jewish events/classes; involvement in the Jewish community; connection to the organised Jewish world; observance of Jewish holidays or ritual). Others point to more of an internal shift in respondents' sense of self (sense of Jewish identity; Jewish knowledge; understanding of Jewish or Israeli music; feeling of connection to Israel). Still others relate to the theme of interpersonal connections (meeting a spouse/partner; connection to Jews who are different to me).

informal learning styles within an overarching experience that would be characterised typically as 'informal' or 'non-formal'.

The two expectations that participants are gently encouraged to accept are first, to engage in the experience, and second, to connect with other people. There was a clear sense among respondents that these two activities are central to the endeavour. Engagement in the programme offers valuable intellectual and emotional stimulation and establishes learning as a dominant shared communal activity; connecting with others serves to build a culture of community within which that learning may be broadened, deepened, and taken forward.

Particular behavioural standards are expected of presenters, although these are rarely stated explicitly. Presenters must embody *Limmud's* values; they should engage and connect too, in ways that model best practice. They should both teach and learn, within and beyond the particular sessions they offer, and they should participate fully in the event without ever separating themselves off from others. As much as the quality of their content is valued and appreciated, it is the quality of their interactions with others that is most prized.

Amidst all of this, participants are continually compelled to make choices. On first glimpse, these choices are simple ones – what session to attend next; which presenter to select; when and where to eat lunch, etc. However, on closer inspection, they involve far more complex choices about one's identity. As *Limmud* breaks down many existing family and community structures, the individual is free to construct his programme how he wishes, and

the choices he makes reflects something about who he is, and who he wishes to become. Whilst this can be both “enlivening and terrifying” (for learners and teachers alike), the continual praxis of individually-driven, informed decision-making within a context of community is arguably the most important learning going on.

The success of the endeavour is subsequently assessed not by formal measures such as knowledge acquired or qualifications received, but rather by much softer measures, notably the impact of the experience on the individual’s desire to strengthen her own Jewish self-understanding and to actively participate in Jewish communal life. Irrespective of its inability or opposition to measuring them, these are the outcomes that are of primary interest to *Limmud*.

CONTEXT

The context within which *Limmud* takes place plays an important role within the learning. Context can be examined by reference to two dimensions, space and time, and I will explore each of these in turn.

The spatial dimension: "Planet Limmud"

Almost three-quarters of British Jews live in or around London, making that the most obvious city to locate the event in terms of geographical convenience.¹⁸⁵ However, *Limmud* has never taken place in London – it began its life at a boarding school in Oxfordshire, and then moved from one university campus to another to accommodate growing needs: first Portsmouth, then Oxford, then Worcester, then Manchester, then Nottingham and currently Warwick. The reason for this, as several respondents argued, is the value of “going away” (FF), moving “out of your own space” and not having “any of your daily responsibilities” (SR) and being “in a retreat space” (TF). A quarter of all respondents used the term “bubble” to describe the environment; other terms employed included an “immersion experience” (KR), “somewhat isolated” (KR), “an oasis” and “planet *Limmud*” (DK), and “another world” (NF). Indeed, the environment was compared to “Disneyland” (SR) as if to suggest that every detail within it is constructed to reinforce certain core

¹⁸⁵ See: Graham, D., et. al. (2007). *Jews in Britain: a snapshot from the 2001 Census*. London: Institute for Jewish Policy Research.

principles, and likened to being “as close as you get to how you feel when you are in Israel” (NF), as if to convey the feeling of being in a space within which every contributing factor appears to be infused with Jewishness. Nevertheless, two respondents (SR, DK) did suggest that new technology has allowed the bubble to be penetrated to some degree, a factor which both regarded as a loss of some kind. Creating an enclosed, secure and total *Limmud* environment appears to be critical in the eyes of almost all respondents.

The university campus

The fact that *Limmud* has always taken place in a space usually employed for educational purposes, and most often on university campuses, is worthy of note. For those respondents sufficiently familiar with the reasons behind these decisions, the dominant motivations in each instance were clearly pragmatic – university campuses “happen to be spaces where there is enough room to accommodate the numbers of people that need to be accommodated, and have the right sort of spaces for sleeping and sessions and food and the whole logistics to work” (DL). The fact that a university campus embodies adult learning appears to have been less of a consideration. As the same respondent noted, “I don’t know whether historically the fact that education and the university campuses were chosen because of the notion of *Limmud* as learning and education” (DL). Nevertheless, several respondents argued that this environmental feature supports the educational objectives of the event: “We have always chosen educational settings. We didn’t have to... [it was] absolutely pragmatic. ...But if you end up being in educational places, you go into a classroom, you think learning. When you go into a hotel or conference centre you create a

space which then looks like learning. At a university or school it looks like learning already so you think you are in that mode already” (TL). Similarly, “I think having it within a university space actually shifts the discourse. This is a learning space and it is a space where we are used to having a high level, intellectual community. So I think that shapes it in some way” (TF); and “a university feels very serious, and it feels like there’s some learning going on, because obviously there would be. And it’s also grown-up, so it’s not a school, so the chairs are the right size. And it also looks like lecture halls, which gives a certain status to it” (NJ).

Another respondent articulated the value of a university campus to *Limmud* in slightly different terms: “the vast majority of people at *Limmud* are either pre-university or post-university. And for those people who have not been on a university campus before, being on a university campus is a fundamentally intriguing thing to be on if you’ve never been. If you’re a kid, 14/15/16, you’re a kid and you’re running round a university, it’s about the safe space, which I think is really important. It’s exciting because all of a sudden it’s a playground. And for those people who are post-university, it’s going back to your childhood in a way, going back to your... it’s suddenly you’re a student again” (BF).¹⁸⁶ Furthermore, he added, “it really at the time it does feel ‘studenty’. The refectory, and the whole thing around trays and everything. I think it gets people to do things in a way that they don’t on a

¹⁸⁶ No data exists on *Limmud* participants’ level of educational qualifications, but British Jews are known to outscore the British population as a whole in this regard. Indeed, Jews are 80% more likely to have university level qualifications (or equivalent) than the British population at large (Graham, *et. al.*, 2007). The percentages (which are drawn from 2001 UK Census data) vary according to age – 55.7% of Jews aged 25-34 contrasted with 25.6% of Jews aged 65-74. Based on the assessment of researchers at the Institute for Jewish Policy Research, the 2011 UK Census data is predicted to demonstrate increases in these figures. My non-empirical assessment of *Limmud*’s participants suggests to me that the vast majority hold university level qualifications.

day-to-day basis. And for most people, it wasn't school that was the happiest place of your life, I think being a student is one of the most happy days of many peoples' life" (BF).¹⁸⁷

For several respondents, the preference for a university campus over, for example, a hotel, was seen in positive terms. *Limmud* has a reputation for its downscale nature – for practical and financial reasons it has never invested large sums in accommodation or food, and in contrast to many large scale conferences, it offers few, if any, creature comforts. However, according to one respondent, the discomfort level helps to create a certain atmosphere: "I think the drabness of it, and the slightly kind of Spartan aspect of it all, I think is part of a Blitz mentality, like we're all in it together, and it's all cold and uncomfortable. And you'll hear outside, you know, the conference people who go to conferences all over the world, Americans and things saying you know, 'I can't get over the size of the towels', which we just laugh about and I think it becomes a bit of an in-joke" (NJ). Its modest nature indicates that "you are not going there for the comforts, you are going for some other reason" (TL). Furthermore, one respondent maintained that the discomfort level may help to create "that flat structure" wherein everybody is equal (NJ).

Only one respondent criticised the choice of a university campus, maintaining that a university's classrooms are less than ideally suited to *Limmud*: "one of the problems about using universities is you're always going to be in teaching environments where somebody's at the front and people are sitting in rows listening." However, this was an isolated

¹⁸⁷ *Limmud* participants do not have free access to all of the facilities on the university campus. Notably, libraries and sports facilities are excluded. This is partly for practical reasons – both require the presence of staff, and *Limmud* takes place over Christmas when the university is essentially closed. Opening them up, even if theoretically possible, would incur further expense. In addition, it is likely that some *Limmud* leaders would regard both as distractions: sports activities would reduce the amount of time dedicated to Jewish learning, and library-based study might undermine the interpersonal nature of the event.

comment. Generally, whilst the decision to run *Limmud* on a university campus was driven largely by pragmatic considerations, the value in doing so was interpreted positively by almost all respondents who engaged in the discussion. They argued that it sets the right tone about the learning, enhances the quality of the discourse, builds a sense of equality across the participant base, and creates excitement around the event irrespective of the age of the individual participant.

Being Jewish out loud

According to one respondent: “We talk about the white space and the black space... the idea that the white space [around the letters in the *Torah*] is as valuable as the black letters, and we need, therefore, to make that” (VA).¹⁸⁸ The fact that *Limmud* takes place in an environment that it does not own creates a situation that allows – or perhaps compels – its organisers to construct it in some way. Beyond the formal sessions (understood in the quote above as the ‘black letters’), there is a clear understanding amongst almost all respondents that the wider environment (the ‘white space’) informs the experience and thus needs to be attended to. The very act of creating the environment was understood as an important part of the endeavour by one respondent in particular; he argued that “if the place is too luxurious and it’s got too many staff around, or if everybody stacks the chairs for you as it were, then the sense of making it collectively diminishes” (DK). Thus the choice of

¹⁸⁸ This is based on a *chasidic* idea that the white space around the letters in the *Torah* has as much significance as the words themselves. The ‘white space’ concept contains within it resonances of Polanyi’s concept of “tacit knowledge”, which is comprised of conceptual and sensory information and images that is often brought to bear in an attempt to make sense of a more formal proposition. See: Polanyi, M. (1958). *Personal Knowledge. Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy*. London and New York: Routledge.

space, and the way in which it is constructed, is very much associated again with the principles of individual and community empowerment. *Limmud* takes place in a spatial environment that is constructed and owned – albeit temporarily – by the episodic community that lives there.

A number of respondents regarded the active transformation of the university space into *Jewish* space as particularly important. One described her experience of this: “The first thing that happened [when we arrived at *Limmud*] was somebody walked up to us with *Chanukah* doughnuts, and you walked in and there was this sense of *Chanukah* in the student union where you went in to register. You just felt it” (TF).¹⁸⁹ Others spoke of it as a “*Jewish* social and cultural environment where there’s a common language” (IL) or simply “a *Jewish* world” (NF). Two respondents in particular reflected on the important psychological effects of this. One commented on the power of finding “a space where for an entire week you can be as *Jewish* as you like with people who are normal as far as you’re concerned, with lots of other people who are bankers and consultants, management consultants aplenty and do all those kind of things... I’d argue that’s kind of an underlying insecurity, so you might say *Limmud* is the space where you don’t have to whisper about being *Jewish* and that seems to be a very kind of Anglo-*Jewish* thing and I think that’s quite an important thing. It’s the place where you can be *Jewish* out loud, if you like. That does seem to me quite powerful” (BE). The second analysed it as follows: “Usually you feel like public space in the UK is *Christian*, is Church of England. No, now, a group of *Jews* can just come onto a campus and suddenly the campus is *Jewish*. We can create this *Jewish* space simply by

¹⁸⁹ Doughnuts are one of the traditional *Jewish* foods eaten during the festival of *Chanukah*, which often coincides with the *Limmud* conference.

being here and who we are actually ends up filling up all the air and the molecules and the space there is here. I think that is very, very powerful for British Jews” (TF). The suggestion in both instances is that the transformation of British space into Jewish space is uniquely powerful for a community that rarely, if ever, feels able to be completely free about its Jewishness publicly. It allows British Jews to feel fully at home with their Jewish identities, which, in and of itself, may help to fuel the feelings of solidarity and kinship that comprise community. The fact that it is “very clearly a non-denominational space” in Jewish terms too (DL), only helps to further this sense of commonality; the intra-communal barriers that normally restrict discourse are deliberately minimised, as is outlined in the section on social capital below.

Social space

A number of respondents spoke of the ‘white space’ of *Limmud* as being a particularly important part of the endeavour. One described it as “crucial” and the “most important of everything actually”, arguing that “the building and the location and the layout has a big impact on how that space will be” (DR). One of the primary reasons for this was highlighted by another respondent. He maintained that what is “critical is a decent space for people to gather, which is not obscure, out of the way, but it’s where people should bump into each other, it’s the social encounter that’s as important as the opportunity to go to sessions” (DK). A further respondent similarly remarked that “what we always need is kind of, enough social space that people feel comfortable hanging out within the university.” She added:

“actually that’s the most problematic area, and the areas that are most often changed and tried in different ways” (IL).

The importance of social interaction between participants came across in most of the interviews, and it is clear that, in *Limmud’s* thinking about the issue, attention is given to the use of space as a tool to facilitate it. In general terms, one respondent remarked: “Gaps between sessions and walking through a space where there are armchairs and coffee entices you to sit and carry on the conversations, and presenters being told that ‘There is no green room; you have a session, then you’re with the people.’ So those conversations happen, and I’m a huge believer that it’s out of the conversations that the new learning and new ideas come out” (SR).

Several particular spaces were mentioned, all of which are constructed in some way for similar purposes. The bar is one of these, which is particularly densely populated from late evening until the early hours of the morning. It is “part of someone’s *Limmud* journey going there and meeting people and discussing and debriefing from the day” (KH), or, as another respondent remarked, “relationships and a bar do go hand-in-hand” (NF). The social culture created by the presence of a bar at the heart of the event is deliberate; it is not simply a nice facility to have, but rather a mechanism to support and encourage social interaction, which, once again, fuels the sense of community.

Food spaces were similarly identified as important social environments, albeit ones that require more complex management. “Food spaces are a massive problem because that’s actually one of the most potentially sociable times on Conference where, like I say, if you’re

thinking about learning in terms of building community and meeting other people and discussing what you have done at the sessions in the morning then that's a really key place. But there are over 2,000 people that need to get through a dining room really quickly, so you are really discouraged from sitting down and talking to other people as much as possible, and it can be quite a lonely space for people who don't know other people" (KH). This practical challenge was partly resolved in 2010 by the somewhat controversial creation of a second dining room for the first time, in part "to take the strain off the dining room", but constructed in such a way as to encourage people to sit together and "reflect on what Conference is and why they are there and what they've experienced until that point" (KH). The principle of having a single dining room was highlighted by one respondent who compared the dining room at *Limmud* to the *chadar ochel* on a *kibbutz*, which is often seen as the physical heart of a *kibbutz* community.¹⁹⁰ "The dining room is a very important space and is under-estimated and just taken for granted because it's a 'needs must', but it isn't. We could set up lots of small dining areas all over, but there isn't. There's one. You can 'grab and go,' [i.e. a sandwich and/or a bowl of soup] but if you're going to go sit in a corner, there's one place, and that is for me the *kibbutz* dining room, the classic *chadar ochel* noise and coming together and interaction and whatever" (SR). It is interesting to note that the creation of a second dining room in 2010 was justified on three grounds: first, that it might help facilitate quality social interaction; second, that it might help resolve some of the logistical difficulties associated with a single space; and third, as a one-off in celebration of *Limmud's* 30th anniversary. The development suggests that whilst *Limmud* is constantly grappling with how to resolve logistical challenges, it is acutely conscious of the importance

¹⁹⁰ A *kibbutz* is an Israeli collective settlement based on socialist and democratic principles. Its *chadar ochel* (dining room) is often the central meeting place for the community, and serves as key location for the development of interpersonal relations.

of social interaction and eager to ensure that any new initiatives do not undermine that. Those that might be introduced on a trial basis only, and constructed in a way that demonstrates their experimental and unique nature – e.g. the association with the 30th anniversary. In this instance, the experiment was not repeated; no second dining room existed at the conference in 2011.

However, a small ‘family dining room’ has been established in recent years, aimed particularly at families with young children. Interestingly, the thinking behind this was purely logistical (to simplify for parents the process of giving their young children breakfast and then dropping them off at the children’s programme, and to provide them with an early dinner), but the result was described by a respondent as follows: “basically the families all get to know each other and get to know the other parents of kids who are with their children, and the social bonds that develop between the kids in the age group can continue after *Limmud* because the families do get to know each other in the family dining room.” She continued: “It’s actually now become a very interesting social space in and of itself. Either you have families eating together, or you can have that family dinner time which is earlier than other dinner times because you want to just get your kids to bed so you can enjoy the evening programme. So, you have a sub-group of the families who all do kind of get to know each other. That has become a much closer thing since the family dining room and the breakfast” (KM).

Reinforcing learning

Attention is also focused on creating spaces that encourage informal learning. For example, the lounge, along with the tea and coffee points located at various places across the site, are constructed to be spaces “where people can feel comfortable to sit and do their own reflection, learning and thinking, without that judgement... of not being at a session” (KH). This respondent went on to explain that activities are made available within these spaces – books and magazines to read, *Limmud* word searches, *Limmud* Sudoku, so that “people can be in a non-session space but still doing something that’s part of *Limmud*”. Similarly, the central café and the *shuk*¹⁹¹ are often located in the same space. “Normally that’s what happens and that’s because you’re taking a break, you’re sitting down, you’re having a coffee. But even then you’ve got the Jewish bookshop and you’ve got whichever, LSJS’s [the London School of Jewish Studies] logo up there. So it’s creating a space where even when you’re going for coffee, it’s not just you’re going to Starbucks for coffee” (SR). There is further recognition that “location of sessions actually often affects people’s learning experiences quite heavily” (IL) because, with limited time between sessions, participants may be tempted to select their next choice on the basis of where it is taking place, or where they most need to be at a given time. “There’s a joke about the fact that somebody will stay in a room and then just wait for the sessions to come to them. You know, they’ll go to every session in room E35 because that’s a room they can get to easily” (IL). In this regard, space and time come into contact, and the challenge is how to ensure that space is utilised in ways that reinforce the goals of the event, whilst continually being conscious of how people will, and indeed should, utilise their time.

¹⁹¹ *Shuk* means marketplace in Arabic, and is the term typically employed in Israel for ‘flea market’.

The temporal dimension: Limmud time

An overwhelming component of the *Limmud* experience involves its use of time. It was variously described by respondents as “frenetic”, “frantically-paced” (KH), “24 hours a day” (TF), and “exhausting” (IL). Another respondent explained that the programming “continues inexorably you know, so you’ve either got to get off, or it drives you on... it makes you feel excited” (DK). Indeed, several respondents commented on the fact that programming stops for nothing: “not everything stops for lunch. There’s stuff that goes over lunch and goes over dinner. And part of it, I guess, is so that it’s enough dinner that they can actually feed everybody, but also that’s like kind of, you know, you don’t have to stop. Grab a sandwich and just keep going... I guess that’s evolved over the years, because people have said, “We want more. We want more” (KV). As another remarked: “one can stop for lunch, but the *Limmud* programme doesn’t stop for lunch. It sounds very obvious to us now. There’s never any programme I’ve ever been to, outside of *Limmud* really, that has that concept of if you stop to eat you’re missing something and you have to make a choice about what you’re going to miss. Lunch runs for two and a half hours and breakfast and dinner. There’s no stopping for it. Again, sounds like a trivial point, but it really, really isn’t. It’s tying in that element of choice and how I deal with it and do I continue learning; and you can even go to ‘lunch and learn’ in the dining room” (SR). The implicit message is that the opportunities for learning never stop, and, as a result, the individual is compelled to continually engage in the activity of choice-making.

In exploring *Limmud’s* use of time, two respondents offered further reflections. One argued that the frenetic rush and excitement causes two shifts in individual behaviour. “First of all,

you drop your guard – it’s less kind of cynically sceptical and laid back; and secondly, you start moving with momentum, and for a lot of people that’s a fresh experience around Jewish things you know. ‘I’ve got to get on, got to get involved, and oh, I’ve got to catch that before it goes’ – and I think that contributes to the general mood the *Limmud* is a place with momentum” (DK). Thus, the claim is that the energy of the event in some way alters both one’s understanding of Judaism and their own place within it – both become dynamic, vibrant and urgent. In contrast, the other respondent argued that “time weighs quite heavily on you when you’re at *Limmud* because it’s not one hour glass. There are multiple hour glasses, you’re almost in a cage of hour glasses watching time go by, opportunities pass and then be lost or missed or perhaps even fulfilled. You’re very, very aware of utilising your time and it’s a slightly obsessive compulsive experience because you think, ‘God, now I could be doing ten really worthwhile things and if I’m on the toilet what am I missing?’ And it can drive you nuts...” (AR). However, she went on to claim that this view of time is grounded in parts of Jewish culture: “when you’re a kid and you learn about Jewishness, you learn that every single act that you do matters and every *mitzvah* that you do can tilt the whole universe one way or another.¹⁹² Every second of time is either time used in a worthwhile way because you’re studying *Torah*, or time used in a wasteful way because you’re frittering it away in some way. *Limmud* really, really, really is very reinforcing of that message – that every moment counts and you’ve got to make the most of it, and if you don’t, you know that opportunity is gone forever and with it all the angels that you might have created with your good deeds or your learning or whatever. It’s not an explicitly religious language that’s used, but there’s the implication that every minute is so precious and God forbid you should waste it. I’m actually not sure that’s always good for us. It’s a bit

¹⁹² A *mitzvah* is a religious commandment or obligation. It is also used to refer to a good deed.

of an onerous and hysterical kind of message, really... It's a really Jewish thing. It's just a really Jewish thing" (AR).

The Christmas factor

In the context of the discussions about time, a number of respondents focused on the fact that *Limmud* always takes place during the Christmas holidays. This decision, like many others at *Limmud*, was driven primarily by practical considerations. Potential sites are available and often cheap (BE), most people have time off work (BE, KH, TL, VA) thereby making it a convenient time to go away (KH) when people are looking for something to do (BE, KV). Nevertheless, one of the players involved in *Limmud* in its first years maintained that even these practical considerations were not really part of the initial decision: "choosing to do this over Christmas was not our plan, it just turned out to be – everybody thought 'brilliant, how did you think of that?'" (DK).

Once again, however, this largely practical or random decision has been subsequently endowed with meaning and purpose. Several respondents made reference to Jewish feelings of discomfort and antipathy around Christmas. For example, one commented: "I think the fact that the event takes place at Christmas is massively important because I think before there was *Limmud* there was a sort of awkwardness for English Jews about Christmas" (AR); similarly, "it's at a time of the year when many Jews are uncomfortable being out in the world" (IL), and "I think for many Jews it is that whole wanting to be away... there is that wanting to be away for Christmas. But there is also a kind of wanting to

acknowledge Christmas but not feel uncomfortable” (KM). For another, *Limmud* resolves some of the tensions around Christmas, particularly within mixed Jewish/non-Jewish families: “For many Jews, Christmas is a problem... for those that have out-marriages in their family it raises enormous issues. You do sometimes have the Jewish partner there with the kids, or without the kids, or the non-Jewish partner with the family or others, or it has solved the problem. It’s also very problematic for some people, about what to do with their parents, and you know, the sort of family thing” (NJ).

Indeed, simply by offering a “Christmas alternative” (TL), a few respondents maintained that *Limmud* was altering participants’ perspectives on Judaism and their Jewish identity. For one, “it’s a kind of retreat from consumerism” (BE), implying that *Limmud* seeks to offer a learning-based alternative to the consumerist culture that often accompanies Christmas, particularly if one is excluded from its more religious elements. For another, British Jews’ common feeling of being an ethnic minority in Britain is exacerbated at Christmas, and thus having something to do that positions them as majority is “very powerful” (TF). For a third, *Limmud* offers a Jewish festival at a festive time of year: “It’s a social festival... like in a way like in biblical times, the only time of year that everybody would get together and congregate in the temple [in Jerusalem], and that was actually not so much necessarily to do with the festival you were celebrating but the fact that it was a big community event. That’s almost the same thing – everyone converges and you see people on Conference that you don’t see any other time of year...” (KH).

Summary: key elements of Limmud's context

Limmud's context sheds light on important elements of its educational philosophy. Interestingly, many of the decisions about time and space at *Limmud* were taken for purely pragmatic reasons – they made sense in economic, social or political terms. However, they have been retained over time only in part due to these considerations; their value has also been judged by the extent to which they serve the organisation's educational purposes.

In the course of conducting the interviews, it became clear that the “bubble” created by making *Limmud* an intensive immersion experience allows for the creation of a “planet *Limmud*” within which certain norms of behaviour and activity can be established. Locating the event on a university campus supports this, and infuses the event with an overarching sense of learning and excitement, and helps to create a culture of equality wherein the socio-economic standing of individual participants fades from view.

The Jewishness of the event is created each year anew entirely by the volunteer base, presenters and participants. The space is transformed from a British university campus into an enclosed Jewish environment by virtue of the activities going on, the temporary Judaisation of particular spaces and the people who take part. This act of spatial transformation supports the formal learning objectives of the event, but also allows British Jews to feel comfortable with their Jewishness in a way that is uncommon in other spaces and at other times in Britain.

Particular attention is concentrated on the spaces outside of the formal classrooms, with a specific interest in encouraging social interaction and engagement. Many of these spaces also include signs and symbols of Jewish learning in order to reinforce the theme – learning is not simply classroom-based with an authority imparting knowledge to a group of learners; it also takes place beyond the classroom, and the individual is free and encouraged to utilise those spaces for discussions, self-reflection, reading and other means of enhancing one's Jewish self-concept.

Limmud time is busy, dynamic and frenetic, creating a sense of excitement about learning and momentum to do more. In some respects, this subtly reinforces a compelling if onerous idea within Judaism that one's time should not be frittered away, that every moment not dedicated to learning is wasted, and that one's actions at any point could be of cosmic significance. The fact that *Limmud* always takes place during Christmas, one of many decisions taken principally for pragmatic reasons, nevertheless offers an alternative to members of an ethnic minority who are excluded from Christian religious festivities. In so doing, *Limmud* creates an opportunity for them to alter their minority status for a brief while, thereby allowing them to re-think and reconsider Judaism and their Jewish identity in ways that are not available at other times or places.

SOCIAL CAPITAL

Introduction

The idea of social capital is that social networks and relationships have value in a similar way to other forms of capital. As the literature review showed, much of the work on non-formal education emphasises the educational value of groups, networks and inter-personal relations. In the context of this study, I was interested to understand where social capital fitted in respondents' understanding of *Limmud*. Whilst their common emphasis on community suggests it should occupy a central role, it was only by probing this area directly that I was able to clarify its importance to the organisation. Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) identify three core dimensions of social capital: relational (shared norms, mutual obligations, etc., that influence behaviour); structural (patterns and configuration of connections between actors); and cognitive (shared systems of meanings between actors that restrict or enable exchange). Following a brief general examination of the place of social capital within *Limmud*, I will focus my analysis on the first two of these in turn, interspersing examples of the third where appropriate.

The non-explicit heart of Limmud

The first issue to explore was how respondents understood the place of social capital in *Limmud*. Whilst no respondent argued that relationships were *not* an important part of

Limmud, there were some subtle distinctions in how they articulated their importance. For several, they comprised the essence: one stated that “*Limmud* is, at its core, about creating relationships within and across the Jewish community” (DL); another maintained that “conversation, whether it is a one-to-one or three or four people sitting around, that conversation – whether it is about the content that they have just been to a session about or something else – I still think that is probably at the heart of *Limmud*” (TL). A third commented: “there is no question that actually, who you meet, who you hang out with, who you talk to, who you network with, is so important because, literally, marriages are made”, and later added “it’s at the heart” (NF).

However, others expressed its importance in slightly more ambiguous terms. One argued that relationship-building at both an individual and communal level is “at the heart, [although it is] not the only thing at the heart” (TF); another suggested that whilst cross-communal relationship-building is “absolute, totally and utterly core”, people “are not expected to do the cross-communal thing if they don’t want to” (VA); and a further respondent maintained that whilst “it’s pretty central,” he pointed out that “it’s not in *Limmud*’s mission statement” (KH).¹⁹³ Another, after stating “I think it’s at the heart of the endeavour actually... [but] I disagree that it should be” pointed to the reason why it may not be stated more explicitly in *Limmud*’s literature: “I think it is something that is very important to happen, but you can’t be so intentional about it because then you can get it horribly wrong...” (KM).

¹⁹³ Strictly speaking, this respondent is right, although one could easily argue that relationship-building is implicit in several statements within *Limmud*’s mission statement. For example, “*Limmud* expects all participants to be respectful of one another, and to recognise that all volunteers are also participants”; “We aim to create opportunities for communities and individuals to connect”; and “We believe in the richness of our diverse community and create cross-communal and cross-generational experiences.”

One could argue that there is a degree of disingenuousness in this approach. If, as one respondent noted, "*Limmud* is very interested in socialisation" (BF), and if, as another pointed out "The big change we hope to see is cooperation and understanding between different areas of the Jewish community in the UK" (KH), why isn't *Limmud* more explicit about its aspirations? The answer appears to be a pragmatic one: relationship-building of all kinds, perhaps particularly when seeking to cross intra-denominational and ideological divides, is complex, and one is likely to have greater success by creating the conditions for dialogue to occur naturally rather than stating it up front as an overt goal.

Relational social capital

Respect

Respondents undoubtedly understood that the complexity of this ambition, if it is to be realised, requires a certain set of conditions. A certain tone needs to be set, values need to be promoted, and tools need to be instituted to facilitate it. Underpinning these conditions is a clear and foundational commitment to respecting others. Respondents were more or less unanimous in their emphasis of this. "The fundamental value is probably respect, in that you may not agree with things you hear, and you may not agree with people you meet, but you leave as friends" (FF); "Respect, I think, is probably the biggest [value]. You treat people with respect" (DR); "I think the value of respect – that the presenter should respect participants who come and that the participants should respect the presenter no matter

where they come from” (KM); and “you might not agree with someone, but at least listen to that point of view” (NF).

Furthermore, the respondents each broke down the notion of respect in their own individual ways, thereby creating quite a detailed collective picture of its meaning in *Limmud’s* terms. Some emphasised the importance of openness (“it’s a culture of openness; it’s to go to things you wouldn’t normally go to; to go to teachers you wouldn’t normally hear teach; to go and hear perspectives that you would normally find abhorrent” (FF)); others focused on inclusion (“I suppose *Limmud* espouses inclusion as a core principle or value. So, in theory, all kinds of people are included in the *Limmud* community” (TL)); still others referenced the *talmudic* notion of *la-shem shamayim*, or ‘for the sake of heaven’:¹⁹⁴ “The grand rule is that any conversation or any debate or any interaction needs to be for the sake of heaven” (DL); “By all means, argue your opinion in a robust way for the sake of – call it for the sake of heaven – but in a respectful way, but you shouldn’t be there to try and prove your ideology’s superior to anyone else’s, or to delegitimise anyone else” (KR); and “One of the explicit values that’s there... is the *machloket la-shem shamayim*, the whole concept around we do not engage in debates to legitimise or delegitimise any person or sector of society” (SR)).

Respect, in *Limmud’s* terms, also comprises certain freedoms: “People are free to do whatever they want” (in the sense of freely exploring all types of Judaism and a diversity of opinions) (FF), and “There is a kind of notional freedom of speech, but I suspect *Limmud* has

¹⁹⁴ “For the sake of heaven” in this context means a debate, argument or dispute (“*machloket*” in Hebrew) that honours God (i.e. that is for positive or constructive purposes).

its line. So it is freedom of speech, I suppose like nationally, but as long as it is not offensive to someone else" (TL). It also encompasses being non-judgmental ("*Limmud* is a very accepting community. It's non-judgmental. People make space in a way that I think ... often people don't" (BF)); and tolerance ("I think people buy into the fact that we're all nice, middle-class Jewish people who want to have a lovely time, and we're all going to sort of stay within the law, and we're all going to be very tolerant and very nice" (NJ). For these principles to have any real meaning, diversity of opinion, belief and practice have to be present, and thus its "cross-communal nature" (DK) and the implicit "encouragement that you mix with people that come from different denominations" (IL) are a part of building a respectful culture. In this way, the diversity of the participant and presenter base, situated in a context that gives clear primacy to a deep culture of respect, fuels social interaction on both an individual and collective level. It is further bolstered by a healthy degree of pragmatism; as one respondent noted in reference to some of the complexities of Jewish religious observance, an important statement established in *Limmud's* early years was "the things which we can do together, we'll do together, and the things which we can't do together, we'll do separately" (DK).¹⁹⁵ Other respondents chose to summarise the principle in rather more simple terms: it's about "the talking to strangers, the being nice, the helping out" (NF).

A corollary to the concept of respect is, as one respondent articulated it, "*Limmud's* wonderful refusal to define what constitutes the perfect Jew" (DK). This statement is particularly striking in the context of Jewish educational discourse; the notion of "the

¹⁹⁵ For example, Orthodox Judaism draws very clear distinctions between the position of men and women in Jewish prayer, whereas progressive forms of Judaism often prize egalitarianism. Thus, several different prayer services operate at *Limmud*, none of which is actually run by, or promoted by *Limmud* itself.

educated Jew” (Fox et. al., 2003), which comprises a rich and detailed portrait of the desirable ‘product’ that ought to emerge from a particular educational intervention, has been one of the Jewish educational field’s great orthodoxies in recent years. As should be clear from the analysis so far, *Limmud* largely rejects it, explicitly at least; thus the respect the organisation pays to the learner is not based simply on who she is on arrival at the conference, but also on whom she becomes as a result of it. In theory at least, the principle serves to create an open culture, whereby any individual’s decisions are tolerated and accepted, irrespective of whether one agrees with them.

This theory may suggest an ideological predilection for pluralism. Indeed, in several of the newspaper articles written about *Limmud*, as well as in some of *Limmud*’s own literature, authors use the term “pluralism” to capture the organisation’s ideological preference,¹⁹⁶ and several respondents used the term similarly. However, others were much more cautious: “One of the great fears of the word ‘pluralism’ for all the Orthodox is the fear that the word implies an indifference to difference. You know, this is all the same, doesn’t really matter, we’re all you know – basically don’t we all care? I don’t use the word ‘pluralist’ because I think it scares people and doesn’t help anybody understand at all” (DK). Another commented: “*Limmud* does not have that level of agenda that people should have to accept anything about somebody else other than to treat them with respect” (VA). A similar view was also expressed by the organisation’s Executive Director in an article about *Limmud* following the 2011 conference: “Simonson balks at the description of *Limmud* as pluralistic.

¹⁹⁶ See, for examples: <http://theseandthose.pardes.org/2011/12/18/why-limmud-is-amazing-by-rose-prevezer/>; <http://limmudsolved.blogspot.com/>; <http://www.limmud.org/publications/tasteoflimmud/5771/Bamidbar/>; and <http://infocus.edu.vn/infocus-hoc-tieng-anh-study-english/learn-from-english-news/google-news/study-shows-limmud-conferences-strengthen-participants-jewish-bonds.infocus> (all accessed 19 January 2012).

'That word is often misused regarding us. Pluralism is an ideology and I don't want us to be saying to an Orthodox person: 'You have to accept someone you don't agree with.' What you do have to do is to be here in the same place, because *Limmud* is the community in all its parts."¹⁹⁷ Or, as another stated: "it's a shame though if we do blur the lines [between different types of Judaism] because there are distinctions between different practices of Judaism and ignoring them I think is almost denying that distinction and actually, if there are real distinctions and there are real philosophical differences, then I think we should be exploring them" (LR). Thus, whilst a number of respondents described *Limmud* as a pluralist organisation, several recoiled at the idea, conscious that even the adoption of this language might suggest a preferred organisational inclination. However, both for those respondents who chose to employ the term, and even more so for those who rejected it on these grounds, an underlying emphasis on the importance of respecting the views of others was clearly apparent.

Rules without a rule book

The question of how such a culture is created is very important. How is it possible that 2,500 people adopt this culture so quickly and readily on an annual basis, particularly when the wider Jewish educational context has been described as a "backdrop of increasing uniformity and dogma" in which "isolation and sectarianism abound all around"?¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁷ See: <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/features/does-limmud-reflect-a-false-picture-of-british-jewry-1.405385> (accessed on 26 January 2012).

¹⁹⁸ Chemi Shalev, "A proposal to Limmudize the whole Jewish world", in *Haaretz*, 23 January 2012. Downloaded on 26 January 2012 from: <http://www.haaretz.com/blogs/west-of-eden/a-proposal-to-limmudize-the-whole-jewish-world-1.408845> on 25 January 2012. According to Cohen and Kopelowitz (2011),

Furthermore, as two respondents correctly noted, “there’s no *Limmud* police” (SR) and “there’s no rule book” (AR).

However, there is a mission statement, and *Limmud* does have red lines. Whilst 22 of the 30 statements that comprise *Limmud*’s mission statement are expressed in clearly positive terms (e.g. “We inspire people to be ambitious about their contribution”; “We value choice in form, content and style”), only two stand as strong negatives (“Personal attacks are not acceptable in session material” and “*Limmud* does not participate in legitimising or delegitimising any religious or political position found in the worldwide Jewish community. Anyone who comes to *Limmud* events seeking opportunities for this will not find it”). The remaining six range from almost points of information (“Should participants wish to hold a prayer group, they may do so providing they supply all resources and are responsible for the session or prayer group in its entirety”), through values clarification statements (“*Limmud* has no part to say in the debates between/across denominations; *Limmud* will programme its events in such a way as to avoid religious or political conflict”), to rules worded in such a way as to almost disguise the negative as a positive (“We encourage people not to stereotype others”). The overarching effect is to minimise any sense of “thou shalt not”, and maximise instead a feeling of possibility and creativity.

The two blatant negatives were clearly identified by several respondents. For example, one commented: “there really is an insistence within *Limmud* that [inter-denominational brawls] get left at the door, and there is very little tolerance for attacks on institutions or

of those who responded to their survey, 45% have attended *Limmud* 11 times or more, 39% have attended 4-10 times, and 15% 1-3 times. Whilst a survey about *Limmud* is likely to attract respondents who are most engaged in it, the data do suggest that a significant number of participants returns year after year, a factor which undoubtedly helps to build this culture.

stereotypes” (TF); another said: “you shouldn’t be there to try and prove your ideologies, superiority to anyone else, or to delegitimise anyone” (KR); and a third stated: “If you express an opinion which is disrespectful of another part of Judaism, disrespectful of another’s opinion, I think the session will bring you back or the people around you will bring you back” (LR). Yet the final statement indicates an underlying culture within which participants understand the unacceptability of such behaviour, so the question remains: how have words in a mission statement become understood to an extent whereby formal policing is unnecessary?

According to one respondent, the answer appears to lie in the twin forces of clarity of instruction and passage of time: “when presenters who hadn’t been to *Limmud* at all before, they were kind of given instruction about the, not what they should be teaching, but who their audience is going to be, and that they should prepare their material appropriately. So they would be told, you know, you might have a gay Orthodox rabbi and a, I don’t know, a liberal convert, and the extremes that you might get at *Limmud* one way or the other, you know, you have to be equally respectful of all these people. I’m not sure if that still happens. But that now is implicitly understood by anybody who does a session” (IL). Another added: “it trickles down... I think those statements are there in the back of a book, in the back of the conference book somewhere or it’s explained somewhere to people, but I think it trickles down from the programme partly, its diversity, the way that you’ve got people of different backgrounds and ideologies speaking on the same programme, sometimes alongside each other, sometimes in separate rooms. So that kind of gets communicated across, partly through that” (KR). A third added similarly: “it’s *torah she-b’al*

peh, it's all oral tradition... So long as you have a coherent community, not writing down *torah she-b'al peh* is a really critical point" (DK).¹⁹⁹

Nevertheless, *Limmud* does establish certain boundaries. The mission statement notes, "Shabbat [the Sabbath] and *kashrut* [Jewish dietary laws] are observed in all public areas. We recognise that in private areas people will behave as they wish." Thus, this is not an entirely free environment; certain standards are upheld to ensure that the most observant are able to participate, even if other individuals feel that their personal freedom has been curtailed as a result. "There's an understanding," commented one respondent, "that if you had brought in a 'Big Mac', that you wouldn't be walking around eating something very *treif* [non-kosher] because it would be offensive" (NJ).²⁰⁰ Whilst this is a well-known standard in Jewish circles, it is quite striking that the restrictions on individual freedom are, for many non-Orthodox participants, far tighter at *Limmud* than they are in their own homes.

Other unstated boundaries also exist. Some respondents noted that standard societal taboos, like sexual harassment, exploitation and "very sort of overt sexual behaviour", are unacceptable (AR, NJ), and "*Limmud* tows the line on the legal thing" around drug use or underage drinking (NJ). However, other less obvious issues have also raised eyebrows, notably a charity fashion show for teenagers held one year: "one of the most difficult things I had to deal with as a parent was this fashion show... and my daughter was absolutely thrilled about this, and they were having this parade through the pub bit of *Limmud*, the bar bit, so it wasn't in a private room where you knew what you were going to, and I nearly died

¹⁹⁹ The term "*torah she-b'al peh*" refers to the Jewish oral tradition that evolved over the course of several centuries before it was finally codified in the *Talmud*; the inference is that *Limmud's* rules are transmitted by example and word of mouth, year after year.

²⁰⁰ Due to the laws of *shechita* (Jewish ritual slaughter), a McDonalds "Big Mac" is not certified as kosher.

because the clothes were totally inappropriate” (NJ). Whilst this was permitted, it has not been repeated since, so again, there is some evidence to suggest that *Limmud* curtails individual freedom rather more than one might expect.

Concerning session content, another respondent indicated that certain views go beyond the pale: “something or someone violently anti-Zionist probably wouldn’t be welcome at *Limmud* and might be actively barred” (AR).²⁰¹ Whilst this would be the case at most Jewish communal events, other offerings, tolerated elsewhere, are prohibited. Indeed, as inclusive as the organisation seeks to be, individuals have been deliberately excluded. Two such incidents were recounted by respondents: one in which an invited speaker was disinvited because “the topic he wanted to do was ‘why the Chief Rabbi is a fool’ or something like that” and “we don’t do sessions that knock people” (DK), and another, involving somebody who had refused to give his wife a *get*,²⁰² and, on that basis, was not allowed to participate (BF). So again, for all the claims of individual freedom, quite strict restrictions are being quietly imposed on moral grounds. Yet none of this appears to damage relationships between people; on the contrary, by imposing such standards, every effort is being made to communicate the messages of respect, inclusivity and tolerance.

²⁰¹ Nevertheless, *Limmud* quite regularly stretches the boundaries of the acceptable, for example by inviting controversial speakers. Recent examples include the journalist, Robert Fisk, and former head of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency in the Gaza Strip, John Ging. Both have reputations in the British Jewish community for being staunchly opposed to Israeli government and military policy.

²⁰² A *get* is a Jewish divorce certificate which, according to traditional Jewish law, must be presented by a husband to his wife to terminate the marriage. There have been several instances of husbands refusing to do so, thereby rendering the woman an *agunah* (lit. ‘anchored’ or ‘chained’) and unable to remarry under Jewish law. In such cases, it is quite common for the recalcitrant husband to be shunned by the community.

Structural social capital

Volunteering

The area of volunteering has been explored in some detail above, but in many respects, fits in the context of the discussion about relational social capital. Employed initially for purely pragmatic reasons, it has become an organisational value in and of itself. However, from a structural point of view, it plays a critical role in creating a culture of relationship within the organisation.

The reasons why individuals choose to volunteer were outlined by one respondent in particular, who claimed that “people appreciate a challenge”, they “see stuff being done a certain way and think they can do it better”, they are “flattered” to be asked, consider it to be “quite fun”, see it as “a good way to meet people”, and that whilst “you’ll have guidance from your mentor or the chairs... you can do with that what you want” (KH). Thus, the culture of volunteering includes a social component, an element of flattery, and a spirit of empowerment, all of which probably enhance people’s feeling of self-respect. Individuals are effectively being told that they matter, their contribution is valued, and they have the potential to achieve something significant. When a group of volunteers feels this way, the scope for constructive interaction may well be enhanced, particularly as the volunteer team work together for the best part of a year preparing the event.

However, a few respondents were rather less effervescent about the reality. One noted that sometimes people “feel undervalued, not appreciated, not recognised” and “there are

a lot of people who have dedicated many hundreds or thousands of hours to the cause... but almost resent it some extent" (LR). Another commented that *Limmud's* approach to volunteers is "about nurturing individuals" over and above "building up relationships between people" (KV).

Irrespective of the underlying motivations, the structures that exist around the voluntary work play a role in nurturing connections between people. Volunteers are divided into teams of people who have to work together on a particular component of event management (FF), which inevitably requires what Buber termed "technical dialogue" (Buber, 1947),²⁰³ and team meetings, weekends away, mentoring schemes, Friday night dinners, social events and trips (FF, KM) that have become part of, and adjuncts to this work, all invite social interaction. Furthermore, the approach to volunteer training involves a strong degree of self-reflection – one respondent indicated that the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) is a commonly used tool.²⁰⁴ Interestingly, this type of approach may be particularly significant; one respondent claimed "If you're looking at the Conference team, everyone is there for a reason. There are very few people who are completely sorted and they've got everything in their lives and they want to do Conference as well" (DR). The

²⁰³ In his book *Between Man and Man* (1947), Martin Buber describes three types of dialogue: "There is genuine dialogue - no matter whether spoken or silent - where each of the participants really has in mind the other or others in their present and particular being and turns to them with the intention of establishing a living mutual relation between himself and them. There is technical dialogue, which is prompted solely by the need of objective understanding. And there is monologue disguised as dialogue, in which two or men, meeting in space, speak each with himself in strangely tortuous and circuitous ways and yet imagine they have escaped the torment of being thrown back on their own resources."

²⁰⁴ MBTI is a tool for personality assessment that uses four dichotomies: extraversion/introversion (E/I); sensing/intuition (S/N); thinking/feeling (T/F); and judgement/perception (J/P). Individuals score themselves on the four scales, ultimately rendering one of sixteen four-letter personality types, for example, ESTJ. The validity of the instrument has been questioned by many, not least because it relies on the honesty and self-awareness of the individual being measured, but in this particular context, its presence is indicative of an approach to training that encourages self-reflection and what Howard Gardner terms "intrapersonal intelligence" (Gardner, 1983).

intimacy is that, in many instances, people's motivation for volunteering is social – they are looking to fill a social vacuum in their lives.

Other elements of the volunteer system also aid social interaction. The Young Adult Development (YAD) Scheme offers 18-30 year-olds and full-time students 60% off conference registration fees in return for offering to volunteer for a few hours each day during the event. It is sold, in part, as “a great way to meet people and make friends”²⁰⁵ and indeed, according to one respondent at least “becomes its own social network” (IL). Senior *Limmud* volunteers spend much of their time during the event headhunting and “picking out people and getting them involved” (KV), a pragmatic necessity to ensure *Limmud's* continuity which demands a form of social interaction in which individuals are likely to be charmed and flattered. Furthermore, according to another respondent, the simple act of being a volunteer affords one the capacity to “go up to absolutely anyone” and ask “how has your day been?” which “allows you then to start having conversations” (LR).

Education and learning

The programme itself is also structured in a way that encourages learning through social interaction. Panel debates are commonplace, for example “with an Orthodox, a Conservative and a Reform rabbi, and a woman amongst them, or added on” so as to “model ticking that box all the time”, yet “*Limmud* steers clear, correctly, of dealing with the issue too explicitly, in case it sticks its finger through the gossamer spider web and collapses

²⁰⁵ See: <http://limmudla.org/yadprogram.html>.

it” (NJ). Another respondent similarly noted: “we love the creation of panels... because it breaks that person down and puts them into a different context, and once in a different context, something happens, quite what you can’t predict, but something happens and a relationship may be formed, with the material, with the other individual, with sort of the audience, you know, who knows? But what you need to do is you need to break stuff a bit so that people can’t stay too solidly in their own little boxes that they define to themselves” (DK).

Indeed, for those opting to teach at *Limmud*, the event is known as an opportunity to cross boundaries more typically left alone. One respondent commented: “...this year I am giving a session with someone who we have been looking for spaces to do stuff together and there aren’t a lot of spaces where... she is Orthodox, I’m Reform, we have such a good complementary teaching style and there are just not a lot of spaces where we can teach together. We had a space, we just happened to teach together at something, a conference this year, and we looked at each other and said ‘We have to do something at *Limmud* this year.’ But that wasn’t coming from *Limmud*, that was coming from us saying we want to teach together, where could we do it, ah, *Limmud*, that is obviously the place” (TF). Furthermore, there is evidence to suggest that *Limmud* deliberately seeks out teachers with such an attitude; the same respondent also recounted the story of the first time she was invited to present: “Somebody sort of recommended me as ‘Oh, she would be great’ and then I got a written invitation and then a phone call followed that. The written invitation was would you be interested in... and, if so, let’s have a conversation. That conversation was an interview. There were questions that were asked – I can’t remember exactly what they were – but I remember thinking after that conversation they were checking to see whether I

am an open person or whether I am going to come in there and be strident about my views and not be able to listen and engage with others. So I guess I passed that test. But there was a test there. So I think there is a certain thing about getting the right critical mass of presenters" (TF).

Other programmatic structures were also highlighted by respondents. The *chavruta* project – both in its design and implementation phases – encourages interaction. The *chavruta* textbook itself is put together by a diverse team of volunteers, and the programme requires first pairs, and then groups of people to engage in discussion and debate with one another. Whilst one respondent maintained that "it would be very serendipitous for somebody to be massively changed by an encounter that they had" (AR), the structure nevertheless creates the possibility of "genuine dialogue" (Buber, 1947). Sessions for particular sub-groups with shared interests or concerns (e.g. gays and lesbians, people interested in becoming rabbis, people with both Jews and non-Jews in their families, etc.) are "intentionally scheduled" early on in the programme: "Put on a session that would appeal to that particular single interest group, then you are creating a kind of place where they can find other people in their similar situation. So they are not the only one who is interested in this particular thing and they can see that actually there are others like them, and it helps cement that kind of social..." (KM). Far more generally, as another respondent argued, the very diversity of the programme encourages social interaction: "...the way that you've got people of different backgrounds and ideologies speaking on the same programme, sometimes alongside each other, sometimes in separate rooms" (KR). In essence, by locating Jews with diverse views and opinions on the same preparatory teams, panels, sessions or general space, the possibility of encountering and interacting with others is created. Similarly, by providing

structured opportunities for individuals with common cause to find one another, the possibility of new relationships is formed.

Tools and devices

One device that has been commonly identified by journalists reflecting on their experience at *Limmud*, is the *Limmud* name tag. All participants are required to wear one at all times; indeed, voluntary security officers patrol outside the main building on campus to check participants have them on before permitting them entry. The tags serve two obvious practical purposes – they help to safeguard the security of the event, and they ensure that people entering the event have paid to be there. However, they are produced in a particular manner – no one, irrespective of who they are, has their title on the tag (e.g. Professor, Dr, Rabbi, Lord, Sir, etc.), and first names are written in considerably larger lettering than surnames. The result is to create a sense of parity between people – everyone is equal as no one trades on their professional or honorary titles. As two respondents noted: “...the name badges are very important in kind of creating that kind of sense that I can just go up and talk to you, I can see your name is clear and there and it’s not like we are hiding away (KM); and the way name tags are designed: “...is actually an expression of the value as opposed to a cause of the value, although it creates a virtuous circle, you know? That no one is deferred to because they have that title or that authority” (TF). Furthermore, respondents argued it can be beneficial both to those with and without titles: for those without, “the conversation that you have with Herr, Rabbi, Professor because they are in the lunch queue with you, it is a different kind of thing... There are

opportunities at *Limmud* to approach people of great wisdom – I mean genuinely great wisdom – and just say, ‘Do you mind if I ask you something?’ Those opportunities are not free and easy in the wider world...” (TL); and for those with titles, it allows them to “be quite anonymous” if they wish (BF).

Interestingly, the provenance of the name tag does not belong to *Limmud*; it was introduced by the organisers of the very first conference having seen it at the CAJE conference in the United States. One respondent argued that it probably appealed to their counter-cultural nature: “It's about British Jewry's kind of, you know, hegemony around orthodoxy, but not really wanting to buy into that and trying to say, actually, this is about everybody and everybody coming together which is very, very powerful on our British scene. But just – let's just take all of that off of the table and get rid of it, so it doesn't really exist” (KV).²⁰⁶

Two other respondents noted that the event handbook also communicates a social capital message. Aside from containing the programme itself and the organisation's mission statement, it also includes a list of everyone attending the conference by name (KR). There is no information about individuals, simply their name, but the impression it creates is that every individual has a role in creating the event as a whole. By simply recognising people in this way, individuals are able to find themselves in the handbook which may have a subtle empowering effect. In addition, participants inevitably scan the list to see who they know, which potentially fuels the possibility of social interaction. Another respondent claimed:

²⁰⁶ Strictly Orthodox Jewish organisations in Britain utilise titles in a strikingly formal manner, not only among those with professional titles (e.g. Rabbi, Dr, etc.), but also those without (e.g. Mrs). See, for example, <http://www.jle.org.uk/staff.php>. Titles are often used in common parlance in such organisations, as well as in official literature, as a means of showing respect. Whilst *Limmud's* approach reflects the increasingly informal culture of contemporary Britain, it is important to note just how counter-cultural it is in Orthodox Judaism.

“the handbook is a bit of a manifesto because it’s got all the programme information but it’s got a whole load of other stuff. There’s a really big chunk of ‘thank yous’ which lead you to the understanding that it’s all about what you put in and it’s all about recognition, it’s all about loveliness. Like, over-lovely behaviour, everybody being well-behaved and nice to everybody else and acknowledging how nice and well-behaved everyone is. That’s a big part, so you’re kind of inculcated into that through the signage and through the handbook and through the, “Please put your tray down here,” and “We are *shomrei shabbat* in public areas.”²⁰⁷ That kind of rhetoric that you get through the material and the signage and the handbook” (AR). In essence, core parts of the messaging around the event – in the handbook, on the signs located across the venue, even in the literature sent out in advance of the event – indicate that every individual counts, has something to contribute, and should connect with others. All of this helps to set a tone, and, as the same respondent noted, attract a certain type of individual: “if you were really allergic to it you wouldn’t come” (AR).

Two respondents argued that religious services during the event may contribute in some way towards its social capital dimension too. Running Jewish religious services at a multi-denominational event is especially complex because of particular sensitivities within different Jewish denominations – some insist on strict gender separation, others are egalitarian; some use traditional liturgy, others use a more modern form; some pray exclusively in Hebrew, others include English. The option to create a single service for all, whilst helping to build a sense of common experience, would inevitably impose one set of standards on everyone. The obvious alternative – for *Limmud* to run multiple services – would ensure that different preferences and beliefs are supported, but would necessitate

²⁰⁷ The term *shomrei shabbat* means Sabbath observant in accordance with Jewish law.

Limmud determining which options should, or should not, exist, thereby implicitly endorsing them (or not). Interestingly, *Limmud* chooses neither of these paths. As one respondent said, "*Limmud* itself does not organise and put on services." Instead, "we will absolutely allow and encourage and help facilitate others who put on services. [If] Some Reform Jews want to make sure there's a Reform *shacharit* [morning service], we will do everything we can to help facilitate that and allow them to promote it, or even we will promote it saying 'they have organised this.' Again, it seems really petty, but we're not putting it on because that way we're not joining in saying 'We think there should be a Reform service'" (SR). Another respondent agreed, noting first that *Limmud* does not officially organise religious services of any particular type, before adding "*Limmud* is organising and is making sure that those things happen, but because it's so important that *Limmud* comes across as pluralist and non-denominational, they try not to be seen to be necessarily pushing that particular agenda" (KH). In essence, *Limmud* goes to rather extraordinary lengths to simultaneously maintain its neutrality on such issues whilst ensuring multiple options exist. The result, from a social capital perspective, is threefold: different groups of people with similar religious needs and interests come together out of necessity to create and provide religious services; individuals can freely explore and encounter new types of religious experience; and an overall impression of religious pluralism is established.

As much as these structures may serve the interests of social capital development, a significant proportion of respondents was quick to stress a rather anti-structuralist position in this regard. One commented "I think that part of the strength of *Limmud* is it happens without making it happen, and when you try to force these things to happen, it often backfires a little bit" (FF). Similarly, another argued "the more *Limmud* leaves stuff alone,

the more it's allowed to happen, so one thing for sure that *Limmud* has tended to resist is organised social stuff" (DK). Another respondent commented that there are "things that don't really work that they keep doing... So you know, 'I haven't got friends and I've come alone" – come and get a little tour kind of thing. You know, first-timers tour, or come and play Scrabble because you haven't got anything else to do. That stuff goes on that seems like totally warm and welcoming and how brilliant that they put it on. Actually, it doesn't work" (KV). Instead, as other respondents noted, "...it's probably the inadvertent stuff rather than the programme stuff that really allows people to connect" (AR), and "you can't always engineer this stuff (NJ).

Summary: the place of social capital in Limmud

The place of social capital in *Limmud* reveals a great deal about its educational philosophy. Indeed, *Limmud* is a voluntary organisation that relies on the strength of the social capital that exists within it to function. The relationships that comprise much of its internal structure are commonly acknowledged as the non-explicit heart of the endeavour. Nevertheless, it is striking to note in an organisation so reliant on social capital, that several respondents stressed the need to adopt a rather *laissez-faire* attitude to the building of relationships – they should not be forced or imposed, but should rather be gently facilitated by creating an inspiring event and constructing sufficient space to allow them to develop naturally.

Within that space a culture of respect dominates. Respect, as discussed by the respondents, comprises several components – the inclusion of multiple voices and perspectives, exposure to difference and an open attitude encouraging experimentation and exploration, freedom of expression (as long as it is “for the sake of heaven”), and a dogged refusal to define an idealised vision of the perfect Jew to such an extent that even the pluralist ideal was rejected by several respondents. Rules exist but are rarely declared publicly; instead, positive and empowering statements prevail, stressing possibilities over and above prohibitions. Nevertheless, the red lines are highly revealing: no brawls, no personal attacks, no trying to prove one’s superiority over another. Focus group participants reported that the effect on social interaction is largely positive; whilst not all participants are able to expand their social network, many are.

This culture has been created partly by the passage of time; returning participants understand it and quickly begin to model it for newcomers, and thus it trickles down. The volunteering culture further aids it – the technical necessity of building volunteer teams to complete particular preparatory tasks helps to forge social interaction. Furthermore, the programme itself models social interaction – panels of speakers with diverse views, the way in which the *chavruta* programme is prepared and run, and the diversity of the programme as a whole are all, in some way, designed to encourage engagement across difference. In addition, small devices – name tags, the programme handbook, signs dotted around the site and the attitude to religious services, all contribute in various ways to promote social interaction.

Inevitably, it doesn't work for everyone. Not every individual feels comfortable in such an environment, and not every individual is able to take advantage of the possibilities that exist.²⁰⁸ However, based on the interviews conducted in this research, there can be little doubt that social capital is an essential component of *Limmud* without which it would indeed collapse. A great deal of effort is invested in enabling participants to both expand and deepen their social networks, both for their individual interests and out of a shared collective need.

²⁰⁸ The *Limmud International Survey* reported that 22% of *Limmud* UK participants were "Neither satisfied, nor would recommend" *Limmud* to others (Cohen and Kopelowitz, 2011).

RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS

Defining the indefinable

In my attempt to articulate *Limmud's* educational philosophy, one of the my central questions concerned how best to categorise it – as an example of formal, non-formal or informal education, to the extent that any of those terms can be sharply defined. Certainly, *Limmud* is *not* an example of formal education. It fails, for example, Stern and Sommerlad's (1999) test: it does not constitute a formal training programme leading to a qualification. However, this non-definition is insufficient, notwithstanding Coombs and Ahmed's (1974) argument which, due to the "bewildering assortment" of non-formal educational models, claims that non-formal education constitutes anything that is *not* formal education. Both within Jewish and wider discourse, serious attempts have been made to positively define NFE, so we must draw from these.

Many scholars have argued that the categorisation of educational models and ideas into "formal", "non-formal" and "informal" is problematic. They argue that the distinctions between these categories are blurred (Hodkinson and Hodkinson 2001), and that they are in fact part of a continuum (Rogers 2004, Stern and Sommerlad 1999). Indeed, even the terminology around non-formal education has come to be challenged, and replaced by multiple terms including "experiential learning" (Kolb 1984, Jarvis 1987), "participatory education" (Rogers 2004), "community education" (Poster and Krüger 1990), "transformative learning" (Mezirow 1991) and "situated learning" (Lave and Wenger 1991).

Much of this debate reflects the complex reality of attempts to characterise different educational models which, whilst grounded in similar educational philosophies, differ significantly in terms of purpose, practice, context and content. Perhaps, on reflection, Coombs and Ahmed's non-definition has some merit.

Indeed, in assessing *Limmud*, I am guided in part by Coombs and Ahmed, not because of their bewilderment, but rather because so much of the language employed by respondents was ambiguous and, in certain instances, ambivalent. Not only did one respondent argue that she was "deeply suspicious of trying to capture this in any linear, analytic way", many respondents struggled to pin down key elements of the endeavour. The titles of several sections in the analysis reflect this: "the paradox of purposeful purposelessness"; "content undefined"; "the non-explicit heart of *Limmud*" and "rules without a rule book" all point to it. It is almost as if there is something ineffable about *Limmud*, and that in articulating it, its mystery may be damaged. Indeed, for this reason, I contemplated entitling this thesis "The Wonderful Refusal to Define" – not only does it draw on a quote from one respondent, it also captures this idea.

Limmud's philosophical base

Yet *Limmud* does exist within a certain philosophical tradition – thinkers like Dewey, Freire, Rogers, Gardner, Bruner, Noddings, Buber and Palmer (each of whom is associated in some way with non-formal education and whose work is highlighted in the literature review) would be drawn, I believe, to *Limmud's* educational model. The experience itself is

fundamental, social interaction in a caring communal context is paramount, learning is based on personal inquisition and appropriation, and allows for multiple learning styles. *Limmud* was also established in response to a significant critique of the British Jewish establishment and existing orthodoxies within Jewish education, and thus reflects a Jewish educational reaction inspired by the radical schools of Freire, Illich and Alinsky. Resonances of all these thinkers can be found in an examination of *Limmud*. Yet, as Colley, Hodgkinson and Malcolm (2002) argue, all of these thinkers' ideas have been developed in light of particular contexts; *Limmud* represents another different context, and thus deserves a more nuanced and particular assessment.

Contradictory ideas in creative tension

Limmud is, first and foremost, a product of its age. Its period of dramatic growth coincided with a new-found focus on Jewish education in the British Jewish community spearheaded by the Chief Rabbi, which fuelled its prominence. At least two of its early leaders were teachers trained during the 1970s, and during the course of this research, both demonstrated a familiarity with, and certain appreciation for the radical educational thought of that period (notably, Ivan Illich). Yet, they were also very much of the Jewish community, with strong links to the establishment, and they went on to hold significant and respected positions in communal organisations and schools. Herein lies a hint at arguably *Limmud's* most compelling characteristic – its extraordinary ability to hold two seemingly contradictory ideas in creative tension with one another.

The founders of *Limmud* were not radicals in the image of Freire, Illich or Alinsky. They were inspired by them, but they never opted to adopt extreme methods to challenge the mainstream. They were, in effect, both *of* the community and *against* the community, choosing to challenge its orthodoxies from within, whilst simultaneously seeking permission to do so. If they had leant one way or the other – towards radicalisation or conservatism – it is unlikely *Limmud* would have been created. Their capacity to balance the traditional with the modern, the conservative with the radical, is highly suggestive of the educational philosophy which ultimately emerged. In a profoundly revealing statement, one recounted the following story of the first *Limmud* in 1980:

“The very first *Limmud*, the coach arrived in the car park in Carmel... and the door opened and out of the coach stepped this tall, slim, statuesque all in black, purple spiked hair woman. None of us had ever seen her before, she came from nowhere and she had come because she’d seen the advert in *Time Out*... But she turned to help down the steep coach steps an elderly man [a university professor who was part of the mainstream community establishment]... I have never since seen a better picture than this... a completely new utter outsider holding the hand and helping down the absolute rock solid establishment figure... I thought that’s it – when I saw it, I thought I don’t want anymore, that’s it, that’s all I need.”

This seemingly conflicting image is repeated in conceptual form time and again within *Limmud*. Several examples are self-evident: different Jewish denominations sharing the same space, learning from and with one another; the deliberate lack of distinction between

teacher and student; and the mix of social, intellectual and active educational stimuli. The notion that certain categories belong in their boxes and should not mix is rejected outright by *Limmud*; it is rather in the mixing that learning occurs.

Examining the literature, categorical distinctions are remarkably common. In some of the educational philosophy that grounds non-formal education, Freire (1970) distinguishes between “problem-posing education” and “banking education”. Rogers (1974) contrasts self-learning that is “personally appropriated” with “information transfer”. There are ‘right’ approaches and ‘wrong’ approaches. Indeed, in many respects, the dividing line in educational philosophy is between content-centred education and person-centred education – between an essentialist approach to education that gives primacy to the delivery of a particular body of knowledge, versus a constructivist approach that allows the individual to determine her own learning pathways on her own terms. Philosophically, *Limmud* has a general preference for a progressive educational approach, and thus has clearly been influenced by this tradition; in Dewey’s (1902) terms, it rejects the type of traditional education that “fixes its attention upon the importance of the subject-matter of the curriculum as compared with the contents of the child's own experience.”²⁰⁹ However, Dewey clearly also acknowledges the challenge to an approach to education that “emphasises the freedom of the learner.”²¹⁰ As he stated, “We may reject knowledge of the past as the *end* of education and thereby only emphasise its importance as a *means*. When we do that we have a problem that is new in the story of education: How shall the young become acquainted with the past in such a way that the acquaintance is a potent agent in

²⁰⁹ Dewey, J. (1902). *The Child and the Curriculum* p.3.

²¹⁰ Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience and Education*, p.22.

appreciation of the living present?”²¹¹ The depth of Dewey’s answer cannot be adequately captured here, yet it can be pointed to in his rejection of “Either-Or philosophies”,²¹² his belief in “interaction... that assigns equal rights to both factors in experience – objective and internal conditions”²¹³ and, his argument in favour of both “the child” and “the curriculum” (1902) all point to it. For Dewey, education and learning should be social and interactive processes, and the extremes of both traditional education (where “the child is simply the immature being who is to be matured; he is the superficial being who is to be deepened”)²¹⁴ and child-centred education (in which “To the growth of the child all studies are subservient; they are instruments valued as they serve the needs of growth”)²¹⁵ are problematic. *Limmud* appears to honour this interaction: whilst learning is clearly person-centred, the place of Jewish content in the endeavour is equally central, and it is in the interaction between these that the richness of the learning takes place. In essence, *both* the individual *and* the Judaic content occupy the centre of *Limmud*, as well as the interaction between them.

Indeed, *Limmud* appears to thrive on the interaction of several seemingly competing forces. To highlight a striking example, one might assume that *Limmud* would support Freire’s strong preference for education to “facilitate freedom” and his opposition to education “for domestication”. Yet, in an important respect, it does not. It honours the facilitation of freedom undoubtedly – participants are entirely free to learn whatever they want, whenever and however they wish. However, there is also evident within *Limmud* a quietly-

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.23.

²¹² *Ibid.*, pp.17-23.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, p.42

²¹⁴ Dewey, *Child and the Curriculum*, p.13.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.* p.4.

stated, somewhat uncomfortable but nevertheless apparent desire for Jewish domestication – namely, for participants to become more embedded within Jewish communal life. It is a progressive form of domestication – it is looser and less rigid than the types of education that incensed Freire – but it is evident nonetheless. Viewed through the general lens of Jewish education, this is striking because Freire’s two types of education are mirrored, and typically separated from one another, in the Jewish world. Much of Jewish education, particularly but not exclusively in the more Orthodox parts of the community, is determined to “domesticate” young Jews, and culturally embed them within a particular Jewish context. On the other hand, a common watchword in more progressive circles is that Judaism should be “meaningful” or “comfortable” for the individual, and thus should adapt and amend itself around his wishes and desires. The logical corollary to this is a form of Jewish education that facilitates individual freedom. Yet *Limmud*, despite its apparent preference for individual freedom, in many respects bridges this tension and seeks to do both – to “domesticate” *and* facilitate freedom. In so doing, *Limmud* constitutes an interesting mix of non-formal and informal education with elements of formal learning present too, all interacting with one another to comprise a multi-faceted learning experience that defies simple categorisation, irrespective of the definition one brings to bear.

Echoes of this interactive element can also be found in *Limmud’s* responses to tensions within the literature on social capital. One of the most common distinctions drawn in the literature is between “bonding” and “bridging” social capital: the former is based on links within a particular, bounded group, the latter on links between one group and another. In Jewish terms, a sharp tension exists between these: concerns about intermarriage and

assimilation lead many to highlight the need for bonding social capital; at the same time, concerns about inter-denominational tensions lead others to stress the importance of bridging social capital. Again, there is evidence to suggest that *Limmud* does both: by creating a “bounded yet open” learning environment (Palmer 1998) for Jews, it acts as a sociological adhesive for bonding social capital between Jews. At the same time, by creating an environment in which all Jewish denominations are welcome and encouraged to interact and engage, it also acts as “sociological WD-40” for bridging social capital across Jewish difference (Putnam 2000).

Similarly, Burt’s (2001) distinction between “structural holes” and “network closure” is also held in creative tension at *Limmud*. According to him, structural holes exist between networks: those whose relationships span these holes have a competitive advantage in bridging social capital. Network closure exists within tightly-bound groups where there is internal trust and values-based norms of behaviour: those whose relationships exist within such a network have a competitive advantage in bonding social capital. Here again, one sees both of these dynamics active within the Jewish community, with some communities strongly attentive to network closure, and others intensely focused on structural holes. And again, *Limmud* prioritises both: by creating a closed Jewish environment for several days, a closed network is formed, yet by inviting Jewish diversity into it, the potential for individuals to span structural holes is quickly established.

Similarly, in very practical ways, *Limmud* muddies several normative educational categories. The most striking one is the distinction between teacher and student. In non-formal as well as formal education, this distinction is typically clear. At *Limmud* it is not. One can, indeed

should, be both. Admittedly, a certain meritocracy exists which situates individuals more clearly in one category or the other, but interaction is encouraged – not only between two individuals acting in the roles of teacher and student at a particular given moment, but within a single individual as she experiences the event. These interpersonal and intrapersonal experiences (Gardner 1983) are an essential part of the learning process; one is continually required to consider who one is – teacher, learner, or both – and, in so doing, cultivate a more sophisticated understanding of who one is as a human being and as a Jew. Content and context interact similarly at *Limmud* and are blurred and conflated; whereas most educational endeavours seek to engage students in certain ideas whilst situated in a particular educational context, at *Limmud* the communal context *is* the content.

Categorisations are very common in the literature on contemporary Jewry. In the extensive discussions about “Jewish continuity”, many commentators, particularly in the United States, report an apparent loss of Jewish collectivity or homogeneity (Cohen and Eisen 2000, Horowitz 2003, Greenberg and Nussbaum Cohen 2005) due to a growing emphasis on personal meaning; if Judaism has to be personally meaningful, its collective dimensions inevitably decline in the midst of the individual’s quest for the bespoke. As Cohen and Eisen (2000) report, “that which is personally meaningful has gained at the expense of that which is peoplehood-oriented.” In this conception, the individual is situated against the collective – there are competing claims that reflect those outlined above.²¹⁶ In response, schools of

²¹⁶ See, for example, Boyd and Moskovitz-Kalman (2003). *The Philosophers’ Retreat. Exploring the Place of Israel in the Lives of American Jews*. The document states: “Today, the young and engaged members of the American Jewish community are more marked by their levels of spiritual activity than their connections with Israel – according to research conducted by Steven M. Cohen, approximately 50% of American Jews are spiritually active in some way or another, in contrast to only 33% who feel very connected to Israel. Whereas a generation ago Jews connected to Judaism through the doors of Israel and the Shoah [Holocaust], today there is a reverse causality: attachment to Israel appears to rise only as attachment to Judaism deepens.” In this

thought, each of which have spawned centres of activity, have emerged in the Jewish world – for example, on the one hand, the Centre for Jewish Peoplehood Education in Jerusalem,²¹⁷ on the other, the Shalom Centre in Philadelphia.²¹⁸ The former strongly emphasises collective Jewish identity and works to strengthen inter-Jewish bonds of solidarity; the latter emphasises individual Jewish meaning and works to strengthen inter-faith and inter-cultural links. Intriguingly, at *Limmud*, any such divide is bridged; one is able to pursue that which is individually meaningful *at the same time* as situating oneself within the context of a collective, ‘peoplehood’-oriented experience.

Thus, conceptually, *Limmud* holds several “polarities” (Johnson 1992) in balance, notably the individual and the community, and the particular and the universal. Like Dewey, Johnson rejects “Either/Or thinking”, arguing that it “must be supplemented with ‘Both/And’ thinking in order to effectively manage dilemmas.”²¹⁹ For him, a distinction should be drawn between “polarities to manage” and “problems to solve.” The latter include relatively simple choices – e.g. to select candidate x or candidate y; the former include the type of tensions identified above. Johnson argues that such polarities should be managed by continually moving back and forth between the two poles in order to maximise the positive value of each. For example, an emphasis on individual freedom affords one the right to pursue his own interests and desires, but may, over time, lead to a loss of collective spirit. In response to this loss, renewed organisational emphasis may be placed on activities designed to build community which, in turn, may lead to a reduction in individual freedom

conception, “spiritual activity” (understood to reflect the individual meaning agenda) and “connections with Israel” (understood to embody the peoplehood one) are pitted against one another.

²¹⁷ <http://ipeoplehood.org/>.

²¹⁸ <https://theshalomcenter.org/content/about-shalom-center-mission-more>.

²¹⁹ Johnson, B. (1992). *Polarity Management: Identifying and Managing Unsolvable Problems*.

and a subsequent need to re-emphasise it. Johnson's theory claims that effective management of such polarities ensures optimal benefit of both poles at minimum cost to either. Irrespective of the veracity of his argument, *Limmud* seems to manage such polarities extraordinarily well. The individual/collective polarity is managed by creating an environment which is intensely collective, yet simultaneously affords the individual complete freedom to explore it in an unfettered manner. The particular/universal one is similarly managed, albeit in two distinct ways – within a Jewish communal context and within a wider societal one. Internally, one is able to be an adjectival Jew (i.e. "Reform", "Orthodox", etc.) at *Limmud*, and opportunities to be so are both allowed and facilitated. At the same time, the cultural environment encourages interaction between factions and denominations, thereby creating a larger Jewish universe for all. At the larger societal level, *Limmud* may be the particular side of the particular/universal polarity, providing space and time for particular interests and commonalities to develop, in the knowledge that much of the rest of participants' experience outside of *Limmud* emphasises more universal concerns.

Like Dewey and Johnson, Palmer (1998) rejects "either-ors" and embraces "both-and's", arguing that "in certain circumstances truth is a paradoxical joining of apparent opposites, and if we want to know that truth, we must learn to embrace those opposites as one." Indeed, holding opposites together "creates an electric *charge* that keeps us awake" and "a good teacher must stand where personal and public meet, dealing with the thundering flow of traffic at an intersection" which feels "like crossing a freeway on foot." The "wow factor" described by several respondents may in some way be fuelled by this electric charge – the drama around the constant interaction of competing forces certainly forms part of it. However, Palmer may be pointing to something more profound: that it is at the intersection

between all of the “either-ors” that learning happens best, and the location of a good teacher – or learning environment – at all such junctions creates the opportunity for genuine learning to take place. Philosophically, *Limmud* constitutes such a learning intersection – a place where the polarities of contemporary Jewish life rub up against one another to create an electric charge that fuels learning.

This blurring of, and movement between categories may account for the Orthodox Jewish critique of *Limmud*. In many respects, traditional Judaism strongly emphasises distinctions – for example, between milk and meat (in the laws of *kashrut*), between linen and wool (in the laws of *shaatnez*), between the holy and the profane, light and darkness, the days of the week and the Sabbath, and between Jews and non-Jews (in the weekly *havdalah* service).²²⁰ Categories are strongly bounded in Judaism and liminal moments are often perceived to be dangerous.²²¹ In contrast, *Limmud* embraces the liminal, drawing excitement and insight from the drama and insight one finds there.

²²⁰ The term “*kashrut*” refers to the Jewish dietary laws; the term “*shaatnez*” refers to a biblical prohibition found in the Books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy. The “*havdalah*” service takes place at the end of the Sabbath and, in the final blessing, sanctifies each of the distinctions listed.

²²¹ To give one example, the Passover *seder* includes two seemingly contradictory statements: “let all who are hungry come and eat” and “pour out your wrath on the nations!” The former welcomes others, the latter rejects them, reflecting Judaism’s changing and often fraught relationship with the wider world. At a particular point during the *seder*, the door is opened as if in support of both these ideas – to both welcome people in, and to “pour out wrath”. This is a liminal moment, and it is perhaps no accident that the prophet Elijah is summoned at that point – in Jewish thought and practice the boundary between the inner and outer worlds is one that should be crossed with extreme caution.

Practice of community

However, the question remains of *how Limmud* manages polarities and draws strength from the liminal. The answer, I believe, lies in the respondents' continual emphasis on an understanding of "community" which has resonances of Lave and Wenger's (1991) "community of practice" and Parker's (1998) "community of truth". The "community of practice" is grounded in Lave and Wenger's chief insight – that learning is social and comes largely from participation in daily life. *Limmud* accepts this principle: it provides a multiple-day opportunity for participants to live within, and participate in a Jewish community of practice. Learning is situated – attendees fully participate in "planet *Limmud*" and generate Jewish meaning in dialogue with one another and the formal programme. To paraphrase Lave and Wenger's language, whilst they learn *from* "talk about" Judaism, they also learn *to* "talk about" Judaism. Furthermore, there are no barriers to entry, so *Limmud* affords "legitimate peripheral participation" in its community of practice, creating the possibility for "full participation" in due course. In this way, it acts as a gateway for the curious but unengaged: *Limmud* offers an opportunity to dip into Judaism for a short while without demanding any on-going commitment.

However, Lave and Wenger's theories were developing through observation of very different contexts to *Limmud* – midwives, tailors, US Navy quartermasters, meat-cutters, and non-drinking alcoholics in Alcoholics Anonymous. In these contexts, the communities that emerge certainly have meaning and value for their members, but they do not hold the same profundity of meaning of "Jewish peoplehood", an idea that forms a fundamental part of a 4,000 year-old tradition. A Jewish community is not simply a utilitarian entity; it is the

pre-condition for Jewish life. Judaism cannot be practised alone; it requires community.²²² Thus, whilst *Limmud* in certain ways is a “community of practice”, it may be more insightful to describe it as a “practice of community.” By situating participants in an intensely Jewish environment, by requiring them to continually make choices about how they spend their time, by creating the necessity to navigate their way around the community, by inviting them to actively contribute in the on-going creation of the community, and by creating a context in which the possibility for social interaction is maximised, participants are, in effect, *practising Jewish community*. Many Jews today dip in and out of Jewish communal contexts; the experience of practising Jewish communal living for a short but intensive period is, in many respects, the essence of *Limmud’s* educational endeavour. Furthermore, by making that experience a powerful one – by seeking to achieve “the wow factor” – participants’ understanding of Jewish community is potentially transformed.

Palmer’s “Community of truth”

Palmer (1998) adds further dimensions to this in articulating his concept of the “community of truth.” The hallmark of such a community is “a web of communal relationships”, yet for Palmer, the community goes beyond interpersonal relationships. At the heart of it is a “subject” or, what he terms a “great thing”, which in the context of *Limmud*, is probably best articulated as Judaism.²²³ For Palmer, great things “are the vital nexus of community in

²²² For example, in order to recite certain daily prayers, the presence of a “*minyan*” is required – a community of ten people (usually men).

²²³ Palmer writes: “By *great things*, I mean the subjects around which the circle of seekers has always gathered – not the disciplines that study these subjects, not the texts that talk about them, nor the theories that explain them, but the things themselves. I mean the genes and ecosystems of biology, the symbols and referents of

education. It is in the act of gathering around them and trying to understand them – as the first human beings must have gathered around fire – that we become who we are as knowers, teachers and learners.” Furthermore, communities of truth must do four things to achieve their finest form: “invite diversity” into them (“because diverse viewpoints are demanded by the manifold mysteries of great things”); “embrace ambiguity” (“because we understand the inadequacy of our concepts to embrace the vastness of things”); “welcome creative conflict” (“because conflict is required to correct our biases and prejudices about the nature of great things”); and “practise honesty” (because to lie about what we have seen would be to betray the truth of great things”). In addition, within communities of truth, people should “experience humility” (“because humility is the only lens through which great things can be seen – and once we have seen them, humility is the only posture possible”). ‘Truth’ for Palmer is not a static notion; it is rather “the passionate and disciplined process of inquiry and dialogue itself”; “the dynamic conversation of a community that keeps testing old conclusions and coming to new ones.”

Essential to Palmer is creating an appropriate space to allow a community of truth to develop. Intriguingly, Palmer argues that such a space should itself be littered with the paradoxes of “either-ors”: it should “be bounded and open”; “be hospitable and ‘charged’”; “invite the voice of the individual and the voice of the group”; “honour the ‘little’ stories of the students and the ‘big’ stories of the disciplines and tradition”; “support solitude and surround it with the resources of community”; and “welcome both silence and speech.”

Each of these tensions can be found in the space constructed by *Limmud*.

philosophy and theology, the archetypes of betrayal and forgiveness and loving and loss that are the stuff of literature. I mean the artefacts and lineages of anthropology, the materials of engineering with their limits and potentials, the logic of systems in management, the shapes and colours of music and art, the novelties and patterns of history, the elusive idea of justice under law.”

Conclusion

Palmer's image of what ought to be is undoubtedly an idealised picture. Yet in many respects, it reflects the respondents' portrayal of *Limmud*. The language is more dramatic and the imagery more elevated, yet the illustration of a community of learners in dialogue with one another about a subject with which they wish to cultivate a relationship captures much of what was reported. Furthermore, the ideas of diversity, ambiguity, creative conflict, honesty, humility, inquiry and dialogue all featured in various ways and to varying degrees in the course of the interviews. Indeed, they comprise the core value of respect that so many respondents highlighted as key. Arguably, the only missing element from Palmer's analysis is volunteering, which is the essential activity that allows the *Limmud* community to function and exist. In essence, *Limmud* comprises a group of individuals involved in the practicing of a community of truth, in which Judaism constitutes the intellectual "great thing", respect constitutes the core interactive value, and volunteering constitutes the active operative engine. The skills one is compelled to practise in such an environment – navigation, decision-making, social interaction and formalised learning – all comprise part of the praxis of community.

Viewed through a normative educational lens, one would not be mistaken to argue that *Limmud* fails all sorts of tests. Its demands no qualifications from its teachers – scholars with decades of experience in academia stand alongside amateurs with no qualifications in their field whatsoever. There are no barriers to entry for students – anyone is free to attend any class, irrespective of background, age, knowledge or experience. No coherent learning pathway is set or even suggested, and the quality of content on offer varies dramatically;

indeed, falsehoods, generalisations and half-truths are commonplace, and not all are spotted or challenge. The buildings within which *Limmud* takes place were designed for other purposes entirely, and whilst efforts are made to transform them to create “planet *Limmud*”, a purpose-built site would look substantially different. If we assess *Limmud* in these ways, there is little to commend it.

Yet, a normative educational lens is an inappropriate one through which to analyse *Limmud*. The correct lens is a community one. The most significant learning going on within *Limmud* concerns how to *be* in community. It is taught through experience; participants are afforded the opportunity to live in a Jewish community for a short while, and in so doing, become compelled to *practise* Jewish community. The education is neither solely content-centred nor solely person-centred; it is community-centred, wherein the paradoxes, polarities and inconsistencies that exist within education and the community naturally interact with one another, and the teacher-learners are continually invited to stand at the intersections where they do.

It is not the “silver bullet” of Jewish education. One in five participants would neither return nor recommend it to others (Cohen and Kopelowitz 2011). Orthodoxy’s critique (Sylvester 2004, Elton 2011) is legitimate and grounded in Jewish thought and tradition, although, as Palmer argues, it is equally fuelled by fear.²²⁴ It cannot compete with the formal institutions

²²⁴ Palmer writes: “As long as we inhabit a universe made homogeneous by our refusal to admit otherness, we can maintain the illusion that we possess the truth about ourselves and the world – after all, there is no ‘other’ to challenge us! But as soon as we admit pluralism, we are forced to admit ours is not the only standpoint, the only experience, the only way, and the truth we have built our lives on begins to feel fragile.” He adds: “If we embrace diversity, we find ourselves on the doorstep of our next fear: fear of the conflict that will ensue when divergent truths meet... [and] the fear that a live encounter with otherness will challenge or even compel us to change our lives.”

of adult Jewish learning – the universities, *yeshivot* and seminaries – the logic of their curricula, the quality of their faculty and their barriers to entry all create a more coherent educational product. However, it represents a critical response to the challenges outlined by Jewish thinkers in the early 1990s as they sought to address the possibility that “the very continuity of a large segment of the Jewish people” may be at risk.²²⁵ It demonstrates that part of the solution, for some at least, involves creating opportunities for individuals to practise Jewish community, to live for a short while within a Jewish communal context which embraces Judaism’s rich diversity and utilises its tensions to fuel individual and shared learning.

²²⁵ *A Time to Act*, op.cit.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

Introduction

Since the early 1990s, there has been a global call for the renewal of Jewish life that was sparked, in part, by data from the United States showing a dramatic increase in the intermarriage rate there. Numerous efforts have been made throughout the Jewish world in response to this call, yet the British response which appears to have attracted global recognition above all others is *Limmud*. Indeed, the literature about *Limmud*, which is predominantly journalistic rather than academic, demonstrates how the event has been continually lauded, and often portrayed as one of the most dynamic, interesting and significant examples of Jewish education in the world today. Whilst some of this literature attempts to capture the principles that underpin the endeavour, no systematic attempt had been made to examine its philosophy in a scientific manner, through in-depth qualitative interviews with key informants, in order to capture precisely the underlying ideas that shape its essence. This thesis was designed to fill that gap. Its goal was to develop a rich and detailed articulation of the educational philosophy of an initiative that, whilst challenging many of the orthodoxies of Jewish educational philosophy and practice, appeared to be extraordinarily successful. In undertaking it, I was eager to deepen my understanding of Jewish education following years of experience working within the field in Britain and abroad. In analysing the literature, I was guided by theoretical works on non-formal education and social capital, and developed a research protocol based on these. This protocol examined *Limmud's* purposes, content, processes and context, as well as the place of social interactions, structures and rules in the endeavour. My sample included individuals

who have been centrally involved in running and developing *Limmud* throughout its existence, from some of its founders to some of its most recent leaders. Their ideas were subsequently analysed, and tested in focus group discussion with individuals who have attended one or two *Limmud* conferences.

In this chapter, I summarise the thesis findings, situate my conclusions in the wider literature and outline how the results may contribute to educational debate in the non-formal, Jewish and wider realms. In addition, I highlight the gaps in my analysis, and consider how the findings might be employed in future research, before concluding with an assessment of my own learning through the course of this research.

Summarising the findings

The fundamental question this study has asked is: what is *Limmud's* implicit educational philosophy? In seeking to address this question, it has focused on three main subsidiary questions:

- i) Should *Limmud* be categorised as a formal, non-formal or informal educational initiative, if indeed any of these terms apply, and what does it teach about these categorisations?
- ii) To what extent is social capital central to *Limmud's* educational approach, and what is the place of social capital in Jewish and general education?

- iii) In what ways, if at all, is *Limmud* a response to the challenges of Jewish community continuity and renewal?

Educational theorists have long struggled to draw clear distinctions between formal, non-formal and informal education. This is further complicated by the common employment of the term “informal” in Jewish educational discourse to denote what is more commonly described as “non-formal” in wider British educational discourse. Any attempts I made to situate *Limmud* in the definitions offered by the various theoreticians highlighted in the literature review, fell short; *Limmud* typically met part, but not all of each one. Indeed, even in the philosophical literature, whilst *Limmud’s* approach sits alongside the traditions of Dewey, Freire, Carl Rogers and Gardner to some extent, it doesn’t wholly reject alternative perspectives. To some degree at least, it serves as “preparation for [Jewish] living” (Dewey 1937) and “domestication” (Freire 1972) into Jewish communal life, and whilst “information transfer” (Rogers 1974) is not the preferred educational mode, individual teachers are free to construct their classes as they wish. Furthermore, whilst *Limmud* offers a vast array of learning opportunities to cater for each of Gardner’s (1983) “intelligences”, as is the case within the formal education sector, most formal sessions emphasise the “linguistic” and “logical-mathematical” over and above the “musical”, “body-kinesthetic” or “spatial”. In essence, whilst *Limmud* sits most comfortably within the broad realms of the non-formal and informal, it contains important elements of the formal too. As a few respondents commented, *Limmud* thrives on a certain “refusal to define”, and this appears to apply even when it comes to the fundamental question of whether to situate it within the formal, non-formal or informal realms. It is all of these, and the interaction between them. Arguably, this indicates that the categories themselves, whilst valuable to a degree, conceal as much

as they reveal, hold value for different people at different times in different ways, and should be applied with appropriate care and attention to the specifics of the definition of the term, and the activity they seek to describe.

Concerning social capital, it is clear that interpersonal connections and networks, and their norms of reciprocity and trust, are vital to *Limmud*. It could not function without them: they play an essential role in the culture of the event, and are fundamental to the voluntary spirit that constructs and manages it. Putnam argues that having social capital helps people to sustain information flow, solve problems and improve one another's lives; in so doing, it mobilises solidarity, widens awareness of shared fate and allows communities to advance; certainly all of these theories apply to *Limmud*. Whilst it privileges "bonding" social capital over "bridging" (Putnam 2000), and emphasises "network closure" before "structural holes" (Burt 2001), *Limmud* straddles all of these, seeking primarily to bind Jews to one another, whilst simultaneously working to traverse (rather than blur or erase) existing boundaries both within the Jewish community and between the Jewish community and wider society. Much of the literature about non-formal education and informal Jewish education highlights the importance of social interaction – stress is placed variously on "active dialogue" (Chazan 1991), "prizing" the learner and "non-possessive caring" (Rogers 1974), "honouring personal stories" (Palmer 1998), and creating a "safe space" (Reisman 1990) that "invites learners to listen to each other and react with dignity and decency" (Chazan 1991). Again, these are all core elements of *Limmud*: social capital both creates *Limmud* and emerges from it. Certainly, *Limmud* places heavy emphasis on social interaction; if its approach is valued, the wider implication for both Jewish and general education is that the development of

interpersonal links and the skills required to establish them is of vital importance to individual and collective development.

Limmud should be understood as one of several important responses to the challenges of Jewish continuity and renewal. An annual week-long event cannot hope to achieve the same learning outcomes as an extensive long-term formal education programme designed to cultivate specialisation in one particular area. Yet as the nature of family and community change (Schivelbush 1986, Urry 2007), it acknowledges and even embraces “liquid modernity” (Bauman 2000) and the desire to belong in a constantly-changing and uncertain world (Hobsbawm 1998). In the particular Jewish context, it responds to both the challenges of the inward turn and search for individual meaning (Cohen and Eisen 2000, Horowitz 2003) and the decline of Jewish peoplehood (Woocher 2005, Cohen and Wertheimer 2006) that were outlined in chapter 2. At the heart of *Limmud’s* educational philosophy is an approach to learning that refuses to define a normative approach to learning; instead, it invites multiple approaches into its space and allows them to interact freely with one another. Indeed, *Limmud’s* critical ingredient may be found in the way it allows the individual and the collective to interact with one another, maximising the individual’s freedom to pursue her own needs and interests, but always situating that freedom within a communal context that seeks to inspire and support rather than coerce and suffocate. This mirrors one of the great educational debates of the modern age – between person-centred and content-centred education, and it is this element that holds the greatest value to Jewish and wider education. Educational theory and practice is littered with investigations about how to resolve the individual/collective dynamic; *Limmud* constitutes a fascinating model of education that believes it should be managed rather than

resolved, and offers some important insights into how an appropriate balance might be struck. Whilst this position situates it in opposition to approaches to education that believe the dynamic should be resolved, its claim should assure its place in educational discourse.

Gaps in the analysis and implications for future research

The data gathered for this thesis extended to over quarter of a million words on more than five hundred pages. Whilst I endeavoured to include as many insights as possible, a number of areas remain. One such example is the Britishness of *Limmud*; it is striking that this educational model emerged from Britain, and respondents offered several significant insights concerning why this may have been the case, the nature of its British peculiarities, and whether it is fully replicable in other national contexts. Similarly, respondents had much more to say about cognitive social capital than I could realistically include in this thesis; the internal language and culture that exists within *Limmud* is informative and important, and much more could be said. Furthermore, scant attention was given to the differences between the experiences of the volunteers as contrasted with the participants in general. Whilst these categories overlap, they also exist independently of one another, and the volunteer experience both at *Limmud* and in the periods preceding and following it, are important areas where data exists but I was unable to cover. In addition, greater attention could have been given to the data from the focus group discussions that examined the extent to which the principles outlined in the individual interviews resonated with new participants. Upon analysis, I chose not to explore this in detail, not least because the rest of the data were so rich, but they remain a largely untapped source of insight. More could

also have been done to examine *Limmud's* role as a catalyst for wider community development, but, again, there was insufficient space to examine this in any detail. All of these are topics about which I plan to submit journal articles in the future.

More generally, the three fields of non-formal education, social capital theory and Jewish education are all so extensive it was inconceivable to fully summarise any of them. I am aware that my literature selections are incomplete, and the insights of numerous other writers in each of the fields would have added to my analysis. I hope that others will bring these to the same topic in the course of time, and both add new insights and challenge my conclusions. Indeed, the most important lesson I have learned from this work is the importance of focus in research; despite my best attempts to limit its scope, this research extended some way beyond what was feasible in a thesis of this length. Nevertheless, in so doing, it has helped me to see what more should be done. Future research ought to investigate the value of, and interplay between the different definitions of formal, non-formal and informal education, and consider how these categorisations either contribute to, or limit, educational practice. It should look closely at the importance of different types of social interaction in education, not least between teacher and student, both from the interpersonal and intrapersonal perspectives. It should explore the ways in which individuals and communities are empowered and taught to manage the polarity between the individual and the collective, and the ways in which the educational context – Bettelheim's "therapeutic milieu", Saxe's "cultural island" or Palmer's "community of truth" – enable this. Ultimately perhaps, it should investigate how religious, ethnic or other types of communities maintain existing tradition, whilst enabling renewal to occur. However, in the final analysis, it will probably take many more decades before a full assessment can be

made of *Limmud's* impact on the British Jewish community, and even then, it will need to be situated in the context of demographic developments and other influential factors. For the time being, it is legitimate to follow its plaudits, and make every effort to continue to examine and comprehend its philosophy, practice and impact.

On a personal level, conducting this study has been a rich and valuable experience. Aside from the insights I have gained about *Limmud* itself, it introduced me to new literature, and taught me how to apply other academics' ideas to help inform my work, from designing the research, through fieldwork and data analysis, all the way to writing up the findings. This was an important insight for me; whilst I have conducted qualitative research before, doing it within an academic framework forced me to be more systematic and robust in my approach, and more thorough in my analysis. I believe that my interviewing technique became more fluent and methodical during the fieldwork phase; there is a difficult balance to be struck between following a clear structure, framework and timetable, and allowing the respondent to speak openly and freely. Whilst the interviewer is always somewhat dependent upon the interviewee's innate interests and abilities, I learned through the process to be as clear as possible about my research goals, while creating space for the interviewee or focus group participant to express herself in her own terms. During the analysis phase, I tried to be as rigorous as possible, attempting to stick as closely as possible to my research goals whilst remaining true to the voices of the respondents. Determining which ideas to include and exclude was complex, particularly with such a rich and detailed dataset; I focused my attention on answering the research question, but in so doing, often felt as if I had more to say. My desire to continue to use the data in the future for potential journal articles stems, in part, from this. I am particularly grateful for the clear and

structured feedback I received from my tutor throughout; whilst I obviously won't always have the luxury of his insights and experience in my future work, it is clear to me how important it is for someone to play that role, and to seek out additional sources of expertise wherever possible. In summary, there is little doubt in my mind that I have become a more rounded researcher as a result of conducting this study, and whilst I feel there is much more for me to learn, I hope that I will be able to take the lessons I have absorbed, both from this study and my time at the University of Nottingham more generally, and apply them in my future work.

APPENDIX A: GLOSSARY OF HEBREW AND JEWISH TERMS

Agunah: (lit. 'anchored' or 'chained'), situation in which a woman is refused a divorce under Jewish law, which renders her unable to remarry under Jewish law. In such cases, it is quite common for the recalcitrant husband to be shunned by the community.

Ashkenazi: collective term for Jews able to who trace their lineage back to the medieval Jewish communities along the River Rhine in Germany.

Avodah: "service" or "worship".

BCE: Before the Common Era; the Jewish equivalent of BC (Before Christ).

Beit midrash (pl. batei midrash): lit. "house of interpretation"; a Jewish study room or hall, typically found in a *yeshiva* or synagogue.

Betar: Zionist youth movement established in Riga in 1923 by the Revisionist Zionist, Vladimir (Ze've) Jabontinsky. Politically aligned with the contemporary Likud Party in Israel.

Bnei Akiva: Orthodox Zionist youth movement established in Mandatory Palestine in 1929. Politically aligned with the National Religious Party in Israel.

CE: Common Era; the Jewish equivalent of AD (Anno Domini).

Chadar ochel: dining room.

Chanukah: eight-day Jewish holiday commemorating the rededication of the (second) temple in Jerusalem at the time of the Maccabean revolt in 165 BCE. It is celebrated annually on the Hebrew date 25 Kislev, which typically falls in December.

Charedi (pl. charedim): strictly Orthodox (lit. "fear" or "anxiety", as in those who tremble in awe of God).

Chasidut (Chasidic; Chasidism): a Jewish movement founded by the Baal Shem Tov (Master of the Good Name) or "Besht" in 18th century Eastern Europe, and particularly took root in Poland, Lithuania and Ukraine. Based upon, and heavily influenced by "Kabbalah" (Jewish mysticism), it places heavy emphasis on simple and joyful service of God, notably through prayer and acts of loving-kindness.

Cheder: Jewish supplementary school; literally "room".

Chavruta: a traditional approach to talmudic study, which involves a pair of students, usually of similar ability, independently learning, discussing and debating a shared text. It is most commonly found in *yeshivot* or similar institutions.

Chinuch: education (lit. dedication).

Conservative Judaism: a modern stream of Judaism founded in 19th century Germany that became fully institutionalised in the United States in the early 20th. Grounded in the philosophy of “positive historical Judaism”, it sought both to modernise Judaism from its orthodoxies, whilst conserving some of fundamental traditional elements rejected by Reform Judaism.

Dayan: a senior rabbi, especially one who sits in a religious court.

Gemara: component of the Talmud comprising rabbinical analysis of and commentary on the Mishna.

Gemilut chasadim: good deeds.

Get: a Jewish divorce certificate.

Habonim: youth movement founded in East London in 1928. Originally non-Zionist, it adopted a Labour Zionist position from 1935, and went on to establish several *kibbutzim* in Israel.

Halacha: Jewish law (comprising biblical and Talmudic law as well as later customs and traditions. Also “halachic”: pertaining to Jewish law.

Hashomer Hatza'ir: socialist Zionist youth movement and political party founded in Galicia in 1913.

Havdalah: (lit. “separation”), the service that marks the end of the Sabbath.

Kashrut: Jewish dietary laws.

Kibbutz: an Israeli collective settlement based on socialist and democratic principles.

Kiddush ha-Shem: (lit. “sanctification of God’s name); refers to an act that brings honour or respect to God. Often contrasted with a *chilul ha-Shem*, a desecration of God’s name.

Kiruv: lit. “bringing near” or “rapprochement.” In recent times it has become common parlance for the practice of reaching out to secularised Jews in order to turn them towards Orthodox Judaism.

La-shem shamayim: lit. “for the sake of heaven”. Typically used in relation to a debate, argument or dispute that honours God (i.e. that is for positive or constructive purposes).

Liberal Judaism: progressive Jewish movement, founded in the UK in 1902. Places strong emphasis on modern scholarship, inclusiveness, intellectual honesty and a values-based approach to Jewish life (over and above one grounded in traditional ritual).

Limmud: (lit. “learning”); a British Jewish charity founded in 1980 that runs a range of cross-communal Jewish educational events, including the flagship “conference” held in the UK every December.

Ma'ariv: Evening prayers.

Machloket: a debate, argument or dispute.

Masorti: (lit. “traditional”); one of the British Jewish denominational movements that is most closely aligned with Conservative Judaism (see above).

Matzah: unleavened bread, traditionally eaten during the Passover festival.

Mikve: a bath used for the purposes of Jewish ritual immersion.

Minyan: a quorum of ten Jewish adults (usually males) required to perform certain Jewish rituals.

Mishna: first major written redaction of Jewish oral tradition and first major work of Rabbinic Judaism (ca.200CE).

Mitzvah: religious commandment or obligation. Also: good deed.

Nudnik: a derogatory term for someone who is annoying or irritating.

Passover: Jewish festival commemorating the biblical exodus from Egypt (Hebrew: “Pesach”).

Peoplehood: refers to the ethnic or tribal dimension of Jewishness as opposed to the religious one – the idea that the Jews are a people, nation or ethnicity as well as, or over and above, a religious group.

Reconstructionist Judaism: modern American Jewish movement that developed between the late 1920s and 1940s, based on Mordecai Kaplan’s philosophy of Judaism as a progressively evolving civilization.

Reform Judaism: modern stream of Judaism founded in 19th century Germany that regards traditional Jewish law as a set of guidelines rather than obligations, and calls for the modernisation of Jewish traditions, rituals and belief.

Renewal Judaism (or Jewish Renewal): modern American Jewish movement that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s and seeks to reinvigorate contemporary Judaism with the application of mystical, *Chasidic*, musical and meditative practices.

Seder: (lit. “order”). A ritual service/meal that takes place in Jewish homes on the first (and often second) night of Passover.

Sephardi: collective term for Jews able to trace their lineage back to the Iberian peninsula prior to the expulsion from there in the late fifteenth century.

Shaatznez: a biblical prohibition against the wearing of a garment made of both wool and lines (found in the Books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy).

Shabbat: The Jewish Sabbath, which begins just before sunset on Fridays, and ends just after the appearance of three stars in the sky on Saturday evenings.

Shacharit: Morning prayers.

Shechita: Jewish ritual slaughter.

Shomrei Shabbat: (lit. guardians of the Sabbath). Means Sabbath observant in accordance with Jewish law.

Sh'ma: one of, if not the most fundamental expression of Jewish faith in the liturgy. Recited twice daily (in the morning and evening), as well as before going to sleep, it is also the final prayer Jews traditionally utter before death. The text comes from three separate biblical passages – Deuteronomy 6:4-9, 11:13-21, and Numbers 15:37-41.

Shuk: open air market (from the Arabic “souk”).

Talmud: the main compendium of Jewish oral law and one of the central texts of Judaism. It is comprised of two key components – the “Mishna” (ca.200 CE) and the “Gemara (ca.500 CE), and records rabbinic discussions pertaining to Jewish law, ethnics, philosophy, customs and history. Also “talmudic”: from the Talmud.

Talmud torah: (lit. “learning Torah”). Refers both to learning itself, and a traditional Jewish primary school.

Torah: The first five books of the Bible (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy), which comprise the foundational story of the Jewish people and the basis of all of Jewish law. Sometimes used as a synonym for the Jewish canon as a whole – “studying Torah” often refers to the study of any traditional Jewish texts.

Torah lishma: studying Judaism for its own sake – i.e. not for any professional or financial reward. One who does this is considered extremely worthy in Jewish tradition.

Torah she-b'al peh: the Jewish oral tradition; evolved over the course of several centuries before it was finally codified in the *Talmud*.

Treif: (lit. torn); Yiddish term referring to food that does not conform to Jewish dietary laws.

Wissenschaft des Judentums: (German for “Jewish Studies”); 19th century German movement that called for the critical scientific investigation of Jewish texts and literature, in accordance with academic norms.

Yeshivah (pl. yeshivot): institute for the study of traditional Jewish texts.

Yom tov: Jewish holiday or festival (lit. "good day").

APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION FORM

My name is Jonathan Boyd and I am a research student working for the degree of Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) at the School of Education, University of Nottingham, UK, under the supervision of Professor W. John Morgan.

I am conducting research about *Limmud*, the annual festival of Jewish learning in the United Kingdom. The purpose of the research is to explore and make explicit the implicit educational philosophy of *Limmud*, in order to better understand how it functions, and build a study that will allow others, both within and beyond the Jewish world, to learn about its underlying educational goals, principles and practices. Expressed succinctly, my main research question is: *what is the educational philosophy of Limmud?*

I am using two approaches to conduct the research: (i) face-to-face interviews with individual informants which will last for between 60 and 90 minutes; and (ii) focus groups, which will last for 70 minutes. During the interviews and focus groups, I will be asking a series of questions about the *Limmud* Conference, focusing on its educational purpose, processes, content and location, as well as the nature of the dynamics between different people and ideas. I am interested in how you understand and experience *Limmud*, and how you feel it is intended to be understood and experienced.

Interviews and focus groups will be recorded and subsequently transcribed. The data will be treated in the strictest confidence, and will only be reported in anonymous form. Data generated by the research (e.g. transcripts of research interviews) will be kept in a safe and secure location and will be used purely for the purposes of the research project (including dissemination of findings). No-one other than my supervisors and examiners will have access to any of the data collected.

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary, and you are at liberty to withdraw at any time without prejudice or negative consequences. This research will in no way pose any risk or harm to you, but if you have any concerns whatsoever, you should feel free to discuss these with me, my supervisor, or the Research Ethics Coordinator at the University of Nottingham, all of whose contact details are below. I am also willing to provide further information about myself and the research study should you require this.

For further details, or to raise any concerns, please feel free to contact:

Jonathan Boyd
jonathanboyd123@gmail.com

Professor W. John Morgan
John.Morgan@nottingham.ac.uk

School of Education Research Ethics Coordinator
educationresearchethics@nottingham.ac.uk

APPENDIX C: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Dear research participant,

My name is Jonathan Boyd. I am a research student working for the degree of Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) at the School of Education, University of Nottingham (U.K.) under the supervision of Professor W. John Morgan. I am conducting research which investigates the underlying educational goals, principles and practices of *Limmud*, the annual festival of Jewish learning in the United Kingdom.

My study involves a combination of face-to-face interviews with individual informants which will last for one hour, and focus groups which will last for one-and-a-half hours. These interviews and focus groups will involve discussion of the *Limmud* conference, focusing on aspects of its educational purpose, processes, content and location, as well as the nature of the dynamics between different people and ideas.

Although there is no direct benefit to you, the results of the study may assist in developing a better understanding of the issues and concerns involved, and they may affect Jewish education in particular, and non-formal and informal education in general.

If you have any questions about this research study or your potential participation in this study, please contact me, my supervisors or the Research Ethics Co-ordinator at the following addresses:

Jonathan Boyd: jonathanboyd123@gmail.com

Professor W. John Morgan: John.Morgan@nottingham.ac.uk

School of Education Research Ethics Coordinator: educationresearchethics@nottingham.ac.uk

Yours faithfully,

Jonathan Boyd
Doctoral Student
School of Education, University of Nottingham

(continued overleaf)

Project title: Understanding the implicit educational philosophy of *Limmud*

Researcher's name: Jonathan Boyd

Supervisor's name: Professor W. John Morgan

I consent to participate in this study. I understand that the interview will be audio taped. I grant permission to be quoted directly, but confidentially, in the final research report.

Signature

Date

Personal Information

Name: _____

Age: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

If currently working:

Job position: _____

If currently studying:

Post-secondary education (Institute/College/University): _____

Programme title: _____

Duration: _____

Year of study (at present): _____

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. Introduction

- Give respondent the “Participant Information Form” (Appendix B) and go through it with them. Invite questions.
- Give respondent “Participant Consent Form” (Appendix C) and ask them to complete it.
- Turn on audio recording equipment

2. Non-formal education

2.1 Purposes

- What does *Limmud* conference seek to achieve? What are its purposes, goals, ambitions?
 - o Would you say its purposes are expressed explicitly at the conference, or implicitly, or both? Can you give me some examples?
 - o Whose purposes are dominant: *Limmud’s* (i.e. the organisation/conference), the learners, or are they both equal?
 - o To what extent can outcomes of the conference be measured against established purposes?
 - o Do you think *Limmud’s* purposes have changed over time? If so, how? Can you give examples?

2.2 Content

- What are participants expected to learn at *Limmud* conference? Who sets these expectations?
 - o What is actually being learned? Is there a notion of the educated *Limmud* “graduate”?
 - o Is there a view that certain knowledge or certain skills ought to be acquired? If so, what is that?
 - o Is there a view that *new* knowledge ought to be created or developed as a result of the *Limmud* experience? (i.e. that it is not only about learning from a canon, but that new insights – what might be termed *chiddushim* in Hebrew – will emerge). If so, to what purpose? Is it a collective new knowledge, or something that will vary from individual from individual?

2.3 Process

- What do you think the *Limmud* learner actually experiences during the conference?

- How does the learner behave? Is there a view on what the learner *should* ideally do?
- What is the relationship between learner and teacher? To what extent is learning individual, and to what extent collective or collaborative?
- How, if at all, is learning assessed?

2.4 Location and setting

- How does the space in which the *Limmud* conference takes place impact the learning experience?
 - What do you see as the key aspects of the space and how it is constructed?
 - What do you see as the key uses of time and the thinking behind it?
 - What do you see as the elements of the “curriculum” or learning outcomes that are captured by the environment in which *Limmud* takes place as opposed to the content that is delivered?

3. Social capital

3.1 Structural social capital

- Does the *Limmud* conference help to build connections between people? If so, how?
 - What is the place of relationship-building within *Limmud* conference? “Relationship-building” should be understood both on the somewhat abstract level – i.e. between denominations, different Jewish communities, Jews and non-Jews, etc. – and a more down-to-earth level – i.e. actual social relationships between individuals.
 - How does *Limmud* enable such relationships to develop?
 - To what extent is *Limmud* focused on bonds between Jews, as compared with bonds between Jews and non-Jews? Is *Limmud* an exclusively Jewish endeavour? If so, has this exclusive Jewish nature of *Limmud* changed at all over time? If not, where do non-Jews fit within it?

3.2) Relational social capital

- What types of relationships do you think *Limmud* considers appropriate?
 - Are there any values which are obligatory for all? Are there any that are absolutely prohibited? Are there values that sit somewhere in between these poles – i.e. that are either preferred or tolerated?
 - Are there any behavioural norms that are established at the conference? If so, how is this achieved?

3.3 Cognitive social capital

- Does *Limmud* deliberately employ any devices – language, metaphor, stories, cultural references – to either enable or restrict relationships between participants?
 - o Is there any language employed, or codes used, that somehow capture key components of *Limmud*? If so, please give me an example.
 - o Are any metaphors used, or stories told amongst *Limmud* leaders or volunteers that capture the core nature of the endeavour?
 - o In conclusion, what would you say is the central *Limmud* narrative or story? Or, if you had to sum up *Limmud* in a sentence or two, what would you say?

4. Concluding questions

- How do you see *Limmud's* future? Do you expect its role or position change in some way? If so, how? What directions do you think it is most likely to go in?
- Is there anything else you want to tell me about *Limmud*? Is there anything else I should have asked that I didn't that will help me to better understand its educational approach?

APPENDIX E: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

Introduction

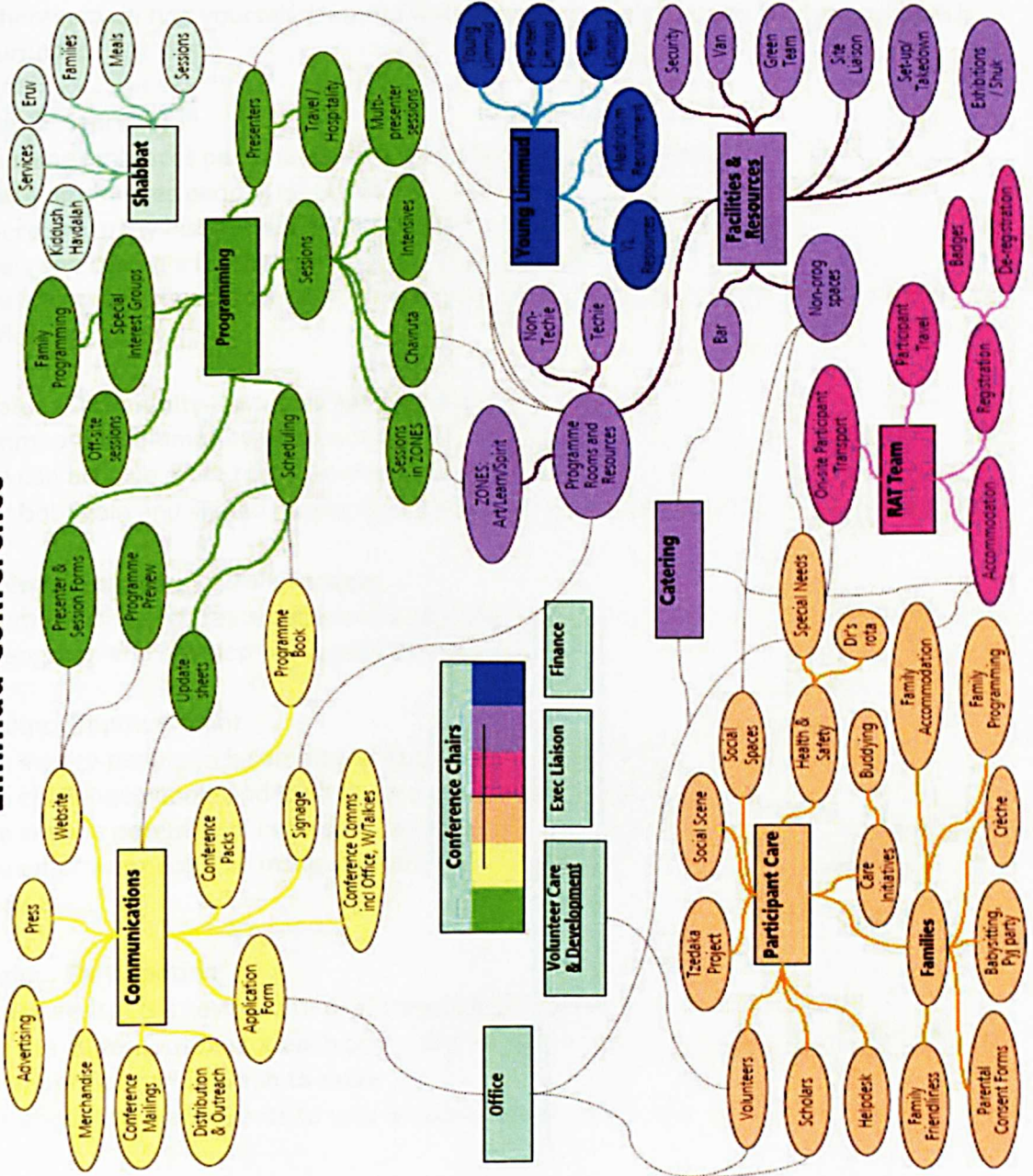
- Introduce the session by outlining the purpose of the research as explained in the “Participant Information Form” (Appendix B)
- Thank people for coming and ask them to introduce themselves
- Explain the reasons for recording the session, stress that all data will be treated confidentially and anonymised and explain ‘Chatham House’ rules
- Ask people to speak one at a time
- Note that the session is open, that everyone’s views are welcome and important
- Outline the format of the focus group session and the time frame
- Hand out the “Participant Consent Form” (Appendix C) and ask them to complete it.
- Turn on audio recording equipment

Questions

1. Tell me a ‘*Limmud* story’ from the conference; share an anecdote that, for you, captures what *Limmud* is about.
2. What are *Limmud*’s values? What ideas is it seeking to promote? Where do you see evidence of this?
3. What did you learn when you were here? What learning will you take away with you?
4. Tell me about the social experience. How easy or difficult was it to connect with others when you were at *Limmud*? What elements helped to fuel social interaction? What elements got in the way of it?
5. Are there any other insights about *Limmud* that we haven’t discussed that you would like to share?

APPENDIX F: LIMMUD'S ORGANISATIONAL CHART 2011 (SHARED WITH THE AUTHOR BY LIMMUD'S EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR)

Limmud Conference



APPENDIX G: LIMMUD'S MISSION AND VALUES STATEMENT (LIMMUD WEBSITE – WWW.LIMMUD.ORG, 2011)

Limmud's mission - values and principles

Wherever you find yourself, Limmud will take you one step further along your Jewish journey.

Core Value: Learning

- Learning embraces personal development, knowledge and skills
- Learning changes people, inspires action and opens new worlds
- There are many inspirations that can offer opportunities for learning
- Everyone can be a teacher and everyone should be a student
- We encourage the creation of a learning environment in which people are able to reflect and grow

Core Value: Community & Mutual Responsibility

- Limmud is a community of learning
- We can achieve more together than we can individually
- We both gain and should give something back to the Jewish and the wider community

Core Value: Expanding Jewish Horizons

- Limmud strives to create collective and communal experiences, through which we strengthen and develop our Jewish identity

Core Value: Empowerment

- We inspire people to be ambitious about their contribution
- We challenge people and trust them to rise to that challenge
- We see the potential of individuals and communities, and support their development
- We empower people to make choices, and provide the information to make informed choices

Core Value: Participation

- Volunteerism is a key feature of almost everything we do
- We are all responsible for each other and for the communities we create, everyone has an important contribution to make
- We encourage participants to take an active part in all we do

Core Value: Diversity

- We value diversity in all that we do
- We value choice in form, content and style
- We believe in the richness of our diverse community and create cross-communal and cross-generational experiences
- We value accessibility, and aim to be accessible to all
- We encourage people not to stereotype others

Core Value: Enabling connections to be made

- We aim to create opportunities for communities and individuals to connect
- We recognise the strength of providing a space where spiritual, emotional and intellectual connections are made

Limmud's Principles: Commitment to Respect

- Limmud expects all participants to be respectful of one another, and to recognise that all volunteers are also participants.
- Personal attacks are not acceptable within session material
- To ensure that informed choices can be made, we ask presenters to provide biographies

Limmud's Principles: Arguments for the Sake of Heaven

- Limmud does not participate in legitimising or de-legitimising any religious or political position found in the worldwide Jewish community. Anyone who comes to Limmud events seeking opportunities for this will not find it
- Limmud has no part to say in the debates between/across denominations. Limmud will programme its events in such a way as to avoid religious or political conflict. However we do recognise and appreciate that 'arguments for the sake of heaven' can make a positive contribution to furthering our education and understanding. Sessions should therefore be educational and not polemical

Limmud's Principles: Religious Observance

- Shabbat and kashrut are observed in all public areas. We recognise that in private areas people will behave as they wish
- Should participants wish to hold a prayer group, they may do so providing they supply all resources and are responsible for the session or prayer group in its entirety

[The text below was added to *Limmud's* mission and values statement in 2012 – accessed online (www.limmud.org), 19 February 2013]

Limmud sustainability statement

- Sustainability means applying Limmud values in a way which delivers the present and supports the delivery of the future. The sustainability and continuity of a Limmud community includes:
 - Investing in the people who make up that community
 - Ongoing financial stability
 - Minimising our environmental impact

APPENDIX H: LIMMUD PROGRAMME EXAMPLES

EXAMPLE 1. TUESDAY 24 DECEMBER 1985, PORTSMOUTH POLYTECHNIC, FULL DAY PROGRAMME

T U E S D A Y 2 4 T H D E C E M B E R

7.30 - 8.30 BREAKFAST

7.00 SHACHARIT R01/2

9.00 - 10.00 EARLY MORNING STUDY

(a) CHASIDIC TEXTS - MIKE TABOR

A selection from Bratslav and Chabad chasidut on the themes of appreciation of self and the interdependence of man. Room R02

(b) BACK TO THE SOURCES - SHIMON FELIX AND JONATHAN GORSKY

Today's topic is Bible in Jewish Tradition. This session will study specific texts, both in Hebrew and English. The beginners' session will be led by Jonathan Gorsky in room R12, and the advanced by Rabbi Felix in room R11.

(c) JEWISH PHILOSOPHY AND THOUGHT - MICHAEL GILLIS

During the course of the week this group will study texts of the Rambam and Rav Kook. Room R04

(d) HISTORY OF THE JEWS IN EUROPE 1919 - 1939 - DAVID MARCH.

The general and Jewish history will be explored relating to the Jews of Germany, Russia and France. Room R13

(e) THE SYMBOL OF THE SHECHINA - CHANI SMITH

Using texts from Lecha Dodi and the Zohar, this session will explore the feminine aspect of G-d. The session is based on an article to be published in the next issue of "European Judaism". Room R01

10.15 - 11.15

* KEYNOTE LECTURE *

RETHINKING MEDIA IN JEWISH EDUCATION - YEHUDA WURTZEL

This one-hour lecture will be held in the lounge. As this is a lecture, and not a regular session, there will be no time for questions during this hour. However, the lecturer will hold a feedback session at 5.00, for those who want to ask questions or explore the issues raised.

SESSION D

11.30 - 1.00

1) WHERE HAVE ALL THE TEACHERS GONE? - SIMON CAPLAN

A session on personnel development in the 1990's, which will focus on new proposals to encourage people to come into Jewish education. Room R11

2) "THE OLD DOCTOR": JANUSZ KORCZAK - STEVE COPELAND

Janusz Korczak is mostly known in the Diaspora as the man who walked to the gas chamber with the children of his orphanage. In Poland and Israel, however, his life and work are well-known to both children and adults. This session will introduce Korczak and will try to suggest a frame for considering his great legacy. Room R12

3) WHY AM I A JEWISH EDUCATOR? DEVELOPING YOUR OWN PHILOSOPHY - IAN MANN

This session aims to explore thought about educational purposes through exposure to various schools of educational philosophy, and their application to Jewish education. Room R01

4) CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT - GAIL DORPH

What are the tools we need for building a curriculum? This session will analyse the pre-requisite criteria, and discuss the processes involved in formulating the aims and objectives. Room R02

5) DO THE CHILDREN IN YOUR CLASSROOM DRAW? - VINNIE OFRI

Everyone can express themselves through art - a practical session of step-by-step techniques to build your confidence and theirs. In Hands-On workshop.

6) AN INTRODUCTION TO THE JEWISH FAMILY MEDIATION SERVICE: AND ITS VALUE TO EDUCATIONALISTS - MARLENE COHEN

A look into the history of West Central's research into Divorce in Anglo Jewry, and discussions with people working with children in the Community about children and family break-up. This research has led to the creation of an important new service which will minimise the impact of divorce upon children. Room R04

7) ANTI-SEMITISM AND THE HOLOCAUST - SHIRLEY MURGRAFF

This session will discuss their place on the anti-racist curriculum, through talk, clips from two ILEA videos "Teaching the Holocaust" and "Talking with Survivors", followed by questions and a discussion. In the Lounge.

1.00 - 2.15 LUNCH

2.00 MINCHA R01/2

SESSION E

2.30 - 4.30

8) SIR KEITH'S ONLY CONTRIBUTION TO JEWISH EDUCATION: THE GCSE
- CLIVE LAWTON

The new GCSE national criteria for religious studies offer some thought-provoking challenges for Jewish education. How should we respond? Michael Gillis will continue the discussion and together we will look at some practical implications of the new examinations. R13

9) LONDON BOARD INFANT CURRICULUM - ESTELLE COHEN

The London Board's brand new curriculum for the first years of Cheder. Resource Centre

10) KERNELS OF A POMEGRANATE - PENNINAH SCHRAM

A participatory workshop in storytelling for educators and parents. The storyteller tells only stories she loves and the audience explores and shares the magical experience. In this way storytelling continues to strengthen the rich Jewish heritage. This is the first in a series of workshops that will explore the role of storytelling in the Jewish experience. Room R11.

11) JEWISH EDUCATION IN YOUTH GROUP SETTING - DAVID GOLDBERG/
MYRA TOPPER.

In this session we will look at the problems of Jewish programming with identifying and talking about how to overcome these problems. Room R02

12) COMPUTERS IN JEWISH EDUCATION - MARK SMILEY

This is part one of a series of computer workshops. While examining some of the current software available, the workshops will enable participants to discuss the theory and philosophy of programmed learning. In the Resource Centre

13) THINKING ABOUT TEACHING: A MINICOURSE IN BASIC SKILLS- IAN MANN

This course will run over three days and will provide an introduction to five of the basic skills of teaching. Since these days educational input is also made in youth group settings, it is for teachers, youth workers, parents and anyone interested in improving their teaching skills. The areas being covered are: set induction and closure; questioning; discussion leadership; stimulus variation; and classroom management. The individual sessions may be attended, but for the best possible use of this course participants should try to attend it as a whole. Room R01

*** COUNSELLING PART II - RM R12 ***

4.30 - 5.30

* SPECIAL *

FIFTY WAYS TO LEAVE MOTHER RUSSIA - ALAN MYER/
MIKE LEIGH

A workshop hosted by the EXODUS Soviet Jewry Campaign. Alan and Mike will demonstrate different techniques that can be used to raise consciousness about Soviet Jewry. It is an exciting workshop that should not be missed. Max. 30 people. Room R01

SESSION F

5.00 - 6.00

14) Feedback session Room resource centre

15) Chugim as yesterday

16) PROGRAMMED LEARNING - DAVID CLAYTON

A simple way to use a computer as a teaching aid to the learning of Torah, Festivals, or anything you choose. This is a practical session where no previous knowledge of computers is needed. Room Glass House

17) KNOW YOUR WAY AROUND THE JEWISH PRESS - SIMON ROCKER

Simon will lead an informal session on the ways in which we can advertise events and news in the Jewish press. Room R04

18) TRAINING THE TRAINERS: SUPERVISION - IRVIN FELDMAN

Professional workers and serious part-timers often find themselves in the position of wishing to give support to their colleagues. An examination of the use of supervision as a means of supporting Teachers and Youth and Community Workers in their work. Room R13

6.00 - 7.15 DINNER

7.00 MA'ARIV R01/2

7.30 - 8.30 EARLY EVENING PROGRAMME

(a) BACK TO THE SOURCES - SHIMON FELIX

In tonight's study session, Rabbi Felix will discuss Oral Law.
Room R02

(d) BRAIN OF LIMMUD Room R04

(f) CO-OPERATIVE GAMES Room R11

(g) HISTORY OF ZIONISM GAME Room R12

(h) CRAFTY JUDAISM - KEN HAMMOND Hands-On Workshop

8.45 - 10.00 EVENING ENTERTAINMENT

WEAVING SPELLS

10.30 LATE NIGHT PROGRAMME

(i) DANCE Dining Room

(ii) LET'S IMPROVISE! Join Vivi Lachs in room R02 for an improvisation workshop.

(iii) WATCHING VIDEOS - AND GETTING PAID FOR IT! - SARA LEVITEN

Explore ways of using popular movies such as "The Wave" and "Cabaret" to extract lessons and values. The session will also show children how to view material more critically. Room R06.

Limmud Conference 2000

**Tuesday 10:45 – 12:00
Intensives**

Why did Pinsker Write "Auto-Emancipation"? (2 of 4)

Anat Gueta
Community
Lecture

E4

In 1881 Y.L. Pinsker, a Jewish doctor, made a diagnosis of anti-Semitism as a collective mental illness, caused by the unnatural situation of the Jewish people as perpetual exiles. Years before Herzl, Pinsker concluded that the only solution to this situation is to create a Jewish state in which the Jewish people can return to normality. Each session of this intensive stands on its own, but the series builds throughout the week for a full picture.

Windows to Israeli Society through Literature (2 of 4)

Rachel Korazim
Arts, Israel, Education
Text Based, Workshop

R5

This session will look at the theme of the Shoah (Holocaust) as it affects Israeli society. Through short stories of Sayon Liebrecht and David Grossman as well as poetry by Dan Pagis and Yehuda Amichai we will focus not on what had happened in Europe during the Shoah but rather on its long term influence on Israelis today.

How To Pray: What They Never Taught Us in Cheder (2 of 4)



Larry Tabick
Spirituality
Discussion, Text Based

N1B

In the second session, we will discuss prayer techniques that can be applied to any service anytime. Jewish sources will be used. Some knowledge of the prayerbook and liturgy will be helpful.

Israel: A Virtual Visit Heading North (2 of 4)

Julian Resnick
Israel, Tikkun Olam, Community
Discussion, Lecture

R4

We will "travel" together to some of the significant sites. After recent events we will decide on the day whether to "travel" through Jericho or not. We will travel up the Jordan valley and on to the Northern border with Lebanon and the Golan Heights. Highlights will include a stop at Kibbutz Misgav Am, Har Dov and the Bental and Kibbutz Kfa Haruv. All of these sites will afford us both "breathtaking views, weather permitting" and the backdrop for discussion around the future of the region.

Learn to Leyn (2 of 4)

Chani Smith
Music, Tachles, Education
Training

N1A

Ta'amei Hamikra (the flavour of the Torah text) is the Hebrew name for leyning. In this short course we'll learn to understand those dots and dashes above and below the letters and bring out the Torah's special flavour through chanting. Participants need to be able to read Hebrew. Please stay for 4 sessions.

In Search of Huckleberry Finn's Mohel: A Practical Guide to Creative Writing in the Midrashic Mode (2 of 4)

Allen Hoffman
Arts, Tachles, Family
Creative, Lecture

D4

Session 2. The Jewish Family: You Remember the Bible or Why Jewish Families Gather but Only the Caterers Rejoice. Adam, Eve, Cain and Abel – Oh, the nuclear family. And that's just the cheery start! In this session, family members will not be permitted to sit together. In addition, literary masks will be provided. Above all, we create the narrative; for example, I was named after an unsuccessful East European chicken thief and I am appreciative because that's the good news.

You Call This "Torah"? (2 of 4)



Johnny Solomon
Torah Lishma, Bet Midrash
Text Based

N4

We will continue our study of Brachot 116 by analysing some textual variations both from manuscripts and other Rabbinic literature and discussing whether these variations hinder or aid our understanding of the text concerned.

Questioning God's Love (2 of 4)

Margaret Jacobi
Torah Lishma, Bet Midrash, Philosophy
Discussion, Text Based

S2

The Song of Songs is one of the greatest love songs ever written. The rabbis understood it as telling of the relationship between God and Israel. It is a troubled relationship and the Midrash asks challenging questions, such as "Why do the righteous suffer?" and "What is Israel's role among nations?" We will look at some of the issues and on the way consider how Midrash works. The sessions are based on Hebrew text, but you do not have to know Hebrew to enjoy them.

Tuesday 10:45

70

**Israeli Dance – Jewish Texts
(2 of 4)****Deborah Silver**
Arts
Workshop

N3

In these classes we will learn a selection of beginner's dances from the wide and inspiring range of Israeli folk dances based on traditional Jewish texts. There won't be much textual work – we will spend the majority of our time dancing! Copies of texts will be provided, so all you need to bring is a pair of comfortable shoes (trainers are best) and your two feet. You don't need to have ever danced before. Come and enjoy! Please note: Israeli folk dance is a modern secular tradition, so these will be mixed classes.

Getting to the Heart of Jewish Leadership: Love (2 of 4)**Robert Rabinowitz**
Tachles, Community
Discussion, Text Based

R2

Jews, especially British Jews, don't normally talk about love in the context of leadership. Yet, perhaps the most famous summary of Judaism is Rabbi Akiva's dictum: "Love your neighbour as yourself." How would the nature of our leadership be affected if we took seriously the idea that our love for other people should be the primary motivation for our actions?

Utopia Revisited – For This Land is my Land (2 of 4)**Mitch Heifetz**
Torah Lishma, Philosophy
Text Based, Workshop

E3

The sessions will delve into the different aspects of the utopian masterplan for Eretz Yisroel. The seven cycles of sabbatical years. The masterplan is a unique combination of observances: individual, group, people; agricultural, economic and spiritual. We will learn, dream, debate and decide about philosophy and practicalities of this masterplan for utopia. The idea that the Land of Israel is special and belongs to the Lord will enable us to investigate our own understanding of our relationship with Israel.

Elijah – First Action Hero (2 of 4)**Marcus Freed**
Arts, Tachles, Education, Bet Midrash
Creative, Workshop

E1

The land was full of idolatry and ritual prostitution. One man came to spoil the fun: Elijah – First Action Hero. This course will explore the story of the extraordinary prophet. Bibliodrama is the exciting fusion of Theatre Arts with Jewish Learning, an exploration that brings Torah to life. Each session will be self-contained and be mostly practical. We will dive into the texts, improvise the stories and find out what the Bible doesn't tell us. Please note that no spectators will be allowed: only spect-actors.

Getting to Know the Bible Commentators (2 of 4)**Harry Freedman**
Torah Lishma, Bet Midrash
Text Based

R1

In the second of our short series on the leading Bible commentators, we will take a look at Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra. Grammarian, poet and exegete, he has been described as the first critical scholar of the Bible. His ideas were radical, yet he fits fully into the traditional mode.

Yiddish For Beginners (2 of 3)**Ester Whine**
Arts, Tachles
Workshop

D1

Following from Session 1, some more reading, phrases and dialogue. A knowledge of Yiddish or Hebrew is not necessary, but it would be helpful to know the Hebrew alphabet.

"Let There be Lights, Camera, Action...": Personal Video Documentary Workshop (2 of 4)**Paula Weiman-Kelman**
Arts, Family
Creative, Workshop

E5

Gain confidence in using your video camera to interview friends and family, document life and record personal history. These sessions will concentrate on basic camera skills and interview techniques. After a brief introduction participants will learn by doing as we practice filming and interviewing each other and then view and critique the results. Clips will be considered for inclusion in a final production to be screened at Limmud.

The Lost Art of the Wimpel (2 of 4)**Barbara Stoner**
Arts, Tachles
Creative, Workshop

S1

Participants will discover the once "lost" art of the 'wimpel' or Torah binder as it was used as a ritual object in Europe. This beautiful art form is enjoying a re-birth in the Jewish world today, extending to bar/bat mitzvah, marriage and even yizkor rituals. Each participant will create a wimpel of his/her own (over an extended period of workshops totalling 6–8 hours). No artistic experience or knowledge of Hebrew is necessary.

Hebrew Reading Crash Course (2 of 4)



Martin Fisher
Tachles
Training, Workshop

N5

If learning to read Hebrew is something you have never quite got round to, or something you learnt years ago, but need a refresher, then this course is for you. After four sessions, you will leave Limmud being able to read Hebrew comfortably and use this as a basis to start following a synagogue service or learning spoken Ivrit. It's a starter course for complete beginners (refreshers also welcome). Lots of fun and singing.

Stress Free Simcha Speeches (2 of 4)

Gavin Presman, Elkan Presman
Tachles
Training, Workshop

R3

Do you worry about making a simcha speech? Would you like to deliver a message that will be a real joy? In this session we will discover and practice the three functions of an introduction and the five techniques of completion. So by now we know how to prepare, start and finish!

Torah for Everyone: Crash Course 2000 (2 of 4)

Raphael Zarum
Torah Lishma, Bet Midrash
Creative, Text Based

D3

The 'Torah For Everyone' crash course has two aims: to discover the multi-levelled thematic structure of the entire Torah and to learn how to study and talk Torah with our families, friends, colleagues, communities and our People. Having been successfully piloted at Limmud '99 and CAJE25, the course will soon be launched in the U.K. community. It is a major project of the Text and Values Project at Makor-AJY.

Come and find out how to LEARN the entire Torah in under twenty minutes, ten times in a row; ASK nine key questions which will help you make sense of any Torah text, and PREPARE a Torah talk in four straightforward steps. No tricks, shortcuts or one-liners, just good quality Torah all the way. Please come to all four sessions. Places are limited.

Conversation in Modern Hebrew Language (2 of 4)



Haggit Inbar-Littas
Arts, Israel, Tachles
Discussion

S3

Conversation in Modern Hebrew language: topics of current affairs, social affairs. People participating in this course should have an intermediate or higher level of Hebrew. Shake off the rust, and just enjoy speaking Ivrit!

Writing and Reading Hebrew Script (2 of 4)

Rachel Williams
Israel, Tachles
Creative, Training

D2

Teaching the Hebrew script, enabling students to write basic Hebrew, as well as teaching very basic modern Hebrew conversation. Participants should have previous knowledge of the Hebrew printed Alef-Bet, and knowledge of basic reading. If you can read the siddur but not a letter; if you never learned to write in Hebrew; if you'd like to take your Hebrew one step further – this course is for you.

Abraham Ibn Ezra's Introduction to the Torah (2 of 4)



Irene Lancaster
Torah Lishma, Bet Midrash, Philosophy
Creative, Text Based

E2

"The brain is the angel between Adam and his God": allegorising is a cop-out.

In this second of four sessions we examine Ibn Ezra's attitude to allegory, a method which seeks to discard the shell for the kernel of truth. He is particularly scathing of Christian allegory which he sees, correctly, as not just an attack on the Jewish text, but also on Judaism itself. Through stunning exegesis, he relates the Jewish emphasis on text to the practice of circumcision, emphasising that both are equally necessary to a correct definition of Judaism. Knowledge of Hebrew and Bible useful but not essential. Translations provided.

What Price Power? The Story of King David (2 of 4)



Shoshana Dworsky
Bet Midrash
Discussion, Text Based

N2

The story of David has come down to us in vivid and provocative detail, from Goliath to Bathsheba-gate and beyond. The forces that conspire to establish David's reign force a question that should haunt readers in every generation: What price power? Come learn the saga of the man called 'Sweet Singer of Israel', and marvel at the bittersweet complexity of a human journey.

EXAMPLE THREE: TUESDAY 25 DECEMBER 2012, 10:50am TO 12:00pm, UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK

TUESDAY

SOCIETY TODAY

Sensitizing and desensitizing disability

Tzvi C. Marx

Lib 1

This session will explore the sensitization and desensitization of disability in biblical and rabbinic sources. We will look at the effect of disability on social status and religious life and examine examples of exclusion and stigmatization, as well as empathy and dignity in Jewish text.

TS

Tikkunism critically examined

Gerald Steinberg

Sci 3

Tikkun Olam – repairing the world – is an important Jewish principle, but some adherents have turned it into an alternative religion. In many cases, tikkunists join campaigns, such as church-based boycotts, which exploit moral language to wage immoral political war on Israel. In this session, we will explore the complexities and distortions of tikkunism in the 21st century.

GD, L

How goats, chickens and local produce changed a Jewish community

Marc Soloway

Sci 7

Every Sunday morning, Marc milks goats and gathers eggs from chickens in a Jewish Farm co-op. Every Thursday the car park of his shul is a drop off site for a local farm's weekly shares of fresh produce to members of a Jewish CSA (Community Supported Agriculture.) These projects and others have had a fascinating effect on Boulder's Jewish community.

GD, SI, FF

The case for hands-on Jewish education (1 of 2)

Andrea Kasper, Hannah Graham

Soc 6

A look at the Jewish educational landscape in North America and its development with a focus on the lack of experiential methodologies. Overview of theory and research on project-based education to follow. Introducing Yadaim Academy of Applied Academics, an evolving programme for the American scene to engage students in experiential learning.

L

TOP TIP: Take a session off

With nearly 1,000 sessions to choose from, it's really tempting to try to go to everything. Grab a drink in one of our coffee lounges, meet new people in one of our bars and eat to your heart's content in one of our dining areas.

Social economic gaps – a threat to Israel's future

Tammi Molad-Hayo

Soc 7

The increase of social economic gaps in Israel contribute to the increase in violence and racism. Poverty has become a hereditary disease, a trap with no escape other than lottery or illegal actions. When there is no future and no one takes responsibility the only channel in which youth can find some outbreak to their frustration is violence and hate.

L

LATE MORNING

10:50 – 12:00

ARTS

The wandering Jew. No wonder!

Vincent Berger, Revital Shloman

Ram 4

Like a fish out of water, an Israeli abroad, a German away from his homeland. The story of 2 different people who met (at Limmud 2006) and share the destiny of the wandering Jew! Reading texts and poems relevant to our story and inviting you to share yours. Texts will be presented in four languages to encourage English and non-English speakers.

SI

Early childhood music

Addie Lupert

Rootes Chancellors 1

Learn songs that focus on Jewish concepts, values, language, liturgy and celebrations for young children and their families. This workshop will also focus on pedagogy and model strategies for working with this population.

The 'Diary of Anne Frank' – rescue and resistance (2 of 2)

Irene Wise

Soc 2

During the Nazi occupation of Holland, only a tiny fraction of the Dutch population helped to rescue Jews. Closely reading some extracts from The Diary of Anne Frank, (and using the new iPad app of the Diary) we shall examine the complex relationship between the helpers and the hidden and consider the altruism that existed within both these groups.

GD

LUNCH OPTIONS

From Sunday to Thursday a hot lunch will be served in the Rootes Dining Room from 12:00 to 14:15 (12:00 to 15:00 on Sunday and 12:00 to 14:30 on Thursday). Alternatively, soup, sandwiches and salads will be available at a selection of Grab 'n' Go points around campus. See page 10 for full details.

From Yiddish to Hebrew and back: the dybbuk in Israeli theatre

Dorit Glasser

Soc 4

GD, L

In the year 2008 in Israel, two new productions opened of the historical first Hebrew play 'The Dybbuk'— from 1922, and both included Yiddish, the language of the Galut (exile). Jumping back and forth in time, and examining scenes from them, we will explore what using Hebrew in 1922 meant then, and suggest what the return to Yiddish might indicate today.

KNOWLEDGE

A hint of treif (2 of 3)

Raphael Zorum

Hum 2

TS

This three-part series gets to grips with the problems of mixing up kosher and non-kosher food. We'll answer three questions: If it tastes of treif, is it? Is Kashrut about morality or measurements? Can doubtful-treif be fixed? The Shulchan Aruch comes to life when we unpack the living logic of Jewish law. Each session stands alone, together they are glatt kosher.

The prophets (2 of 4)

Clive Lawton

Ram 1

L

Jews tend to concentrate on Torah so our knowledge of the prophets is often sketchy. In this series we'll look at what prophets do, and explore five, selected for their variety, based on a series Clive's making for BBC Radio 4. This time, it'll be Elijah, unless he arrives beforehand!

Pour out your wrath! – the role of the open door in the haggadah

Ariel Friedlander

Ram 3

GD, L

Why do we open the front door during the Seder? Tradition teaches that we look for Elijah, but what of the words we say as we peer into the dark? 'Pour out your wrath on those who do not know you' – is there a place for anger in our liturgy? Learn, share and discuss this portion of the Haggadah.

'Tractate Independence' and how to use it (1 of 2)

Arik Ascherman
Ram 5

GD, TS

Israel's Declaration of Independence contains a prophetic vision of justice and equality, but what does that mean? 'Tractate Independence' is Rabbis for Human Rights' Talmudic style commentary to the Declaration that we use to teach young Israelis about Judaism, human rights and democracy. Now available in English, this session will explore Israel's founding vision and how to teach the Tractate.

Yeshivat Limmud (2 of 4)

Laliv Clenman, Shaiya Rothberg, Michael Pollak, Chanel Rosen
Rootes Sutherland

GD, TS, DS

Day 2. Four in-depth, double-length yeshiva-style sessions, providing a range of options to study classic texts (in Hebrew and English) in pairs and in groups, supported by experts. Please see Monday 10.50 for details. Please note you must attend Yeshivat Limmud from Monday.

The caveman and the kabbalist: the death and resurrection of Shimon bar Yohai

Gila Fine
Sci 2

L, TS

Can one reconcile the holy with the mundane? When God says 'My world' does He mean the heavens or the earth? And how did 13 years in a cave change R. Shimon bar Yohai for good? A kabbalistic reading of Shabbat 33b, spanning the Bible and Talmud, Midrash and Zohar, Plato and Augustine, Soloveitchik and Lamm, Kierkegaard and Monty Python.

Bereshit: Judah and Joseph – the first Jew, the first Greek (3 of 4)

Yehoshua Engelman
Sci 8

L, TS

The first book of the Torah contains many shocks and surprises. We will explore the meaning of the text in four parts. In this session, we will examine the relationship we have with ourselves as a people from the perspective of Judah and Joseph, insider and outsider.

LIFE

Learn to read Hebrew from scratch (2 of 4)

Anne Clark
Hum 3

In the second session we will learn the rest of the Hebrew consonants and add the vowels. This is your chance to crack the code and open the door to a deeper involvement in Jewish living. All materials provided. Limited to ten people. Attendance at all four sessions essential. No previous knowledge required.

Stitch and kvetch

Limmud Social Events Team
Rootes Bar

SI

...because no Jewish event is complete without a space to kvetch! Bring your knitting, embroidery, mending etc. and an open mind! A chance to relax, stitch and put the world to rights with a cup of tea and good company.

Jewish meditation (2 of 2)

Eddy Levin
Soc 5

L, M

Come and join us for an illuminating experience of Jewish Meditation, a synthesis of many traditional forms, as taught by Eddy over the past 20 years. Learn how to still the mind, relax the body, open the heart and find clues to your own potential. We shall have 20-30 minutes of meditation, followed by discussion. No previous experience is necessary.

Educators in the web era (2 of 4)

Anat Goodman
Soc 6

A hands-on workshop where Participants will explore innovative Web 2.0 tools and learn how these may be implemented to engage communal education and/or Hadracha activities. Google Apps for education, Blogging, Prezi, Online Collaborative tools are a few of the tools we will explore. You must bring your own laptop.

Women's circle

Debbie Danon
Soc 8

GD, M

Coming together with a group of women in an intentional way can be a powerful and nourishing tradition. Come and join us in connecting with your Limmud sisters, mothers and daughters!

NOW AND THEN

Defining Zionism in 2013

Gusti Yehoshuah-Braverman
Lib 1

GD

Today, the young generation in particular is questioning and querying many definitions. What used to be obvious in the past is no longer obvious. The definition of Zionism is one of them. What is Zionism today? What is the future Zionism? And who can we define as Zionist? This open discussion will touch those questions and more.

Israel and a changing Middle East: exploring the impact of the Arab Spring on Israel

Dov Waxman
Lib 2

L

For the past two years, the Arab Spring has been unleashing profound changes across the Middle East. Israelis have been watching anxiously as the region is being transformed around them. We will explore what the Arab Spring means for Israel. What are the risks and challenges for Israel? What new opportunities are there? How has Israel responded so far?

The Jewish confederates

Andy Finkel
Ram 6

L

Do you wonder why would Jews, who celebrated freedom from slavery in our liturgy, supported the slave-owning Confederacy in the American Civil War? We will also explore the link between a Jewish nurse, chicken soup and the possible effect it had on the assassination of Abraham Lincoln.

Jesus in his Jewish context (2 of 4)

Amy-Jill Levine
Sci 4

L

Jesus spoke to fellow Jews in first-century Galilee and Judea. What might his original message have been, and why and how have his teachings been interpreted in anti-Jewish ways? Test case 2: The story of the widow's offering (Mark 12:41-44).

Three days in Warsaw

Colin Grazin
Soc 7

F, L

Why should my family history interest you? What is the connection between Polish Gur Chassidim, Napoleon, the French Resistance, African diamond trading, Kristin Scott-Thomas and walking a Sefer Torah through the streets of Warsaw? Find out how all these came together over three amazing days in Warsaw in July 2012

SOCIETY TODAY

Fowl play: how the cruel world of egg-laying hens may be more than a Jew can stomach

Natan Levy
Hum 1

TS

Factory hens live in a space about the size of this open handbook. In their two years of existence, they will produce more eggs than a natural hen lays in a lifetime. This is bad news for Jews. Every egg from these hens may be as un-kosher as a bacon-double-cheeseburger. Join a rabbi and veterinarian to uncover the hard-boiled facts.

TUESDAY

Jews or non-Jews? Who should we help first? Richard Verber

Hum 4 **GD, TS**
And where should that help be directed? The UK? Israel? Elsewhere? Come and share your view and hear how World Jewish Relief manages these delicate life-and-death challenges which affect the lives of thousands of people every single day.

Jewish life on campus

Alex Green, Sheryl Gold, Georgina Bye, Judith Flacks, Ricky Kaplan

Sci 5 **GD, SI, FF**
Alex Green, the President of the Union of Jewish Students, will be joined by members of the UJS team to discuss Jewish life on campus and the provisions available. This will be an interactive session with time for questions from the audience. All are welcome; this is particularly recommended for parents and all prospective students wanting to find out more.

Israel as a global citizen: changing the conversation

Rachel Ishofsky

Soc 7
All too often, Israel is presented as a source of conflict in the global community. But what about its contributions to the world? Together, we'll explore the history of Israel's foreign aid, the current landscape of Israeli social justice organisations and the Israeli innovations that are making the world a better place for all of us.

EARLY AFTERNOON

12:20 – 13:30

ARTS

The Jewish 'King Lear' – a comedy?

Maureen Kendler

Ram 3 **L, TS**
In 1892, Jacob Gordin updated Shakespeare's King Lear by staging a Jewish version. He created a 'comedy' with a happy ending and a profound social message to the new generation. His aim was to blend Western and Yiddish culture and transform Yiddish theatre. We will look at this extraordinary, unique period piece (in English translation) and see if he succeeded.



Nine poems that can change your life (2 of 3)

Michael Wegier

Ram 4 **GD, TS**
We will look at nine extraordinary poems that contain the depth and beauty to transform how we look at Jewish history, identity, Israel and the Jewish people. They will be drawn from several languages and countries but all share an urgency and a power to leave you breathless with admiration for the poets' craft with words and rhythm. (3 sessions)

Bernstein's Kaddish Symphony: blasphemy or profound theological exploration?

David Bilchitz

Soc 2 **TS**
In his Kaddish Symphony, Leonard Bernstein uses music and text to give us a visceral experience of the many profound and difficult theological questions that flow from the Mourners' Kaddish. In this interactive, multi-media session, we will explore how the symphony both challenges and provides a novel gloss on this seminal prayer.

The Limmud harmony intensive (led by Ellen Dreskin) (3 of 4)

Ellen Dreskin, Zoe Jacobs

SU Copper Rooms 2

Join us as we make music together. Each of our four presenters will offer diverse musical styles, to include choral music, rounds, old standards and perhaps even some campfire melodies! Please come and bring your enthusiasm and love of music. Each session stands alone in a series of four.

May you grow like an onion with your head in the ground – an autobiographical story

Michael Picardie

SU Duck

A near death experience at the hands of car-jackers in Johannesburg in 2000, visions of a dead daughter Rachel, Mordechai's salvation through the realisation that in an upside-down world – 'Zol zu waksen vi ein tsibile mit kop in dred arein.' Even Jean-Paul Sartre utters existential truths in a cave exquisitely painted by Bushmen. What more could you want?

KNOWLEDGE

Mad rabbis and rabbinic madness: illness, anger and insanity in the Talmud (2 of 4)

Yaffa Epstein

Hum 1 **GD, TS**
The Curious Case of Bulmus: Compulsions and Kashrut The Talmud tells us of a particular physical ailment called the Bulmus – an overwhelming desire to eat a specific food. But what happens when the food is not Kosher? Or if it is a fast day? We will examine this case, and attempt to understand the rabbis' perspective(s) on Compulsive behavior.

A corruption ... Judaism light or an authentic expression of Judaism? (2 of 2)

Miriam Berger

Hum 2 **GD, TS**
Reform Judaism is Judaism from an informed standpoint where everyone can be part of the decision making process, an opportunity for every individual to interpret Judaism to create a meaningful existence for themselves. Come and get to grips with the process for yourself and put it to the test with some of the fundamental questions of your Jewish life.

Tales from the psalms: how I weaned myself from God's breast

Deborah Kahn-Harris

Lib 2

L, TS
Psalm 131 is an exquisite if somewhat curious short psalm. At its heart is a challenging image that relates weaning to the human-divine relationship. In this session we will read the psalm in detail and try to understand what this central image might mean for us.

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