

Teaching Hebrew ללמד עברית

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Bathea James

From the Desk of Bathea James, RAVSAK President

Dear Chevre,

I hope that you are well and your preparations for the close of the school year are not too burdensome. My wishes for a most successful year end.

RAVSAK has historically been focused on the advancement of community day school education in the US and Canada. This year, we had the good fortune of welcoming our first Mexican Jewish day school as a new member. As we begin our preparations for the year end, we find that the work of RAVSAK is reaching beyond North America and across the Anglo-Jewish world.

On a recent trip to South Africa in March this year, I had the pleasure of discussing what we do with the Head of the South African Board of Jewish Education, Rabbi Craig Kacev. The board was established in 1928 to provide a common framework for the many institutions in which students could receive a thorough Jewish Education. Their focus is on excellence in Jewish and secular studies with the aim of ensuring that every Jewish child who wants a Jewish education gets one, and that they reach their maximum potential. Their offices are on the magnificent campus of the Kind David School, Linksfield in Johannesburg. I had the privilege of working there prior to my immigration to America. We discussed successes, challenges and common

concerns- we all face the realities of limited resources, big dreams and few people to do the work that needs to be done. It is our hope to soon partner with the South African Board of Jewish Education in our shared interests.

As I reported earlier this year, we are working with JCOSS, London's first Jewish community day high school. After an extended wait, they have just received word of government approval for funding and planning for the new school and campus has begun in earnest. RAVSAK will work closely with JCOSS as we welcome them, too, into our growing network.

Dr. Marc Kramer, our Executive Director, continues to consult with a small group of Jewish schools in Australia as they explore the possibilities and struggles that come with operating across and beyond denominational lines.

Closer to home, we have had the good fortune of thinking together with the leadership of NAAJHS (North American Association of Jewish High Schools) about ways to synchronize and share our work. We will also welcome the Reform day school network, PARDeS to our conference this coming January in Los Angeles.

As we continue to work on our strategic planning and have the pleasure of interacting with so many talented individuals, it has become clear to us that collective wisdom and part-

nership with all our constituents is crucial for RAVSAK's future survival and expansion.

With this in mind, I am writing to ask for your help. In keeping with best practices of sound organizational structure, RAVSAK is in the process of developing or expanding our governance model. We are seeking fellow educators and lay board members who have the capacity and desire to help lead the industry of Jewish community day school education at the national and international levels.

Board of Trustees

This lay board will guide RAVSAK in an advisory capacity ensuring we adhere to best practices, help us in identifying the needs of our member's lay boards, as well as assisting RAVSAK in either finding or providing the financial backing to maintain and expand present services and staff. We are seeking individuals who have "made a difference" in their local communities and are prepared to take what they know and what they do to the national scene. If you are interested, please call Dr. Marc Kramer at 212-665-1320

Judaic Advisory Council

This committee will be comprised of Judaic Directors who will meet via conference call several times a year as well as in person at our annual meet-

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Dr. Alan Mintz

Is Teaching Ivrit B'ivrit Worth The Trouble?

My answer to this question is a vigorous "Yes!" Yet any reaffirmation of Hebrew as the proper classroom language for teaching Judaic subjects in day school must acknowledge that this is an ideal under fire. Teaching in Hebrew is a tough challenge for today's non-native speaking teachers who, unlike their predecessors of a generation ago, were not trained in Hebrew-rich environments like the Hebrew colleges. There is always the concern, shared at times by parents and educators alike, that "meaning" in core areas will be sacrificed in the awkwardness of communicating in a foreign language. Finally, there is American society itself, which has never fostered language study and has given Americans to believe that anything truly important will be given them in translation.

First, a little historical background. The idea of *Ivrit B'Ivrit* was put forward over a century ago not merely as a pedagogical technique but as a matter of ideological passion. The Zionist revolution had two planks, territory and language, and it was only the latter that could be cultivated in the Diaspora. Hebrew, especially for the followers of Ahad Ha'am in America, played the role of a portable homeland. By insisting on modern spoken Hebrew as the language of Jewish education, these pioneering Hebraist educators pulled off an extraordinary coup: They turned Sunday schools into Hebrew schools. The heyday of Hebraist education in America was 1920-1960. During this time, the Hebrew colleges were founded, central boards of Jewish education supervised the intensive Hebrew curricula of community-sponsored afternoon schools, and Hebrew summer camps were set up. The exemplars of this movement were the Yeshiva of Flatbush and the Massad Camps, institutions where Hebrew was so pervasive

that even the small talk in hallways and the chatter on the baseball field took place in the Holy Tongue.

We now live in a different world; it hardly needs to be pointed out. Yet even if the challenges are greater, the goal of teaching *Ivrit B'Ivrit* continues to make a strong claim on us. The rationale has of course changed;

to emerge.

Hebrew is the world language of the Jewish people and the essential medium of Jewish culture and religion. As such, it is a value in itself, a message as well as a medium.

The effortful investment in teaching in Hebrew is justified because it gives



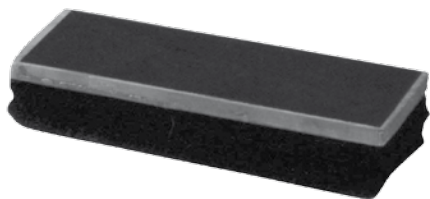
we are no longer in the grip of the same ideological imperatives that impelled earlier educators. In fact, one of the great tasks confronting Jewish educational thinking is the reframing and reformulating of the rationale for Hebrew in terms that make sense to us today. In this job of rethinking, four themes are likely

students the one lifelong key needed to unlock the treasures of Jewish culture and experience, both ancient and modern.

Teaching classical texts in Modern Hebrew create an unbeatable synergy in which more Torah knowledge and more language skills are attained

than if each were taught separately. When students begin to recognize that the root stems they are manipulating in their spoken language are in many instances the same as the ones they are recognizing in the texts they are reading, then they are experiencing something very important about the nature of Jewish civilization.

When students are taught in Hebrew by non-native speakers of Hebrew, like themselves, they learn the important lesson that Hebrew is not just the language of the state of Israel and its citizens but a possession of the Jewish people everywhere, even if it is not spoken perfectly.



Yet even if you enthusiastically subscribe to these objectives, it can be a daunting chal-

lenge to put them into practice. Without spending considerable time in Israel—and then only under the right conditions—it is very difficult for an American-born teacher or administrator to attain the facility necessary to fluidly manage a classroom in Hebrew. It is for that reason we have developed the Ivriyon, a five-week Hebrew immersion program specially designed for day school teachers. Supported in part by AVI CHAI, the Ivriyon is a project of the Jewish Theological Seminary and held on its New York campus. It is open to day school teachers K-12 from schools of all stripes and denominations, as long as the schools are committed to Hebrew-rich instruction in Judaic subjects.

Ivriyon focuses on the language skills necessary not only to convey material in Hebrew but also to make a classroom come alive. Participants take turns presenting lessons and playing the role of students and giving each other supportive feedback while Hebrew-language experts offer suggestions for more effective communications. The participants learn how to ask questions that elicit responses and give students the necessary language to represent their feelings and ideas in Hebrew. They further learn how to write correct work sheets and exercises. Grammar deficiencies are individually assessed and worked on. Ivriyon takes the discipline and promise of immersion seriously. Within an atmosphere of total commitment to Hebrew speech during every minute the program is in session (five days a week), it becomes possible to think in Hebrew and let the faculty of fluency develop.

Ivriyon is not the solution to the challenge of teaching Ivrit B'Ivrit but it is an important resource in approaching that valuable goal.

Dr. Alan Mintz is the Chana Kekst Professor of Hebrew Literature at the Jewish Theological Seminary and director of the Ivriyon program. (Information about the program can found at www.jtsa.edu/progs/heb/ivriyon.) Dr. Mintz may be reached at: alanmintz@nyc.rr.com

***The Executive
Committee
and Staff wish
you and your
families a
Chag Sameach!***





Jennifer Bayer

What I Learned in Hebrew Class: An Olah Chadasha Reflects

Everyone has a personal version of “the story.” It could be that you asked to go to the “*beit shimush*,” only to be met with a blank stare, instead of directions to the ladies room. Perhaps you needed a blood test and after 15 years of living in Israel, you asked for a “*mi'vchan dam*” instead of a “*bedikat dam*.” My personal favorite belongs to a friend who was arguing heatedly over a contract, a “*khozeh*.” He was infuriated at the mirth that his protests inspired – until he realized that he was, in fact, arguing over a “*khazeh*,” a chest or more accurately, a breast.

Did my day school Hebrew language education of the seventies and eighties adequately prepare me for a life in Israel? It depends on the day. Some

days, it just flows: I can make my basic needs known, I can express my feelings, and I have a basic grammatical structure to carry me through any vocabulary snafus. Some days I am struck dumb. I can barely negotiate the car inspection or am tongue-tied in the restaurant, to say nothing of being an advocate in parent-teacher conferences for my child.

After five consecutive years of living in Israel and two previous student years, I have come to realize a basic truth about my day school language education. Like all Jewish education, it works well for the developmental stage that one is at. If one drops out of Jewish education at twelve or thirteen, one is left with a pre-adolescent's view of Judaism. As a consequence, my language studies served me fairly well on my first

year living in Israel as an eighteen year old. At thirty-eight, however, I often encounter more complex situations, and feel the need to express more subtly-nuanced emotions. I require several sets of vocabularies for my varied roles: one for the pediatrician, one for the teacher and the PTA, yet another for professional situations. For those situations, I have almost had to re-learn Hebrew and expand my vocabulary to include words which express my current concerns and responsibilities.

From my own experiences teaching in elementary day schools, I can retroactively assume that the goals of my exposure to and acquisition of Hebrew language during K-12 day school education, focused on preparing me to be able to independently approach and decipher Jewish texts

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and prayers. It provided me with a basic platform and introduction to Zionism, Israel and Jewish history. By these standards, my education was spectacularly successful. I am an active, affiliated Jew who has herself gone into Jewish education. Did it prepare me to be a fully functional adult in Israeli society? Not really. But to be fair, I'm not sure my teachers at the time could have projected my current needs, nor do I think I would have understood what they would be with the sophistication that I use today.

Ideally, it would be best if day schools could project some of vocabulary of functional adult Israeli life into their curriculum. By these I simply mean words and phrases that we teach our children in English as they grow, but omit in Hebrew class, perhaps because of lack of context. Some of them are words which spring from traditional texts, but have been reinterpreted in Modern Hebrew. To give a few examples, which I have learned in the past five years: words for texture (*mirkam*) and shapes

(*malben, meshulash*) and "evening news", words such as *lehitudar* (to deteriorate), *le'altar* (immediately) and *almoni* (anonymous). It would have boosted my confidence to know when to use certain virtual synonyms

My personal favorite belongs to a friend who was arguing heatedly over a contract, a "*khozeh*." He was infuriated at the mirth that his protests inspired – until he realized that he was, in fact, arguing over a "*khazeh*," a chest or more accurately, a breast.

such as *lehachlif* and *leshanot*, which are both roughly translated in English into "to change" and which fruits and plants have *gar'inim*, which have *gal'inim* and which have *khartzanim*, all words for pits.

I was lucky enough to be the recipient of enough Hebrew language competence that I didn't have to attend ulpan in order to function minimally in Israeli life. Would it have been better if I did? Certainly. Would

it have been even better had those quotidian concerns that ulpan prepares one for so well been addressed in elementary and high school? Yes again. The attempt to make Hebrew language relevant and conform to the needs of modern Israeli life is not only on target, but of vital importance.

I applaud those asking the questions about whether Hebrew language instruction prepares American Jews to begin to speak the same language as Jews in Israel, with all the metaphorical implications intended. We are a global people,

with Hebrew language providing the meeting point not just for Americans and Israelis, but in fact, all Jews who meet in Israel and abroad.

Ms. Jennifer Bayer teaches art at the American International School in Jerusalem and at Machon Gold, a one-year post-high school program for women from outside of Israel. She can be reached at gamulka@zahav.net.il

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Rabbi Joshua Elkin, Ed.D.

The Case for Hebrew Language in Our Day Schools

Hebrew is the nerve center which unites and integrates Jewish people in time and in space. It serves as an intellectual bond among all

Jews throughout all generations, and through all the lands of dispersion. Its granite syllables are personal links to the timeless message of Moses and Isaiah. And by means of the Hebrew Bible and prayer book, Jews of the remotest corners of the earth are bound together.”

These words of William Chomsky in his book *Hebrew: The Eternal Language*, ring out to us today. We are living through a paradoxical time. On the one hand, Hebrew has experienced a dramatic rebirth over the last century in Israel. On the other hand, we find ourselves in the largest diaspora community where we have witnessed a dramatic drop in the centrality of Hebrew language in all that we do. We often view Hebrew proficiency as unattainable. Prayer books, Bibles, Hagaddot, Israeli songs, literature, and virtually everything else originally in Hebrew are now routinely read and studied only in English, even if the Hebrew is right there on the page.

We offer many reasons and excuses for this sad state of affairs: lack of Hebraically-grounded teachers; lack of time; complexity of subject matter that requires one’s native tongue; and the difficulty of forming relationships with students using a foreign language. However, Hebrew is hardly “foreign;” it is foundational to our identity as a people. To paraphrase Rabbi Shalom Paul, Professor of Bible at the Hebrew University, Hebrew is the DNA of the Jewish people. We are playing a very dangerous game where the stakes are very high. What may seem necessary or expedient in the short run may prove to be very costly in the long run. As Morde-

cai Kaplan wrote in 1934, “once Hebrew becomes a foreign or an ancient tongue to the Jew, he or she ceases to experience any intimacy with Jewish life, and he/she begins to look for rational justifications for being a Jew, with the consequent self-delusions and ultimate frustrations.”

I want to advocate for Hebrew language as a major priority deserving of our highest attention. And the day school is the best setting for Hebrew to stage its needed comeback.

Why the Day School?

Day schools provide the most intensive setting for Hebrew language acquisition - a full school day and a full academic year. The fact that most day schools commence in kindergarten makes the case even more compelling; the very young have higher capacities to acquire a second language. Those day schools that sponsor an early childhood program have additional opportunities to provide an even earlier and richer exposure to Hebrew as a living language.

Renewed Effort?

Many reasons converge to make the present moment most ripe.

1. Relationship to Israel and the Jewish people worldwide - What better vehicle to forge a bond with Klal Yisrael and with the State of Israel than language. The language works on both a modern conversational level, as well as on a liturgical level. The 80,000 Birthright Israel alumni represent a vital link to Israel and its language, and that link will continue to grow deeper.

2. Language and brain development - The more we know about the brain, the more we recognize that learning a second language not only doesn’t adversely affect other learning, but

in fact contributes to healthier brain growth all around. The earlier the exposure, the easier the learning and the deeper the impact on the brain’s structure and functioning.

3. Connecting more and more Jews to their Judaism - Hebrew language and culture provide avenues to reach out to the less affiliated through a cultural approach, rather than a purely religious orientation. We know that Hebrew song, dance, visual arts, and theatre have great capacity to build bridges to Jewish life even for the most unaffiliated.

4. Availability of marvelous Hebrew resources - The Montreal-based Tal Am Program is a valuable curricular resource for grades 1 - 7, while NETA focuses on middle school and high school (both funded by AVI CHAI). The Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture is spearheading a Hebrew immersion effort in Bergen County NJ as a demonstration site focused on what is possible. CD’s of Israeli songs and DVD’s of Israeli TV shows and films abound, offering ready resources for our classrooms and for our parents. The widely popular elementary-age magazine *BabagaNewz* has recently added a Hebrew section as an additional resource, beyond the Hebraic texts found in the *Teachers Guide*.

5. Availability of Hebrew language classes - In most cities the classes are geared to individuals of different levels of proficiency. Almost every adult can make progress, thereby modeling for students both the value of Hebraic learning and the possibilities of making real strides in language fluency.

Increased Capacity

How Can a Day School Increase its Capacity to Deliver an Intensive and Ongoing Exposure to Hebrew by all Students?

1. Affirm the importance of Hebrew language in all statements of school mission and vision for the future. Get solid buy-in from all constituencies.

2. Focus on professional development for all staff who can potentially increase Hebrew exposure - Start with the administrators and work

your way through faculty, assistant teachers, and anyone else. Create a Hebrew speaking faculty group to help improve Hebrew fluency among those staff who are feeling insecure. Underwrite the costs of faculty taking an Ulpan in Israel, or going to the 5-week summer Ivriyon - the intensive Hebrew summer program at JTS

in New York City. Provide Hebrew tapes for faculty to increase exposure to Hebrew so that they can feel confident enough to conduct large segments of class in Hebrew.

3. Use and showcase Hebrew at all public events and activities and in public spaces - These include assemblies, milestone events, graduations, lobbies, letterhead, etc. Playing Hebrew background music at selected times (so as not to interfere with class time) is also a great way to infuse Israeli/Hebraic culture into our day schools.

A Charge

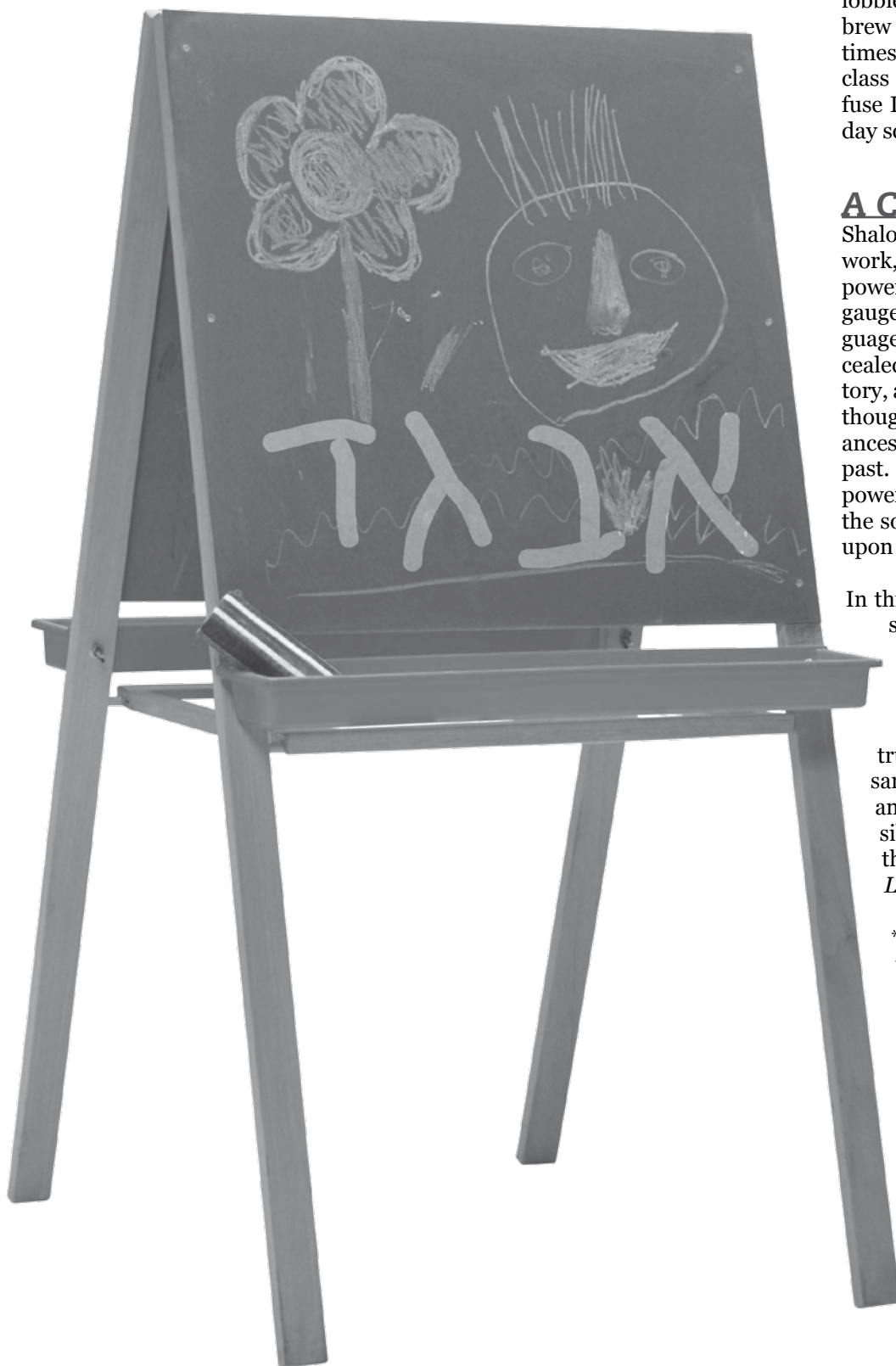
Shalom Spiegel wrote in his seminal work, *Hebrew Reborn*, in 1930: "The power of language can scarcely be gauged. Language is more than language. Within language lie the concealed magic forces of nature and history, a heritage of emotions, habits of thoughts, traditions of taste, inheritances of will - the imperative of the past. It is impossible to measure the power and influence of all this upon the soul, upon its consciousness and upon its subterranean strata."

In this spirit, I challenge you to consider and implement strategies so that your school and the day school movement as a whole can tap those "magic forces of nature and history" toward a true Jewish and Hebraic renaissance. Our language is precious and challenging, but is also accessible and beckoning. Let's seize the opportunities before us.

L'hatzlah! Hoping for success!

* This article originally appeared in the November 2005 "Views from Josh Elkin" published by PEJE

Rabbi Joshua Elkin, Ed.D. is the Executive Director of PEJE, the Partnership for Excellence in Jewish Education. Visit www.peje.org to read more about PEJE's day school field-building activities and to subscribe to receive PEJE electronic communications.



100+ Hebrew Words and Phrases Everyone in a Day School Should Know

The editorial staff of HaYidion could not pass up the opportunity to slip in this concise list of Hebrew words and phrases that we hope everyone in your school knows. Feel free to copy out this centerfold and share it with teachers and parents

Hebrew
English
Do you speak English?
What is your name?
Nice to meet you
What time is it?
All right/OK
Please
Thank you
I
Mine
You
Excuse Me
Good Evening
Good Morning
Hello/Goodbye
What is this?
What?
What's up?
How are you?
What's new?
When?
Where?
Why?
Yes
No
I do not understand
Water
Restrooms
Car
Bus
Money
Do you have?
I love Israel
Boy
Girl
Mother
Father
Parents
Today
Yesterday
Tomorrow
Day
Week
Month
Year
Geshundeit
See you later

Ivrit
Anglit
Ata medabar anglit?
Eych korim lecha?
Nayim Mayod
Ma hash'a?
Beseder
Bevakasha
Toda
Ani
Sheli
Ata (m), At (f)
Sleecha
Erev Tov
Boker Tov
Shalom
Ma zeh?
Ma?
Ma kore?
Ma nishma?
Ma chadash?
Matai?
Eyfo?
Lama?
Ken
Lo
Ani lo Mevin
Mayim
Sherutim
Oto
Otobus
Kesef
Yesh lecha?
Ani Ohev et Israel
Yeled
Yaldah
Ema
Aba
Horim
Ha'yom
Etmol
Machar
Yom
Shavua
Chodeah
Shana
Labriyoot
L'hitraot

עברית
אנגלית
אתה מדבר אנגלית?
איך קוראים לך?
נעים מאוד
מה השעה?
בסדר
בבקשה
תודה
אני
שלי
אתה / את
סליחה
ערב טוב
בוקר טוב
שלום
מה זה?
מה?
מה קורה?
מה נשמע?
מה חדש?
מת?
איפה?
למה?
כן
לא
אני לא מבין
מים
שירותים
אוטו
אוטובוס
כסף
יש לך?
אני אוהב את ישראל
ילד
ילדה
אמא
אבא
הורים
היום
אתמול
מחר
יום
שבוע
חודש
שנה
לבריאות
להתראות

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Chair
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Spring
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Eight
Nine
Ten

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Gir
Eit
Eparon
Kisei
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Student (m) Studentit (f)
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Sargal
Kitah
Delet
Chalon
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Tikra
Minehel
Bochen/Mivchan
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Luach
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Devek
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ארבע
חמש
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שבע
שמונה
תשע
עשר



Dr. Vardit Ringvald

Strengthening Schools in Hebrew Teaching and Learning

In the past two years, there has been a steady increase in inquiries from Jewish schools across the continent expressing interest in having their Hebrew language programs reviewed. The two main reasons given are:

They want to see if they are indeed fulfilling their institutional goals with regard to Hebrew teaching and learning.

There is dissatisfaction with the results of their current Hebrew language programs and they are seeking ways to identify and address the underlying issues.

As a result of the growing influence of organizations such as RAVSAK, PEJE, Torah U'Mesorah, and JESNA, schools have become more aware of the impact of having clearly articulated vision, mission and goals and of assessing their activities to ensure there is alignment between the stated goals, the activities and the outcomes. The work I have been doing for the past 20 years in adapting the Proficiency Approach to Hebrew language teaching and learning is particularly suited to assisting schools in examining these issues and providing them with the tools to proceed systematically to achieve sustainable results.

What is the Proficiency Approach?

Proficiency is an approach used in teaching a foreign language developed to enable learners to perform in the target language in four skill areas – reading, writing, listening and speaking. This approach was developed in the United States during the early 1980s and is still in use today.

The American Council on the Teach-

ing of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), with the help of practitioners and researchers in the field, developed the ACTFL Provisional Guidelines in 1982. These guidelines serve as the directing principles of the Proficiency Approach (PA). The approach recognizes the fact that the learner's ability to perform in the target language develops gradually. Accordingly, it identifies four main phases through which language learners progress during the acquisition process before they achieve native speaker abilities: Novice, Intermediate, Advanced and Superior. The first three phases are further divided into sub-levels. The students' progress can be characterized according to specifically defined levels such as Novice-Low, Novice-Mid, Novice-High, or Intermediate-Low, Intermediate-Mid, Intermediate-High which are associated with specific and measurable skill development and demonstrated mastery. Therefore the evaluation of the learners' ability in the target language can be explicitly described.

The 1982 ACTFL Guidelines were generic, and suited mainly to the more frequently taught languages such as French, Spanish, and German. Subsequently, an ACTFL and federally sponsored initiative tried to create specific guidelines for additional languages. In 1989, the Hebrew Proficiency Guidelines were created by a team of Hebrew language experts at the Hebrew Program at Brandeis University.

Why the Proficiency Approach?

The following are some of the specific ways in which a proficiency approach (PA) enables an institution to succeed in its Hebrew language goals:

PA Helps Articulate Learning Goals:

By describing the nature of each level of performance in each language skill the guidelines provide the tools to create a path for our learners to move from one stage to the next. The criteria used in the guidelines help language educators create and articulate clearly specific performance goals for learners of all language skills.

PA Supports Language Acquisition:

By adopting the notion of performance as the core principle, the Proficiency Approach focuses on the learners' abilities in the target language by concentrating simply on what the learners know about the language. Consequentially, the approach supports the teaching and the learning of the pragmatics of the language which, according to Van Patten, help learners internalize the language.

PA Creates a Learner-Centered Environment:

Language educators must know how to identify the variables that affect their students' ability to learn, and take them into consideration while developing their classroom/school program. These variables include motivation, appropriate language learning style and learning strategies, level of anxiety, predisposition toward the language and level of aptitude to acquire it.

PA Allows For a Flexible Approach to Curriculum:

The goal of the Proficiency Approach is to promote the learners' functional abilities according to a fixed set of criteria. It does not dictate specific teaching materials or teaching methods. Therefore, it allows each teacher and institution to select the most suitable material or teaching method that will maximize their learners' language acquisition process. The approach also allows the teachers to use the curriculum as a vehicle to reinforce the values that the school

chooses to emphasize.

PA Has Tools to Assess Learners' Performance:

Because the guidelines are developed according to specific criteria it is easier to assess learners' language abilities in all four skills for the purpose of making decisions on placing learners into their appropriate learning groups as well as for making decisions relating to the articulation of learning goals. Standardized assessment tools are an inherent part of the Proficiency Approach.

Developing the Field of Hebrew Language and a cadre of Hebrew Language Professionals

The success of this approach is highly dependent on our understanding the importance of developing the field and professionalizing our Hebrew language educators.

In order to execute the proficiency approach goals, educators need to develop a mastery of certain aspects of the language-teaching profession, such as second language acquisition theories, teaching methodologies, principles for identifying appropriate teaching materials. It is also necessary to develop appropriate materials, assessment methods as well as some principles that are related to formulating lesson-plans and in-

corporate the use of technology in the classroom. Training through PA develops independent professionals who can serve as Hebrew language experts and resources in their institutions and for the community.

At the present time, several educational institutions have implemented the approach as a framework for creating their Hebrew curriculum. While this approach was initially launched at the Hebrew Program at Brandeis University, generous grants from the Covenant Foundation and the investment of several schools have funded the development of PA for supplementary schools and day schools as well. These schools include Keshet (an afternoon Hebrew school in Cambridge, Massachusetts), Gann Academy, The New Jewish High School in Waltham, MA, and JCDS, Boston's Jewish Community Day School. In addition, other schools, including The Epstein Middle School in Atlanta, Georgia and the Solomon Schechter Day School in Newton, Massachusetts, have begun to introduce and use this framework for their programs.

The approach is helping these schools to professionalize their Hebrew faculty through an investment in and strong commitment to professional development and to map and design their own particular curriculum tailored to serve the needs of their learners and to align their visions and results. In the article, Hebrew, Comes to Life through Meaningful Learning, in the April 7, 2006 issue

of Backpack, the weekly newsletter of The Epstein School, Liat Kadosh, Hebrew Language Coordinator, reported, "The [middle school] students really loved learning Hebrew in these workshops because they were driven by student interest."

A graduating middle school student at JCDS shared with me her experience of how her Hebrew language learning experience has changed. She said since the Proficiency Approach was introduced at the school it has allowed her to fully invest in the learning process. The clarity of the expectations and the goals associated with the PA have made it easier for her to push herself to maximize the improvement of her language skills, and with each new milestone, she experiences an increased connection to Hebrew and Israel.

The Proficiency Approach has provided a framework within which the institution, the educator and the learner are all partners in a clearly defined journey and, on the way, they are all winners as the school's vision is strengthened, the staff is empowered and the students are enabled and Hebrew, the language of our heritage, continues to thrive and be passed to another generation.

Dr. Vardit Ringvald is the Director of the Hebrew and Arabic Languages Program at Brandeis University. Dr. Ringvald can be reached at ringvald@brandeis.edu.

RAVSAK extends a refuah sheleima to David Posnack Hebrew Day School student Daniel Wultz, who was seriously injured in a terrorist bombing in Israel. You are in our thoughts and prayers

SUMMARY HIGHLIGHTS

ACTFL PROFICIENCY GUIDLINES - SPEAKING (REVISED 1999)

SUPERIOR	ADVANCED	INTERMEDIATE	NOVICE
<p>Supirior-level speakers are characterized by the ability to:</p> <p>Participate fully and effectively in conversations in formal and informal settings on topics related to practical needs and areas of professional and / or scholarly interests</p> <p>Provide a structured argument to explain and defend opinions and develop effective hypotheses within extended discourse</p> <p>Discuss topics concretely and abstractly</p> <p>Deal with a linguistically unfamiliar situation</p> <p>Maintain a high degree of linguistic accuracy</p> <p>Satisfy the linguistic demands of professional and / or scholarly life</p>	<p>Advanced-level speakers are characterized by the ability to:</p> <p>Participate actively in conversations in most informal and some formal settings on topics of personal and public interest</p> <p>Narrate and describe in major time frames with good control of aspect</p> <p>Deal effectively with unanticipated complications through a variety of communicative devices</p> <p>Sustain communication by using, with suitable accuracy and confidence, connected discourse of paragraph length and substance</p> <p>Satisfy the demands of work and / or school situations</p>	<p>Intermediate-level speakers are characterized by the ability to:</p> <p>Participate in simple, direct conversations on generally predictable topics related to daily activities and personal environment</p> <p>Create with the language and communicate personal meaning to sympathetic interlocutors by combining language elements in discrete sentences</p> <p>Obtain and give information by asking and answering questions</p> <p>Sustain and bring to a close a number of basic, uncomplicated communicative exchanges, often in reactive mode</p> <p>Satisfy simple personal needs and social demands to survive in the target language culture</p>	<p>Novice-level speakers are characterized by the ability to:</p> <p>Respond to simple questions on the most common features of daily life</p> <p>Convey minimal meaning to interlocutors experienced with dealing with foreigners by using isolated words, lists of words, memorized phrases and some personalized recombinations of words and phrases</p> <p>Satisfy a very limited number of immediate needs</p>

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Leah Nadich Meir

Good News for Hebrew Language Education

There is good news for day schools educators who have pleaded for interesting, engaging and educationally superior materials for teaching Hebrew language. There has been a resurgence in the past few years in Hebrew language education at all levels, from preschool through high school and beyond. Some initiatives, such as "Hebrew in America", sponsored by the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture and the Ma'alah program, developed by the Melton Center with a Covenant Foundation grant, have tackled the preschool years. Two ambitious initiatives have begun to transform Hebrew language education in day schools at the elementary and high school levels. Both are known by Hebrew acronyms: Tal Am (Tochnit Limudim Ivrit Umoreshet) is designed for

grades one through six and NETA (Noar Letovat HaIvrit) is geared for grades seven through twelve.

These two comprehensive Hebrew language programs aim to improve the quality of Hebrew language learning in Jewish day schools, so that graduating students will be fluent readers and speakers of Hebrew, entirely comfortable in Modern Hebrew as well as in the classical Hebrew of Biblical and rabbinic texts. In addition, the Tal Am and NETA programs seek to nurture among students a deep love for the Hebrew language as the language of Am Yisrael and Medinat Yisrael, (the Jewish people and the Jewish state). Their non-denominational materials focus on Hebrew as the language that ties all Jews to one another, making them particularly well suited to community day schools.

Tal Am is unique in being an integrated Jewish studies curriculum that covers Hebrew language, Tanakh (Bible) and tefillah (prayer), as well as introductions to rabbinic literature and Jewish history in the older grades. Developed by Tova Shimon and a highly skilled team of educators at the Bronfman Jewish Education Centre in Montreal and in Israel, Tal Am is currently available for grades one and two, with an additional grade being added every year through 2009-2010. It is being used in over 300 day schools worldwide from all streams of Jewish life. The subject areas are spiraled and aligned to facilitate multi-lateral reinforcement of vocabulary, language skills, thinking and learning abilities and the thematic integration of concepts and values. The colorful and lively books, posters and classroom libraries, as well as CDs, imbue each step

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of learning with excitement. Feedback from teachers and school heads has been uniformly enthusiastic.

The NETA Hebrew language initiative is being developed by Hilla Kobliner and her colleagues, Hebrew language curriculum experts from the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, and administered by Hebrew College in Boston. NETA is now being taught to over 10,000 grade 7-12 students in 56 North American schools. It is also being taught in Australia, Russia and the Ukraine. New schools are accepted yearly. For the first time, high school students can learn Hebrew language through age-appropriate and intellectually challenging materials that incorporate Biblical, rabbinic and Modern Hebrew in elegantly designed books. Each NETA unit, from the beginners' through the advanced levels, is built around a theme that is gradually developed both linguistically and intellectually.

Experience has shown that first-rate curricular materials are only as effective as the teacher who is using them. Both Tal Am and NETA place a very high priority on the professional

education of their teachers. Both programs therefore include teacher guides and provide intensive introductory seminars for teachers who will be using their materials for the first time. The introductory seminar for Tal Am includes pre-service and in-service segments, enabling teachers to learn more about the program after having had some experience in teaching it. In addition to its introductory seminar, NETA now offers three subsidized certificate courses at Hebrew College (providing credits toward a master's degree): the first for teachers new to Hebrew language teaching who plan a career in teaching Hebrew as a second language, the second for experienced teachers and the third for Hebrew language department coordinators. A practicum with individual mentoring by a NETA educational consultant is an integral part of all three courses. In addition to mentoring the certificate course students, NETA educational consultants work closely with the Hebrew language coordinators and the administration of each school to support them in meeting the challenges of introducing a demanding program for Hebrew language teaching.

As a result of these two far-reaching initiatives, both of which are supported by multi-year grants from The AVI CHAI Foundation, day schools have access to outstanding educational materials and perhaps even more importantly, to professional education for their Hebrew language teachers. Day schools will finally be able to boast of graduates who are comfortable in all the Hebrew skills: understanding, speaking, reading and writing. Through Hebrew, these graduates will have a strong and enduring connection with the past, the present and the future of the Jewish people and the land of Israel, and a lifelong commitment to continuing their learning.

Additional details and contact information about Tal Am (www.talam.org) and NETA (www.netahebrew.org) are available on their respective websites.

Ms. Leah Nadich Meir is a Program Officer for the AVI CHAI Foundation. Ms. Meir can be reached at: lmeir@avichaina.org

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From The Executive Director

Chevre:

I hope, please G-d, that you are all well and continue to find joy in your most holy work.

Dr. Marc N. Kramer

At the recommendation of the Executive Committee, RAVSAK launched a strategic planning process this past fall to envision our future. We have been fortunate enough to have Dr. Ray Levi, head of the Minneapolis Jewish Day School and RAVSAK vice president for planning, to lead this process. With input from key informants from across the spectrum of Jewish educational and philanthropic organizations, and guided by RAVSAK's past presidents and many current school leaders, the Executive Committee is putting the finishing touches on an exciting strategic plan that will undoubtedly keep RAVSAK and all of our schools at the leading edge of Jewish day school education.

Dozens of great minds have helped shape our emerging plan – too many to thank here- but I do want to acknowledge Dr. Bill Robinson, Director of Education and Research at the Jewish Life Network/Steinhardt Foundation, who has provided incredible insights into our work and has challenged us to challenge some of our own assumptions. Bill, *todah rabah*.

Like most well-developed plans, we

have explored ways to improve what we already do, expand the scope of our work, and account for the impact these changes will have on the organization's structure and vitality. As an outcome of a recent needs assessment and the strategic planning process itself, RAVSAK will expand its focus in order to continue to serve its rapidly growing network of member schools. This program focus will have 5 key components:

- Enrich professional and lay leadership through research, programs, and conferences that build position knowledge, develop leadership and managerial skills, heighten positive disposition, encourage tenure, and strengthen commitment to Jewish diversity;
- Develop protocol and policy best practice modules that ensure authentic pluralism and equal the highest standards of leading independent schools;
- Promote religious purposefulness, a commitment to life-long learning, and the centrality of Israel – the land and its people, across time and today in our schools;
- Expand networking capacities within and across administrative positions to promote peer learning, reduce professional isolation and foster a culture of mutual support;
- Facilitate like-school, inter-school,

regional and North American-wide student programming at the primary, middle and high school levels which provide opportunities for collective learning, tzedakah, and spiritual growth.

Additionally, the strategic plan calls for significant attention to RAVSAK's infrastructure which must evolve if we are to meet the needs of our members and achieve our important goals. As this increase in capacity is vital to our success, we have already begun the process of seeking new office space, restructuring and expanding the professional staff, and developing meaningful partnerships with leaders in the philanthropic community.

Ultimately, these changes will allow us to substantially increase the quality and quantity of the guidance, advocacy, consultation, result and service we provide. I look forward to keeping you abreast of these developments.

I again wish to thank all of those individuals who have helped shape RAVSAK's new strategic plan. It has been an honor to work with you, and more so, to be a part of such an exciting process. My warmest wishes for a chag Shavuot sameach, Dr. Marc N. Kramer.

Dr. Marc N. Kramer is the Executive Director of RAVSAK, he can be reached at mkramer@ravsak.org



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Questions?

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[continued from page 2]

ing. They will be responsible for providing input on all Judaic related topics such as ideas for new initiatives, conference presentation topics and speakers, identifying gaps in RAVSAK's service to Judaic heads, and helping us ensure excellence in Judaic and Hebrew studies for our school membership. If you are interested in serving on this committee, please call Lynn Raviv at 205-567-8587

Executive Committee This committee directs and supervises the current organization. If you have any ideas for new board members who are willing to work throughout the year in helping us fulfill our mission, please call me at 520-5754098.

I thank you all in advance for seriously considering national leadership roles through RAVSAK. Let's hope the vision that we all share of preparing our future Jewish leaders continues to sustain us.

B'Shalom,

Bathea James

Bathea James is the President of RAVSAK. Bathea can be reached at bathea@msn.com

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