HaYidion: The RAVSAK Journal
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From the Editor
by Barbara Davis

In a global and interconnected world, speaking more than one language is no longer a luxury but a necessity. Approximately one-fifth of Americans speak a language other than English (LOTE), and around the world it is estimated that almost two-thirds of children are bilingual. Thanks to the ubiquity of technology, LOL, IMHO, OMG and BBM are common linguistic currency, and people text and tweet in many tongues. Recent research indicates that this multi-linguistic phenomenon may even be beneficial to the brain. Bilinguals perform better on a variety of cognitive tasks; one study even found that the onset of dementia was delayed by four or five years in people who spoke more than one language.

But what about a language that is spoken as a mother tongue by only 9 million people, that became extinct by the 4th century CE, that survived purely as a liturgical and literary language until it was miraculously revived in the late 19th century? What is the value and role of such a language?

This issue of *HaYidion* is devoted to the Hebrew language, the language of the Jewish people. But our considerations are of a living language, one that we want to have our children learn as a way of perpetuating our past, communicating with our brethren, and perhaps, assuring our future.

Who would have thought that this ancient language, the source code for centuries of Jewish thought, values and history, could be controversial in the Jewish community day school world of the 21st century? Yet today’s email brings news of a California “Hebrew Charter Middle School,” created by a rabbi, in which the students do not have to study Hebrew, much less be Jewish, and of another Hebrew charter school suggested for Harlem, which drew local opposition because “they want modern Hebrew and that’s not going to help our children in any way.” And there are controversies over the best way to teach this language, the purpose of teaching it, the purported lack of success in teaching it. It all makes for fascinating reading—as do the beautiful poems created by students in RAVSAK schools, written for our first ever Hebrew poetry contest.

This issue of *HaYidion* is one with a multiplicity of approaches to a single subject. I believe you will find it unusual as well as useful, enjoyable as well as educational, intriguing as well as inspiring. I hope you will be able to read it as you relax in a hammock under a tree or on a beach near the ocean, on a well deserved summer vacation.

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From the Desk of Arnee Winshall, RAVSAK Chair

שלום חברו,

I hope that everyone enjoyed Passover meals, gathered around dining room tables with family and friends, re-telling the story of the exodus and sharing personal stories, connecting the past to the present and creating new stories that can be told in the future. We are a people who have continually lived in the present and built our future drawing strength and wisdom from the past.

In this issue we focus on one of the key links in the chain that connects the past to the present and is an essential element for preserving the Jewish people well into the future: the Hebrew language, our שפת עם, our national language, and for some our שפת אם, mother tongue. RAVSAK's mission is to capitalize the "J" in our schools, and there is no element more essential than the mastery of Hebrew for engaging deeply in Jewish study and exploring Jewish roots.

As Jewish educators and RAVSAK schools, we strive to provide our students, our staff and our families with the opportunity to develop and strengthen their Jewish identity and connection to Israel, to create their own stories as members of the Jewish people. We have a secret weapon, a national treasure, so to speak—the Hebrew language. Wayne L. Firestone, President of Hillel, wrote, “We need to recognize the Hebrew language as a valuable portal for self-exploration and Jewish identity building.”

In Indonesian they have an expression: Bahasa jiwa bangsa. Language is the soul of a nation.

This year has been designated the year of Hebrew, שנה השפה העברית. The Academy of the Hebrew Language writes,

The Israeli government has decided to honor the Hebrew language by issuing a stamp that highlights Hebrew's uniqueness: its continued existence even after it ceased to be spoken, the treasures that were added to its vocabulary throughout the ages, and its modern revival as the everyday language of Israel. (Go to p. 31 to see the stamp.)

The year of Hebrew is truly an opportunity to celebrate our beautiful language and to call attention to the importance of investing in elevating the study of Hebrew in the Diaspora. Please join RAVSAK in taking the lead to advocate for the investment in the development of the field of Hebrew educators. By raising the level of Hebrew education, we will provide our students with the opportunity not just to study Hebrew, but to experience the joy and pride that comes with truly acquiring Hebrew and making it their own.

Arnee

RAVSAK's Board and Staff wish you a happy Shavuot
I understand firsthand the positive impact a Jewish education can have on a child. That’s why I work in a Jewish school.

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Shifting Paradigms in Hebrew Learning and Teaching

by VARDIT RINGVALD

Most Jewish day schools view the learning and teaching of Hebrew language as a vehicle to shape and reinforce their students’ Jewish identity. The outcome desired by heads of school, parents and students is for graduates to have internalized and “owned” the Hebrew language in a way that will allow them to feel comfortable using Hebrew in the context of modern Israel and be equally able to interpret at least the Siddur and the Tanakh confidently.

The enormous task of creating an educated graduate who is a true “Hebraic” person creates anxiety among school leadership. Lacking the expertise to lead the Hebrew program and the necessary cadre of professional Hebrew language educators, most Jewish school leaders are driven to outsource the responsibility for their Hebrew education. Schools are led, therefore, to depend on programs that train personnel to teach specific, ready-made, fixed curricula available on the market.

When both teachers and principals lack professional tools as language educators, using these predetermined programs is reassuring. Clearly articulated, packaged content holds out the promise that the school will always have an organized Hebrew program, which “somebody else” with expertise has taken care of developing for them. What most heads of schools fail to understand is that by outsourcing the Hebrew endeavor, they create barriers to their learners’ owning and internalizing the language.

In the field of second language learning, we differentiate between learning and acquisition. Learning refers to knowledge about the structure of the language, to memorized vocabulary lists and to the conscious use of the language in the specific context it was learned. Acquisition encompasses a learner’s abilities to internalize all aspects of the target language and to use it subconsciously and automatically in a variety of “real life” environments—beyond the immediate learned materials. In order to achieve the desired graduate profile, a paradigm shift is required, empowering learners to acquire the Hebrew language instead of only learning about it.

Unlike pre-packaged, content-oriented programs, student language acquisition and the required teacher professional development are dynamic processes fraught with unpredictable elements. In a process that exhibits many clear characteristics and discernable stages, learners generally move from the pre-productive phase (mastering input) to the productive phase (exhibiting proficiency in their output). Gradual progress in a second language is evidenced in both receptive and productive development: from understanding and producing lists of simple words and phrases taken from the immediate surroundings to producing a collection of connected simple sentences, and finally paragraphs. Learners move from the use of simple present tense verbs to other complicated tenses and from using Hebrew in familiar real-life settings to using the language in unfamiliar contexts.

Acquisition progress in terms of the above-mentioned characteristics is not linear, but “zigzag”—and even this differs from one student to the next. The pace of acquisition is impacted by variables such as age, learning style and strategies, motivation, aptitude, learner anxiety level, as well as the particular conditions in which the language is presented, including number of contact hours, intensity of the program in question, type of linguistic input to which learners are exposed (authentic versus inauthentic, authentic materials being those generated by native speakers for native speakers, to be used from the earliest, “novice” level of proficiency), and many others.

Another factor that contributes to the unpredictable rhythm of language acquisition is the distinctive phase, called “the plunge,” during which learners move to the intermediate level with their language expanding horizontally. At this level, they know more vocabulary than before and are familiar with the differ-
ent tenses. They try to use the language in real life settings, retrieving the information from a larger area of the brain than novice users of the learned language. As a result, learners tend to make errors of all kinds that can impact the pace of their language production and give them the impression that their language level is falling. The feeling accompanying this apparent “plunge” is one of failure. When given a choice, up to 80% of students drop out of the language learning process at this stage.

It is the teachers’ expertise, not any given curriculum, that is key to supporting students through this process. Having curricula and being trained in how to teach a particular curriculum will not result in a program that successfully addresses and resolves the unpredictable onset of the aforementioned difficulties.

Hebrew educators can only truly support their learners when they are fully aware of the language acquisition process, enabling them to make smart curricular decisions in “real time” and ensure that the process is as rewarding as possible in spite of this unpredictability. In order to overcome these challenges, Hebrew educators need to be equipped with the expertise that allows them to make such educated decisions.

Only through the internalization of the principles of second language acquisition theory and the assimilation of an in-depth understanding of all aspects related to the teaching and learning of Hebrew will teachers gain the power to activate the language acquisition process in their learners. In order to help their learners navigate this dynamic process successively:

What most heads of schools fail to understand is that by outsourcing the Hebrew endeavor, they create barriers to their learners’ owning and internalizing the language.

What RAVSAK Schools Say About Hebrew Education

Over the past three years, Hebrew at the Center has convened groups of day schools to discuss the benefits, challenges, successes and vision related to Hebrew language in their schools from the point of view of the students, the parents, the teachers and school leadership. Based on conversations with heads of schools, principals, Judaic directors and Hebrew coordinators from more than 20 schools from across the spectrum of Jewish practice and affiliation in Boston, Atlanta and Los Angeles, the following themes emerged in the words of those who participated:

1. “Hebrew plays a significant role in connecting not only to Jewish people but to Israel—the country and people. Hebrew is the language that unites us as a people.”

2. “Hebrew is part of the students’ Jewish identity and ensures Jewish continuity.”

3. “All students should be able to engage with the Hebrew language and feel connected.”

4. “Students want to experience that they are progressing and that after spending years studying Hebrew they can use Hebrew.”

5. “Success is when kids insist on using Hebrew and when they view Hebrew as worthwhile.”

6. “Hebrew is a second tier subject. Parents often display attitudes that it isn’t as important. (Parents’ sense of inadequacy in Hebrew may be reflected in their attitudes.) Their perception that the teaching is not effective may influence their attitudes.”

7. “Teachers usually don’t come with background in teaching a second language though they may (or may not) be professionals. What is needed is investment in their professional development as it relates to the field of Hebrew teaching and learning.”

8. “We need teachers who are familiar with goal-setting and assessment and understand foreign language teaching.”

9. “In order to change the status quo, we should be able to set expectations of the level of teaching that is the same as for general studies: classroom management, best practices, differentiation skills, effective communication with parents, and collaborative work with colleagues in the school.”

10. “There is a need to articulate how Hebrew fits into the larger vision of our school.”

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 8]
In order to achieve the desired graduate profile, a paradigm shift is required, empowering learners to acquire the Hebrew language instead of only learning about it.

In other words, a Hebrew language program that relies on the core principles of these elements has the potential to help its learners achieve their linguistics goals. Such an approach will allow for the flexibility demanded by an inclusive program, which provides every learner with tools for maximizing his or her acquisition process.

To reach this goal, schools have two tasks at hand: helping their teachers gain the necessary expertise, and creating a language program in which this expertise can best be utilized. Providing opportunities for in-service professional development is the primary means of expediting this process for teachers. When teachers learn, internalize and implement the principles of language acquisition within their own contexts—in their individual school settings and classrooms—they conceptualize them in a relatively short period of time and maximize the acquisition process for both themselves and their learners.

By putting their learning into practice through interaction with their learners in real time, teachers are able to experience instances of immediate success, reinforcing their own development and immediately impacting learner outcomes. If the content and sequence of a PD program is custom-suited to the immediate needs of a school and the profile of its teachers, each teacher becomes equipped to follow the process through the lens of his or her learners’ needs. These tasks might seem challenging to implement in the daily life of a school. They entail freeing teachers’ time for professional development, modifying curriculum, and collecting data on an ongoing basis. School leadership must allocate funds as well as establish clear expectations from coordinators and Hebrew educators. When these elements are not part of a school’s culture, of the fabric of the school’s Hebrew language program, the school remains forever dependent upon outside sources for support.

In Hebrew language teaching and learning, a paradigm shift means a revolutionary change in our programs, shifting to the dynamic and flexible process navigated by the core principles of language acquisition. This fundamental change will lead to desired learner outcomes, enabling us as Jewish educators to fulfill our vision of “Hebraic” graduates who will become our Jewishly literate leaders of the future.

Project ROPE: Roots of Philanthropy Education

Project ROPE is a program in youth philanthropy unparalleled in its engagement with Jewish texts and values. Now entering its fourth year, ROPE gives students the skills, tools and dispositions to become lifelong leaders in Jewish philanthropy and communal service. The program has the students take the ethical traditions learned in school and put them into practice by confronting social issues both locally and in Israel.

Barbie Prince, head of the Shoshana S. Cardin School, says of the program: “As Jews, we have a long history of taking care of others, making sure that everyone has their basic needs met. What we don’t have is a mechanism to teach our students how to be philanthropists in order to sustain the culture of giving. Students need to learn how to choose intelligently organizations to support, how to ask others to join them in supporting organizations and how to raise money effectively. As a Jewish educational community, we need to work together to give our students these tools. Project ROPE is the perfect educational vehicle for our students to grow in philanthropic knowledge and implementation.”

Project ROPE is open to all RAVSAK high schools, and we invite you to join for the coming school year. For more information, contact Dr. Elliott Rabin at erabin@ravsak.org.
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We Can Graduate Students Who Know Hebrew

by Naomi Stillman

It’s 10:30 am and the kindergarteners are talking about recycling. They’ve just put their milk cartons from snack in the class recycling bin and are wondering what the cartons will be made into. The third graders just finished reading about Joseph and his brothers and are discussing sibling rivalry. The middle schoolers are putting the finishing touches on their time capsules, the tenth graders are prepping for a debate about society’s obligations towards homeless people, and a senior is working on his graduation speech.

Now let’s imagine that all that activity is happening in Hebrew. Pie in the sky? Or day school of the future?

At this particular moment in Jewish education, a day school alive with Hebrew sounds like either a fond memory or a flight of the imagination. But is it? Not necessarily. The scenario above can start unfolding in Jewish day schools in a few short years if we start now.

We all know some things about learning a language. For example,

• the earlier you start, the better
• the more you use it, the better
• if you stop using it, you’ll forget it

How can we apply these understandings to building a Hebrew plan for our schools?

1. If starting earlier is better—start in kindergarten.

2. If using Hebrew more is better—use more Hebrew during the school day. In fact, do everything in Hebrew for half of each day—all activities and classes during that half of the day, including recess, gym, and art can be in Hebrew.

3. Keep up this commitment through the 12th grade. That’s the way to avoid the familiar syndrome of “Sara knew more Hebrew in third grade than she does now.”

I suspect that at this point, most readers are thinking “that’s easy to say, but totally unrealistic.” I argue that it will be challenging and will require courage, commitment, and patience, but it is eminently doable.

Before getting into the details of the plan, let’s look at some relevant research. In a 1994 report entitled “Integrating Language and Content: Lessons from Immersion,” Fred Genesee reviewed three decades of “immersion” language learning in North America. His purpose was to learn lessons from the immersion programs that can be applied to other, non-immersion second language programs in schools. The review has three significant takeaways:

1. Second language instruction that is content-rich and connected to other academic subjects and activities is more effective than teaching a second language on its own.

In other words, language is acquired most effectively when the language has some meaningful purpose: learning in Hebrew is more motivating than learning Hebrew.

2. Second language instruction that is discourse-rich is more effective than teaching a second language frontally.

True discourse in the classroom is key. Genuine give and take, with students initiating conversations and speaking at length and meaningfully is discourse. Merely responding to questions or comments initiated by the teacher is not enough!
Historical Evidence
Let’s look at situations in which non-native children mastered Hebrew. These include the Tarbut schools in Eastern Europe between the world wars; Masad and other camps that functioned in Hebrew from the 1940s to the early 1970s; some day schools in the 1960s and 70s; and a very few day schools today. What did these schools and camps have in common? Both formal learning and daily activities were conducted in Hebrew. In the Tarbut schools, starting in kindergarten, the majority of the school day, including recess, was lived in Hebrew. The Masad camps offered a full summer of all-Hebrew activities and learning. And in successful day schools, all Judaic studies classes happen in Hebrew. That’s how students and campers learned Hebrew and absorbed the message that Hebrew is a useful, versatile language.

True discourse in the classroom, genuine give and take, is key. Merely responding to questions or comments initiated by the teacher is not enough!

3. Second language instruction that systematically integrates explicit and implicit learning is more effective than either alone.

Explicit language instruction is formal, teaching the rules (such as grammar) of the language—i.e., the language itself is the object of instruction. Implicit language instruction uses the language as a vehicle for engaging content—i.e., the language is the medium of instruction. Both are needed because students need formal linguistic rules to develop correct linguistic form, master increasingly complex linguistic structures, and speak idiomatically, but explicit language instruction alone undermines the purpose of language by detaching it from any meaningful use such as conversation or argument, text study, prayer, cultural exploration, friendship, or fun.

Genessee emphasizes that random or associative linguistic information and tasks, even if explicit and seemingly connected to content, do not contribute to students’ language skills. (For example, a poem by Rachel is not a good opportunity to present the roots and conjugations of the verbs in the poem. Instead, it’s a good time to stay focused on the message of the poem). In other words, research shows that the integration of explicit and implicit instruction has to be systematic and part of a formal instructional plan.

All three conclusions point in the same direction: students who do important and interesting things in Hebrew will know Hebrew. So Hebrew at school has to be active and meaningful. Hebrew posters and Shulhanot Ivrit are nice, but unless the students use Hebrew regularly and actively they won’t know Hebrew. What’s more, unless students need Hebrew to succeed academically and fit into school culture, they won’t be motivated to know Hebrew.

Students in grades 2-5 need a more systematic approach. They should continue to learn and play in Hebrew for half of each day, but explicit teaching of grammar, vocabulary, cursive writing, reading without vocalization, and other skills a particular school wants its students to master (such as Rashi script) should be gradually introduced.

Students in grades 6-10 will learn all Judaic and Israel studies in Hebrew, and also take a systematic Hebrew-as-a-second-language class to “organize” their knowledge of the language, and teach grammar, writing, and other language skills more formally.

Second Grade—Too Late? : An Anecdote
In 2004, I attended a conference at the Library of Congress. During a break, the woman I was chatting with asked what I do. When she heard that I administer a Hebrew program, she told me the following story:

I grew up in a small town in Pennsylvania. In the second grade we got a new teacher from Israel. On the first day of school, he told the class that he knows no English, and proceeded to teach us in Hebrew for the entire year. At the end of the year, we all knew Hebrew—and he revealed that he knows English just fine.

I won’t speak to the moral message imparted, but the linguistic lesson is clear—if you use it, you will know it.
Computer literacy in Hebrew is a must. School computers will be Hebrew-enabled and loaded with relevant Hebrew programs, and students will learn Hebrew keyboarding early on.

- Bilingualism boosts “executive function”—bilingual children develop the ability to control attention and ignore misleading information earlier than monolinguals.

And why Hebrew?
- Mastery of Hebrew promotes students’ understanding of their history, culture and tradition, strengthening Jewish identity and fostering a sense of belonging to the Jewish people.
- Mastery of Hebrew enables our children to read and study biblical and rabbinic texts, liturgical and modern Hebrew literature, with intelligence and appreciation. Hebrew is the path to deeper, more authentic engagement with texts.

If students are given the chance to speak, think, and act in Hebrew from the very earliest grades, they will soon know Hebrew.

This whole enterprise sounds like a lot of effort, and some of you may be asking yourself “Why go to all this trouble?”

Here are some reasons:

- Bilingual children have been shown to outperform their monolingual peers on standardized tests in all subjects as well as on and tests of cognitive development, problem-solving and higher order thinking.
- Bilingual children demonstrate greater self-confidence and more creativity than monolingual children.
- Hebrew cultivates students’ bonds to the State of Israel, giving them access to Israel’s people, events, and intellectual ferment.
- Hebrew is the international and cross-generational Jewish language.

Summary

If students are given the chance to speak, think, and act in Hebrew from the very earliest grades, they will soon know Hebrew. The key is to use Hebrew to expand the students’ knowledge and perspective, to offer them new knowledge and understandings, to hone their thinking skills, and to engage meaningful content on myriad topics.

What would it take to make this happen?

It will take time. But if we do nothing, the time will pass anyway, and nothing will change. If we start now, then in 10 years, hundreds of students will be fluent in Hebrew.

It will take a genuine belief that the opening scenario (remember the day school of the future?) is realistic and that by teaching Hebrew we are bequeathing a treasure to our students.

It will take high standards and high expectations.

It will take well-trained, deeply committed, professional teachers.

And because we cannot provide true immersion (a full school day in Hebrew and exposure to Hebrew outside of school), we must provide a detailed and carefully planned curriculum that combines content with grammar and linguistics in a thoughtful, linguistically sequential way.

Mostly, it will take Hebrew—Biblical written Hebrew, and modern spoken Hebrew, grammar and games, projects and plays, comics and conversations, פייסבוק (Facebook) and גוגל (Google).

I hope that in ten years, the question “Why bother?” will make no sense; and that an article such as this will appear in Hebrew!

הידיעון

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Back to the Future: Achieving Hebrew Fluency in the Contemporary Day School

by Devora Steinmetz

Let me start by stating two propositions that seem to me beyond debate: 1) that the vast majority of children have strong capacity to learn languages; 2) that the vast majority of children who spend years in American day schools studying Hebrew graduate without having attained a credible degree of Hebrew fluency.

Rather than discussing the factors contributing to the poor state of Hebrew language acquisition in most contemporary day schools, I want to begin by staking a clear position: Day schools that spend a significant amount of time on Hebrew and Jewish studies are failing in a significant part of their core mission if they are not educating children to a strong degree of fluency in both modern Hebrew and the Hebrew of classical texts. Further, if we were addressing any other area of study—whether another language, such as French or Spanish, or a different skill area such as playing a musical instrument or playing tennis—parents would be up in arms if their children spent hours a week, year after year, and made the kind of scant progress that many children make in Hebrew over the course of years of day school education.

In my fourth year high school French class, which met for four or five periods a week, we were reading Molière and Camus, material far more difficult than any teacher would have dreamt of giving us in Hebrew, though my high school classmates had been studying Hebrew six to eight years longer than they had been studying French! While it could be claimed that learning French is easier for English speakers than learning Hebrew, given the significant difference in the number of years and the number of hours per week allotted to these two subjects over the course of children’s schooling and the fact that children begin to learn Hebrew at a young age, when their language acquisition skills are most acute, the massive discrepancy in student achievement in these two languages simply cannot be accounted for by the relative difficulty of the two languages.

When it comes to Hebrew language learning, a variety of excuses are offered to explain why children are not becoming fluent. Many educators and parents appear to take for granted that this is the way things must be, that, for whatever reason, it is simply impossible for children to become fluent in Hebrew within the day school setting. It makes me feel old to say this, but I remember a time when the opposite assumption was the norm, when educators assumed that children could easily become competent in Hebrew, and when the vast majority of children did. That was the case in the elementary day school that I attended as a child, and it was the conviction that my own and my classmates’ experience as students in the early years of elementary school in the mid- to late-1960s was a perfectly reasonable indicator of what is possible that guided the development of the Hebrew language program at the school that I founded, Beit Rabban.

I want to offer a brief description of the Hebrew language program that was developed and implemented at Beit Rabban during its early years. I offer this sketch, first, as an example of what is possible, as a challenge to the notion that young children cannot become fluent in Hebrew or that there is a necessary trade-off between Hebrew language learning and depth of Jewish studies content learning. Second, I offer it as containing critical elements that can be adapted to different settings, settings that might have different constraints than Beit Rabban on use of instructional time, deployment of teaching staff, or other things that might make wholesale adoption of this kind of program impractical or impossible.

My description will focus on the first two years of Hebrew language instruction at Beit Rabban, in kindergarten and first grade, the youngest grades in the school at the time. Beit Rabban had mixed age groups; kindergartners and first graders were, for the most part, in a single class, with most discipline-based learning conducted in small groups based on skill level, experience, or ability. K/1 Hebrew study had as its goal the development of basic fluency in day-to-day Hebrew, including reading, writing, comprehension, and speaking. This served, among
other things, as the foundation for formal study of classical texts (first Chumash and then Mishnah and other rabbinic texts) which began, for most students, in the second grade (some students, based on Hebrew level and other critical parameters, began formal text study after only one year in the school, in first grade).

As children embarked on formal text study, the sophistication of their Hebrew comprehension and production skyrocketed, since children were now challenged not only to make sense of biblical grammar and syntax, but also to discuss complex interpretive questions, generally ones that they raised themselves, entirely in Hebrew. While, as mentioned, I will focus here on the Hebrew learning that preceded the children’s embarking on formal text study, I do want to assert that, with the proper foundation and continued support (and, critically, with teachers who do not find that their own ability to discuss these issues is severely limited by their own Hebrew level), children can learn to discuss complex ideas in Hebrew—that it does not have to be the case that, at some point in the educational trajectory, Hebrew must be sacrificed in favor of conceptual sophistication of content learning.

Our approach to Hebrew learning in the K/1 class was a partial immersion approach based on a natural language model of second-language acquisition. Let me define these terms. “Immersion” refers to teaching a second language in a setting in which only that language is used, both by the teachers and by the students. “Partial immersion” does not mean that the immersion quality of the program is only partial (i.e., that the children’s native language is used along with the second language), but rather that the immersion program takes place during only part of the day.

“Natural language” refers to language instruction that is based on the assumption that children can acquire a second language in much the same way that they acquire their first language: through having to make sense of things said in that language in the context, at first, of concrete activities and to begin to speak the language to ask for things, to play, and to engage with others in meaningful activities. Of course, since school is an ar-

Many educators and parents appear to take for granted that it is simply impossible for children to become fluent in Hebrew within the day school setting.
Children in the K/1 class had one-hour Hebrew immersion classes twice a day (once on Fridays), once in the morning and once in the afternoon. During those sessions, a sign at the front of the room was flipped over to reveal the words “Anachnu medabrim Ivrit.” This was an indication of the seriousness with which we took the notion of immersion—the children could not expect the teacher to say a word in English during that hour, and they were expected to use only Hebrew during that time as well, even if sometimes it meant that they needed to ask how to say something in Hebrew. The teacher, for her part, needed to do everything in her power to make herself understood, using exaggerated tones of voice, props, dramatization, practicing language structures (for example, Guess Who, which requires the use of forms such as ha’im and yeish lo/sein lo), cooking or baking (structured in such a way that children were constantly processing or using language to describe what they were doing, what they were noticing, etc.), doing physical activities such as exercises or Shim’on Omer (Simon Says), and many others.

Of critical importance, in addition, was that a culture of speaking Hebrew was cultivated in the classroom and school by the multiple ways in which Hebrew permeated the day outside of immersion periods. The point was not only to increase the time spent on Hebrew and make full use of the range of opportunities for natural language learning but to create a culture in which Hebrew speaking was something that you just do.

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Similarly, children were given the tools very early on to ask in Hebrew for things that they needed: sentences asking a teacher to help tie a shoelace or saying that one is cold or hot, for example, were introduced to the children and posted on the wall, and thereafter children were expected to, and eagerly did, use these sentences any time they wanted to communicate these day-to-day things to the teachers, increasing children’s sense of competence in Hebrew and their self-efficacy as emerging Hebrew speakers. Teachers and administrators used Hebrew among themselves in the presence of the children, and children knew that, if they came into the office to duplicate something or for any other reason, they would need to ask for what they wanted in Hebrew.

In addition, certain classroom rituals, such as noting which children were present and which were absent, always took place in Hebrew, and classrooms were full of both Hebrew labels and Hebrew charts and graphs: for calendar and weather, rotating jobs, graphing how many teeth each child had lost, and many others. These charts would often be reviewed at morning meeting, which would also include singing Hebrew (as well as English) songs, always with a child pointing to the words written on a chart tablet, and singing variations of the Alef Bet song, with different vowels added on different days. Hebrew words appeared regularly on the day’s schedule, not only for Hebrew sessions but for math, park time, lunch, community service, or any other lesson or activity. Often, games that the children had learned to play in Hebrew remained out during Explorations (a more complex version of what is commonly known as Choice Time), and

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children could choose to play the game, but they would need to play it in Hebrew.

The point of all of these, and many other, uses of Hebrew outside of the immersion context was not only to increase the time spent on Hebrew and make full use of the range of opportunities for natural language learning (including many opportunities to read and write Hebrew in a natural setting) but, as noted, to create a culture in which Hebrew speaking was something that you just do. Indications that we were succeeding in creating the disposition of using Hebrew abounded. I think of walking into Explorations and being approached by two children who told me, in Hebrew, that they were taking a class vote in conjunction with the election bids of Netanyahu and Peres, and they proceeded to report on how many children had voted for each. Then, they told me the number of children who had . . . – and they realized that they didn’t know the Hebrew word for “abstained,” so they went over to get a dictionary and they looked it up. I remember a five-year-old who walked over to a teacher during English reading-writing workshop and, showing her stapled booklet of writing paper, said “Yesh li rak nyar echad, ve’acharei hanyar hazeh siyamti.” While each of these uses of Hebrew is flawed, the point to notice is that this doesn’t stop the children from choosing to speak Hebrew or from being able to communicate what they want to say. It is important to note that the same was true for the teachers. We very rarely had native Hebrew speakers teaching in the school; for most teachers, as for myself, using Hebrew in the flexible ways described here often presented challenges. The key was for teachers to have sufficiently good Hebrew to be able to use it flexibly and ubiquitously, and for teachers to demonstrate to the children how to make yourself understood even when you don’t know precisely how to say something as well as how to find out how to say what you don’t yet know how to say.

Since it is often the case in day schools that there is a chunk of time during the day in the early grades that is devoted to both Hebrew language learning and Jewish studies content, and it is often taken as a given that these two goals are in tension with one another, I want to explain what I think is the rather unique approach that Beit Rabban took in relation to this conundrum. At Beit Rabban, each of the classes in the younger grades had two co-teachers, both of whom taught all subjects. Among other things, this enabled us not to have to accept what is commonly thought of as a necessary trade-off between time spent learning Hebrew and the sophistication of Jewish studies content learning. In the K/1, the activities that filled Hebrew immersion periods often had nothing to do with Jewish studies content. Conversely, Jewish studies content, whether concerning holidays, parashat hashavua, discussion of the meaning of tefillot, etc., was generally taught in English, during other times of the day. This enabled us, on the one hand, to select activities for Hebrew lessons that were best suited for early language learning, for the most part concrete activities such as the ones mentioned above. And, on the other

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 69]
Six years ago, I designed a curricular initiative to change Hebrew language instruction at our school, Solomon Schechter Day School of Greater Boston. We had been given the unusual opportunity of a very large financial gift to be used for the improvement of the educational program. I encouraged the school to make an investment in a full-scale K-8 redesign of our Hebrew program based on the proficiency approach.

Why Hebrew Proficiency?

I have long believed in the importance of Hebrew as the foundation of Judaic studies. Hebrew unlocks our sacred literature and cements our connection to Israel and to Jews throughout the world. Hebrew language literacy is the hallmark of a good Jewish day school education.

By external measures, our school was doing well with Hebrew instruction. Students were being placed in high Hebrew levels in Jewish high schools; our all-Hebrew musical was an impressive signature program for our eighth graders. The challenge in arguing for a Hebrew initiative lay in articulating a vision for how we could do better.

Articulating such a vision began with creating a shared sense of dissatisfaction with the status quo. We knew that students were functioning well within the framework of class materials, but there was room for improvement in actual use of language in a real life context. We knew we were not taking full advantage of the brain’s receptivity to language in kindergarten, our youngest grade level. Furthermore, teachers felt that a unified approach to the teaching of Hebrew was lacking and that they were teaching in isolation.

The approach that we decided to adopt was Proficiency, first developed for foreign language instruction by the U.S. military and later applied to Hebrew by Dr. Vardit Ringvald, a professor at nearby Brandeis University. The proficiency approach focuses on improving performance in all four language skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) with the goal of functioning in real-life contexts. It is assessment based, and features clearly articulated goals, structured lesson plans, and authentic learning materials. The proficiency approach advocates building expertise in faculty: empowering teachers to design the units, rather than relying on a curriculum created by outsiders. We were fortunate to be able to contract with Dr. Ringvald as our consultant. Because Dr. Ringvald did not have experience with early elementary grades, we contracted with Dr. Gilda Oran, an expert in language learning and early childhood education, to work with us as well.

Creating Support from Stakeholders

In making a case for an investment in Hebrew curriculum design, I found it helpful to link this initiative to a concurrent English literacy initiative, balanced literacy. Literacy, whether in English or Hebrew, is fundamental to success in all academic areas. All fields of study and professions require strong communication and language skills. Furthermore, we are by nature a literacy-rich school because of our dual curriculum. I also identified certain features shared by Hebrew proficiency and balanced literacy in English. Both approaches stress the importance of collaboration among a faculty and developing a common vision of what characterizes good teaching. Both initiatives involved empowering teachers to design their own units under the guidance of coaches and consultants. Fundamental to both Hebrew proficiency and balanced literacy is a greater focus on skills and performance rather than content and the importance of using assessment to drive instruction.

Of course, there were challenges in making the case for investing in Hebrew proficiency. Unlike balanced literacy, our English initiative, Hebrew proficiency had been adopted by only one other Jewish day school. It had never been adopted [continued on page 19]
below middle school. We would be the first school to apply the proficiency approach to Hebrew K-8, and therefore a degree of trust and a willingness to take a risk were necessary.

**Moving Forward in Stages**

In envisioning this multi-year initiative, we felt it was important to plan for a gradual implementation. Our school, which is on two campuses, had never had a K-8 curricular initiative before, and asking teachers to create a new curriculum was a tall order. Year one focused on making major change in just one grade level: kindergarten. We redesigned our kindergarten Hebrew program, creating a 40-minute per day Ivrit beIvrit lesson taught by a native speaker, focusing on oral language skills. The new K program featured units drawn from children’s immediate environment, use of authentic Israeli songs, stories, and games, and assessments woven into instruction. Teachers in grades 1-8 attended monthly professional development afterschool workshops to become familiar with the proficiency approach. They were learning about it, but were not yet asked to make any changes in their program or their teaching. In year one we conducted a baseline assessment of oral proficiency through the oral proficiency interview tool (OPI), videotaping every student in grades 2-8 speaking one-on-one with a trained facilitator. The OPIs provided data about how our students were currently functioning, and allowed us to set goals for improvement.

Years two and three involved active cur-
curriculum development by every Hebrew teacher in grades one through eight. Teachers met three times per month in grade level teams with Dr. Ringvald and/or Dr. Oran, articulating learning objectives, creating units, finding materials, and pilot teaching. During this phase, results were becoming noticeable. First grade teachers found that they were able to move further with their students because of the grounding they had received in kindergarten. Parents began to notice increased Hebrew facility in their children. Teachers appreciated having release time during the day to build curriculum collaboratively, and were beginning to see their students more engaged in their learning. Teachers who had expressed interest were trained in administering oral proficiency interviews (OPIs).

Years four and five involved a transition from outside consultants to in-house coaches. There were no trained Hebrew coaches to hire from the outside (again, unlike English literacy), so we needed to train our own. Mentored by Vardit, the coaches worked directly with teachers refining units, observing and giving feedback on lessons, finding materials, and designing assessments. The coaches sought to institutionalize the proficiency approach by creating a system for training new teachers, and documenting the curriculum. Periodic afterschool seminars with Vardit for all teachers kept the professional learning going.

In year six and beyond, seminars with Vardit came to a close. Coaches continue to work with teachers and to develop what is needed to continue to improve curriculum and instruction. This year we piloted our own reading program for first grade, built upon the vocabulary acquired in kindergarten and on current research in the teaching of Hebrew reading. The upper grades are developing writing assessments (WPTs) to complement the OPIs. Future areas of growth will be increasing the use of technology in the classroom, in order to allow a wider breadth of authentic materials and learning activities to enrich the units.

**Features of the Proficiency Approach**

Natural Hebrew: Teachers speak to students in natural, idiomatic Hebrew beginning in kindergarten. We do not restrict our vocabulary, grammar, or syntax to what has already been taught explicitly. Rather, we provide students with plenty of input in the language, so that the unconscious process of language acquisition can grow, along with more direct instruction.

Authentic Materials: The materials we use in our curriculum come from authentic Israeli sources. In the early grades, students learn from Israeli children’s books, poems, and songs. In the later grades, material is broadened to include Israeli blogs, Internet sites, video clips, and advertisements.

Student-Centered: Every lesson provides opportunities for students to interact with each other in Hebrew. The approach is centered on the learner rather than the instructor.

Assessment-based: Learning activities are designed to give feedback to the teacher on the students’ performance. Formative assessment is woven into the lesson plans, and teachers use the assessment results to inform instruction.

**Where We Are Now**

Hebrew proficiency is now integrated into our school. OPI results continue to show improvement in student learning. Parents continue to report spontaneous use of Hebrew at home, and increased facility with Hebrew during our eighth grade trip to Israel. Teachers have become excited about this approach. “I have been teaching for thirty years, and now I am at the height of my creativity,” exclaimed one veteran teacher. Another commented: “My students used to write by rote and required a lot of guidance. Now they understand the language, and the writing just flows.” Others have remarked that the students seem much more engaged because they are more interested in the material. While the curriculum is documented, the work of Hebrew proficiency is never done. Each year we will continue to monitor student progress, stay abreast of current research in the field, and adapt our program accordingly.

**Advice for Other Schools**

For schools interested in embarking on curriculum development in Hebrew, I suggest the following lessons learned:

**Start Small:** It is helpful to start with the area that needs the most improvement, and for which the improvements will be have a significant impact. Perhaps it is one particular grade, or a skill area, such as speaking, that will benefit most from the change. Investing time and resources towards one discrete area will allow your school to test the waters to see if the approach is worthwhile. By concentrating on one area in which you anticipate success, you will likely build positive response among your key constituents. It may also be that, because of limited resources, your school cannot commit to more than one grade level or one particular skill area. The proficiency approach can have a positive impact on student learning at a small scale, even if it is not a school-wide, comprehensive initiative.

**Take a Long View:** Creating lasting change in schools is a slow process. Create a plan for three to five years, allowing time for positive buzz to spread and for reluctant teachers to get on board. Be prepared that school-wide change can take as long as seven years. Celebrate successes along the way, and praise the early “pioneers” for their work.

**Invest in your Teachers:** Hebrew proficiency is predicated on the belief that empowering teachers to create curriculum is the most effective strategy for curricular change. Invest in professional development workshops for teachers to develop common language on what good teaching looks like. Create release time for teachers during the school day so that they can work together developing units when they have optimal energy, rather than at 4:00 pm. Above all, build the mindset that teachers are professionals who, with knowledge of their students and of their learning outcomes, can build curriculum.
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Learning a second language, and even more a third one, represents a challenge for both learners and teachers. For teachers, one of the most demanding tasks is to find ways to engage students in the learning of the language; in other words, to find ways to make it meaningful and relevant to them. In the context of Hebrew learning in a Spanish-speaking community, where students have very little exposure to it, this task represents an even more complex challenge. Therefore, the question remains: How do we make Hebrew a meaningful and relevant language in a community where it is not the first or even the second language of instruction?

For us at Colegio Alberto Einstein in Quito, Ecuador, founded in 1974 by members of the local Jewish community, a school that teaches Hebrew as its third language after Spanish and English, the answer has been context. By context we mean the possibility for children to link relevant life experiences with learning ones at school. Our goal has been that our students not only learn a language, but also understand the importance of it in the perpetuation of our culture.

Much research has been made regarding the importance of context in learning and the possibility to link real life problems with school projects. As Lev Vygotsky proposed more than 20 years ago, students should be allowed to explore complex ideas and engage in what socio-cultural theorists describe as “performance before competence” in order to learn. In the language context this implies giving the learner the possibility to engage in conversations and projects even before mastering specific grammatical rules.

This is a paradigm we have embraced in our school and that has acquired a meaningful dimension under the framework of the three International Baccalaureate (IB) Programs: the Primary Years Program (PYP), the Middle Years Program (MYP) and the Diploma Program (DP). These programs have a common ground: they place the learner in the center of the learning process and bring a coherent sequence to students’ school experience. The features that form the basis for all three programs include:

- the broad nature of study, including more than one language
- the flexibility of each program’s curriculum model, enabling teachers to respond to local requirements and interests
- the diversity and flexibility of pedagogical approaches

In this article we will explore what happens in the elementary section of our school under the umbrella of the Primary Years Program.

From pre-K to sixth grade, students explore six transdisciplinary themes: Who We Are, Sharing the Planet, Where We Are in Place and Time, How We Organize Ourselves, How the World Works and How We Express Ourselves. Each transdisciplinary theme allows them to engage in real life projects through well planned units of inquiry where students have to research issues and problems that are relevant in both a local and a global context, understand their causes and offer possible solutions to them. These units of inquiry, require a collaborative effort among teachers of all subjects, including Hebrew. Together, teachers plan engaging learning experiences around common concepts that can be explored from different perspectives through the different subjects such as science, social
As part of this unit, the Hebrew students learned about recycling projects in Israel as well as in other Hebrew schools in Latin America. They explored the concept of responsibility in this class while at the same time learning pertinent Hebrew vocabulary. Students made posters to explain the most relevant features of recycling; they included personal insights on the issue and delivered speeches to present their final products.

In other words, what we do during our units of inquiry in the Hebrew class is to include the three dimensions of language learning simultaneously: learning the language, when students listen and use the language in their everyday activities; learning about the language, as students explore the sounds of language—for example, the sound of “zayin” during their recycling activities where the word “le-machzer” למחזר (to recycle) appeared; and learning through language, when students use it as a tool to reflect on a theme, concept or issue—in our example, responsibility related to recycling.

At this point it is important to clarify that Hebrew classes at Colegio Einstein are quite heterogeneous. In one single class it is easy to find a native speaker as well as a student that is just starting to learn the basics of the language. The role of the teacher, therefore, turns to be a crucial one since it is the teacher who needs to provide the appropriate scaffolding every child needs in order to understand the chosen concept and to participate in the activities she proposes as part of the unit. Such scaffolding includes body language, accompanying actions, gestures, peer support, and pictures, among others. Again, children are required to perform before becoming competent in the language. The units of inquiry allow them to make connections across disciplines, to see the world as whole and not in separated pieces that make no sense by themselves. Ultimately, the units of inquiry allow children to relate what they learn at school with their lives.

The progress in the acquisition of the language has been remarkable. In the past, our students had a basic level of Hebrew by the time they graduated high school. Today, after four years working with the PYP, our upper elementary students are able to communicate in Hebrew, understand instructions, hold basic conversations, and write short stories about themselves as well as about the units they have been studying, abilities that before the PYP were mastered only when getting to twelfth grade. For us, it is clear that they can use the language because they understand it has a purpose and that it is not just to pass a test and get good grades. They feel knowledgeable and proud of their performance; they have developed a sense of efficacy that promotes intrinsic motivation.

Making Hebrew a relevant language in a community where it is not the first language of instruction is not only possible but also desirable. The context provided to support instruction helps children to generate connections with a language that, in this scenario, transmits a meaningful message and at the same time enriches the learning environment through the cultural insights it offers.
Are We Ready for a Standardized Measure of Hebrew Reading?

Schools need to monitor the progress of all students in all areas of learning. Dynamic assessment tools and methods of intervention are considered the best tools to monitor student progress in reading. DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills) is an example of a highly reliable and valid dynamic assessment of English literacy. DIBELS assesses students individually in the Five Big Ideas of reading: phonological awareness, alphabetic principle, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.

Minimally, all students are given benchmark measures three times a year to screen students for strengths and weaknesses in each of the five areas—and it only takes about five minutes per student. Students meeting benchmarks get regular research-based instruction; those that show they are at-risk for reading problems get small group instruction in the particular area that they struggle in and research based instruction; those that are far below benchmarks get individualized instruction in addition to research-based instruction. Spanish and French versions of DIBELS have been developed. (See http://dibels.uoregon.edu for more information.)

What is most exciting about these types of dynamic measures is that they do not present the same problem as other standardized tests, namely the stumbling block of teachers foregoing the curriculum to teach to the test. Indeed, because these measures assess the Big Ideas of reading, the teaching of these authentic reading skills only improves reading itself. That is, even if teachers are “teaching to the test,” if you will, teachers are actually providing students with the building blocks of successful reading.

While these types of measures are commonplace in the English literacy classroom, prior to the development of the MaDYK (Mivcham Dinami shel Yecheleot Kriyah), no equivalent dynamic Hebrew reading assessment tool was available. Although there are some Hebrew reading assessments already in use for students learning Hebrew as a second language, they have not been scrutinized scientifically to obtain evidence for reliability and validity, or standardized with published norms. The existing tools are costly, inefficient to administer, and are criterion-referenced rather than assessments that monitor reading dynamically and developmentally over time.

With MaDYK, schools are now equipped with a tool to identify students in need of support early on in an effort to promote Hebrew reading fluency for all students by third grade. This is a critical age, as the developmental outcomes not only academically but also socially, emotionally, and behaviorally are significantly better for those who have achieved reading fluency compared to those who have not. Our research suggests that Hebrew literacy may be a particularly powerful indicator of future academic, social, and behavioral success for students in Jewish schools. To ensure that our students meet this critical threshold, early and ongoing assessment and intervention is crucial.

Until now, school leaders, teachers, and parents have benefited from such assessment and intervention for English reading. Interventions have been powered by results of regular and ongoing assessments comparing individual students, classes, grades, and entire schools to a norm. In general, Jewish schools find themselves “above average” in comparison to relative samples from the general population, as is the case with most private schools.
What happens, though, when you are only dealing with a population of Jewish schools as your sample? As you would expect, the news that your school is average in Hebrew reading or below average could be startling and raise questions about the measure itself. The same is true for a child who has been excelling in school only to find out that the entire school has been underperforming the national sample. The child might find it odd to receive support, but his or her entire class, grade, or school might need it. Of course, MaDYK, or any assessment like it, does not preclude the ongoing reading assessment information obtained by teachers throughout the course of instruction, but provides a reliable and valid tool for the purposes of comparison and prediction. That said, are we as a community prepared for the statistical reality of a norm-referenced assessment?

As with Garrison Keillor’s fictional town of Lake Wobegon, where “all of the women are strong, all the men are good looking, and all the children are above average,” we find comfort in assuming that our children are above average. This “Lake Wobegon effect,” overestimating our children’s capabilities, though, can perpetuate a world in which we are paralyzed to intervene for our children’s benefit when there truly is an issue. Until now, the lack of tools to measure Hebrew reading progress has allowed us to live comfortably unaware of the realities of student development. As the field of Jewish education emerges in the twenty-first century, we have little doubt that moving from Lake Wobegon will be a good thing. Are we packed and ready for this reality?

For information about MaDYK and how your school can take advantage of this new assessment tool, please email madyk@yu.edu.

"Overestimating our children’s capabilities can perpetuate a world in which we are paralyzed to intervene for our children’s benefit when there truly is an issue."
At the core of our Jewish tradition is the metaphor that we all stood at Sinai and received the Torah through our various senses and according to our abilities. This tenet is mirrored in the progressive educational slogans “learning for all,” “no child left behind,” and in the concept of “differentiated learning.”

We talk the talk, but the time has come for us to walk the walk; to take up the tools available to us in this age of technological advances and implement what decades of research have made clear: All children can learn. But we do them a disservice when we misalign learning and testing, and when our methods do not reflect our knowledge about how the brain learns, and when we ignore the modern technological tools now available.

I hope that this article may encourage us all to share a reflective common language about assessment for learning and the use of technology to enhance that assessment.

When assessment is combined with technology to both evaluate the learning process and contribute to improved instruction and learning, it becomes “transformative assessment.”

A change of mind, heart and practice by all involved is required to create a learning environment to which today’s “i-brain” (Internet Brain) children will be responsive, assessment that is aligned with the learning process, and a nurturing school culture for all children.

My concern about testing is first and foremost a result of my professional experience over the past three decades in hundreds of Jewish day schools across the world. My colleagues and I observed the following “red flags”: Many professionals persist in starting the year with testing that disregards the essential need to activate and retrieve previously-acquired knowledge and skills in Hebrew; hundreds of teacher-made tests are still “paper and pencil,” and do not respect differentiation when it comes to modalities and intelligences, even when these are clearly addressed in the taught curriculum; too many teachers design tests that will elicit bell curve results; when tests are closely aligned with curriculum and most or all children pass, too many teachers assume that there’s something wrong with the test; too often, testing is misaligned and contains material that students have not been exposed to; even in cases where teachers collect material in portfolios, they may neglect to analyze them or to use the data they contain to improve learning and teaching; and finally, there are numerous cases of teachers testing exclusively for either content, or for mastery of skills, but not for both.

Unfortunately, too often assessment is still employed purely to sort and select, track, rank and label students so as to deal with them in homogeneous groupings.

We now know that children’s interests and needs are not served when educators end of rather than during the learning process, and because the assessment is very often insensitive to learners’ needs and to different ways of learning.

Learners’ needs are not respected if testing is misaligned and based on standards, content, or methods they have not been taught or exposed to. In these cases, students’ results are lower than they should be, which causes teachers to “teach to the test” often foregoing the curriculum and its broader goals.

Research is consistently proving the fallacy of testing that is not content- and methodology-dependent and aligned. However, when the purpose of assessment is to improve student learning, to facilitate early intervention and employ alternative ways of teaching, achievements and motivation are higher.

Transformative assessment is achieved when learning is aligned with the curriculum and intertwined with the learning process. To assess learning, one must have clear goals, an understanding of the required sub-skills and an overview of the progression of the curriculum, as each major skill is introduced and re-introduced at different levels of complexity over the course of the year, allowing each child to advance at his or her own pace. By following the learning progression, teachers can make informed decisions.
about their teaching and offer differentiated learning opportunities and assessment.

Assessment derives from the Latin word assidere which means “to sit beside.” Assessment is meant to be a process and a set of tools that assist educators to “sit beside” our students to support them in their learning en route to mastery of the core content and skills they need to develop for life and those they want to develop because of their unique interests and talents.

Even though we educators are “immigrants” to today’s technological world, it is our job to cater to the “natives,” the children who were born into the technology. We must strive to engage our pupils by offering the curriculum through the same technological medium that is the fabric of their lives. By employing the same tools that they trust and rely on themselves, we can accelerate learning and monitor and analyze progress and achievement more quickly and efficiently.

In the TaL AM program, curriculum-based formative assessment is used throughout the school year to support learning of core concepts and skills. Summative assessment is used to enhance accountability for learning the curriculum, to promote standard-based growth of students’ knowledge and language proficiency from grade to grade, as well as teachers’ professional growth and improved instruction skills.

A balanced assessment system takes advantage of assessment for learning and assessment of learning. When both are present in the system and used by all involved in the learning process, the assessment becomes the index of the students’ and teachers’ success and its cause.

Transformative Assessment as Implemented in the TaL AM Curriculum

The TaL AM curriculum is based on both theoretical and empirical research. During the decades of its implementation in schools, TaL AM has learned that when the five interdependent elements—educators, students, learning environment, curriculum and the learning progression—are aligned and congruent, the results are far superior and the learning process is accelerated.

Educators

Educators change the scope and timing of assessments from the traditional summative assessment practice of marking report cards, to a learning-aligned process that combines formative and summative assessment stages and the employment of various assessment tools. Their expectation also changes, to the belief that all students can develop proficiency in communicative skills in Hebrew, and a Jewish identity, through mastery of the core content, concepts and skills. This change represents a shift from the traditional expectation that learning will occur mostly for motivated students who were born with adequate academic aptitude and come from a supportive home environment. Teachers are empowered to change their expectations and their practice because they are supplied with the appropriate tools. Educators share the results of formative and summative assessments to develop strategic plans for improved learning and teaching. School leaders facilitate the assessment stages and participate in studying the results and drawing the necessary conclusions.

Students

Students are fully aware of the main goals of the learning units, and are involved in the creation of the rubrics by which their learning and performance will be assessed. Thus students become accountable and responsible for their own learning and the learning of their peers, and the classroom climate shifts from seeing the teacher as the prime, if not the only, mover of instruction.

Learning Environment

The peripheral learning environment—walls and learning stations—clearly communicates the learning goals and expectations. The very classroom environment facilitates learning, as resources are accessible and clearly labeled and communicate goals, while simultaneously helping to establish the rules of how learning should occur in the setting. Both teachers and students activate the learning environment. The surrounding posters are a pegging system for the key concepts, values and thinking, learning and language skills which are to be mastered over the course of the year. They depict the “big ideas” of...
[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 27]

LEARNING PROGRESSION

In each grade, the learning progression is documented through “Hovrot Sippur” curriculum mapping and portfolios. The Hovrot Sippur and the format of the portfolios change from year to year. Portfolios include writing samples, videos of reading, speaking and learning, teacher tests, tests provided by TaL AM and self-evaluations. The assessment techniques are an inseparable part of the TaL AM program. They too, make use of multiple intelligence-based materials.

Assessment tools include videotaped lessons from the various tracks recorded in the middle and at the end of the school year; videotapes of two samples in which students read a one-minute familiar text and an unseen text (also from the middle and the end of the year); and two samples of academic or creative writing to be compared. There are also formative tests during the learning of the unit and summative assessments when each thematic study unit is completed. Further assessment is based on class portfolios that are created by each student over the course of a school year. Additional examples are reading, writing and oral expression rubrics to measure communicative proficiency in Hebrew.

The documented results of the formal feedback from the teachers and the information garnered from school visits and class portfolios guide the initial training of teachers in advance of receiving their new pupils. At the TaL AM Teachers Institutes, educators are trained in the use of the teaching and assessment tools. During the first two years, they receive feedback and learn techniques for differentiated instruction and intervention, based on the results of the assessments.

In addition to the evaluation/assessment process previously described, no discussion is complete today without mentioning utilization of the World Wide Web. TaL AM has begun to include student-centered, technology-based assessment, as Web-based learning opens up the possibilities of ongoing formative and standard-based feedback and information for fine-tuned instruction and learning.

The advantages of utilizing the Web are as follows:

- The tools are familiar to the students.
- In the technological age, feedback is instantaneous, and pupils need not wait for the teacher to check their work. They receive instant, online feedback that may direct them to further activities to help them master skills in real time, thus accelerating the learning process.
- The feedback can be easily saved in orderly, organized individual and class portfolios.

A personalized profile can be used to compare between students working in the classroom and working at home; between students in the same class; between different classes in the same school, and between classes in different schools.

- Technology-based assessment provides differentiated means to assess content mastery as well as literacy and communication skills. For example, reading and oral group discussions or presentations are easily recorded on Vimeo or on Voice Thread, then assessed and utilized to share results and discuss them with learners. They are also used as the basis for an agreed-upon plan of action to improve skills. Following the intervention and remediation, a new taped assessment can easily be compared to a former assessment to evaluate progress (see Kesher Kol at www.talam.ed.voicethread.com).

Web-based learning opens up the possibilities of ongoing formative and standard-based feedback and information for fine-tuned instruction and learning.

TaL AM integrates cognitive research with Dr. Gary Small’s insights about how technology has altered the way young minds develop, function and interpret information. The ensuing synthesis informs both curriculum and assessment.

The grade one Hebrew Literacy Development program, Ariot CAL (Computer Assisted Learning), translates the Ariot CD-ROMs into an Internet-based platform with a front and a back end. At the front end, children interact with stories, songs and games. The back end provides data to teachers and administrators, supplying a composite picture that tallies correct and incorrect answers and reveals how many attempts are made and how much time it takes for each student to succeed at a given activity, so that skill mastery and results may be evaluated and compared.

In this way, a personalized profile is obtained of each student, revealing his or her progress in mastering skills. This data can be used to compare between students working in the classroom and working at home; between students in the same class; between different classes in the same school, and between classes in different schools. The system allows us to learn more about students’ individual needs as well. Educators can now make decisions based on information that wasn’t previously readily available. TaL AM is evolving into a technology-based curriculum that contributes to the differentiated learning that today’s students require.

Technology also enables us to better understand and meet the challenges of time
allocation. Since it has been proven that short periods of daily learning are more effective than one or two concentrated weekly sessions, TaL AM utilizes the possibilities offered by the Web to encourage individual work on a computer during and/or after school hours, and participation in e-learning groups several times a week.

The goal is to design a computer-assisted or technology-based curriculum, with assessment tools that are aligned to the approach and content. Teachers would be trained to understand and integrate the results which would create an accessible, cost-effective and timely program that is online, aligned to and congruent with the teaching approach, and monitoring of results.

The world is progressing towards reshaping and redefining schooling based on technology.

Ultimately, the schoolbag will become a virtual carryall and books as we know them will be replaced by ipads, notepads and Kindles.

We are aware that we are only seeing the tip of the technological iceberg, and that governments and education systems across the globe are still grappling with defining the future of technology-based education. However, we cannot afford to wait until the evolution process is “complete” but must embark on the path of paradigmatic change and dare to invest now.

Especially with respect to Jewish education, we cannot afford to have students believe that Judaism or Hebrew is not for them because of misaligned testing tools and learning. No Jewish child should feel excluded from his or her heritage.

We cannot afford to have students believe that Judaism or Hebrew is not for them because of misaligned testing tools and learning. No Jewish child should feel excluded from his or her heritage.

It is critical for all of us to walk the walk and undertake the development and use of technology based curriculum and assessment tools so that the learning process becomes a joyful way of developing our children’s Jewish identity.

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Interview with Barbara Davis, Member of RAVSAK’s Board of Directors

1) Tell us something about yourself.

I am an educator, wife, mother of three, a grandmother of seven (and one on the way), professor emerita of Spanish at Onondaga Community College, about to retire after 25 years as principal of the Syracuse Hebrew Day School, the author of a pictorial history of Syracuse African Americans and an upcoming history of the Syracuse Jewish community, graduate of Barnard College with a doctorate from Columbia.

2) Why do you believe that Jewish day school education is important?

I believe in Jewish education because, to quote Rabbi Arthur Hertzberg, “a community cannot survive on what it remembers; it will persist only because of what it affirms and believes.” American Jewry is in danger today because of apathy and attrition—quality, enlightened, pluralistic, joyful and meaningful Jewish education of our children is the only key to our people’s survival.

3) What strengths do you bring to the RAVSAK board?

The perspective of one who did not have a Jewish education, but who realizes how vital it is; the perspective of those of us “in the field,” who know how challenging the job of running a Jewish community day school is.

4) Do you have a favorite Jewish teaching?

“I set before you life and death, blessing and curse: choose life, that you and your children may live.” חַיִּים וְהַמָּוֶת הַבְּרָכָה וְהַקְּלָלָה; וּבָחַרְתָּ בַּחַיִּים—נָתַתִּי לְפָנֶיךָ לְמַעַן תִּחְיֶה, אַתָּה וְזַרְעֶךָ. Deuteronomy 30:19.
Tools and Contents in the Online Teaching of Hebrew as a Foreign Language

Online learning has many benefits: it is convenient, up-to-date, enjoyable, taught by experts, and geared to the individual. It eliminates the geographical distance between moderators and learners, and provides a learning experience that is intensified by the learner’s sense of being a part of a diverse and global group.

Research on language teaching has shown that the use of multimedia tools in teaching a foreign / second language increases the efficacy of language acquisition as compared to conventional ways of teaching. Multimedia tools also activate what Yoram Eshet calls “synchronous thinking.” In the studies he conducted, he discovered that children who learned a language by means of media aids grasped words as pictures and as sounds rather than as a combination of letters. In other words, the nature of absorbing the language is different.

This is also true with regard to online teaching: studies have proved the effectiveness of teaching a language, even a foreign language, using online means rather than frontal teaching methods. Teachers of Hebrew as a foreign language attest to the advantages of online teaching in the learning process.

Three Levels in Online Hebrew Teaching

In the teaching of Hebrew as a foreign language, the use of online means is reflected on three levels ranging from the familiar and common to the novel and state-of-the-art:

A. The first (basic) level: Learning resources on the Net

The utilization of the learning resources that can be found on the Net, such as educational software developed by academic, public, and commercial bodies, constitutes the basic level at which numerous teachers have been teaching for many years. The most prominent in this area is the “Sfatavbut” project at The Hebrew University.

In this framework, free educational software for the Internet was developed in the various teaching fields: morphology, vocabulary, expression, and even accent enhancement. The departments for teaching Hebrew (Classical Hebrew and Modern Hebrew) in various universities throughout the world offer computer-mediated courses on teaching the language. The Ministry of Education in Israel, particularly the Department of Adult Education, also promotes computer-mediated learning.

The Center for Educational Technology dedicates many resources to the development of software for language teaching in schools and ulpanim for immigrants. Additional activities are conducted by the Jewish Agency as well as by educational organizations and commercial bodies.

This level also includes the use of the various Internet sites for performing learning tasks, and the use of online dictionaries, encyclopedias, and databases.

B. The second level: Second-generation software and platforms

The advent of web 2.0 engendered advanced learning resources that utilized tools such as web logs (blogs), Wikis, media sharing applications, and social networks (e.g., Facebook). The use of Course Managing Systems (CMS) such as Blackboard and Moodle is also associated with this level. Additional resources include sophisticated softwares such as Hot Potatoes, which enables the construction of grammar and composition exercises.

All of these are indicative of a trend that involves collaborative and interactive work, with a group of people who, despite their geographic distance, can express themselves in a single document.

C. The advanced level: Utilizing third-generation programs

An additional level of online language teaching and learning is the use of “virtual worlds” for language teaching, a field pioneered in recent years by Mark J. W. Lee. In a course developed by Ram Steiner in the framework of The Mofet Institute’s Online Academy, Steiner...
demonstrated the use of this medium as a creative tool for developing expression in Hebrew, as we shall see below.

**The Connection Between the Tools and the Contents**

Teaching Hebrew online, both synchronously and asynchronously, can harness the resources and benefits offered by online teaching on all three levels. The teacher learns how to make use of the exceptional properties of computer communication and the Internet for purposes of teaching the Hebrew language, thereby gaining advantages lacking in regular frontal teaching.

I shall clarify and demonstrate what has been described above with the help of a demonstration from the program “Studies toward a Specialization Certificate in the Didactics of Teaching Hebrew as a Foreign Language.” This online program is intended for the preparation of teachers of Hebrew as a Foreign Language in the Diaspora. The program operates in the framework of the “Online Academy” in The Mofet Institute’s International Channel, in which various programs on a range of fields of interest in teacher education are developed. The teacher population in the Diaspora as well as in various settings in Israel expressed a desire for implementing a program of teacher education in Hebrew as a Foreign / Second Language in the schools, colleges, and community ulpanim that would meet the needs of the teacher, wherever he may be.

Learning in the program occurs via the “Mofetnet” computer-mediated website that was developed by Mofet’s computer experts. By means of this website, the learning units and assignments are conveyed from the lecturer-moderator to the students and vice versa. In addition, synchronous mechanisms such as Elluminate are used. Elluminate enables lessons to be held via the Internet with “real-time” interaction among the students and between the lecturer-moderator and the students.

The program includes basic courses (mandatory courses) and enrichment courses (elective courses), with the emphasis on both the field of knowledge and pedagogy. By fulfilling the course requirements, those who complete it are awarded a certificate, approved by the Israeli Ministry of Education.

"Children who learned a language by means of media aids grasped words as pictures and as sounds rather than as a combination of letters. The nature of absorbing the language is different."

I would like, therefore, to point out three salient advantages that emerged during the teaching of the online courses in this program, and are capable of indicating the entire direction.

a. Using the Internet Space and Multimedia Tools

In the course “Theory and Practice in Teaching Hebrew as a Foreign Language,” which was developed by this writer, the moderator takes advantage of the wealth of the Internet, and refers the students to available databases such as the Ben-Yehuda Hebrew literature database as well as to Hebrewbooks, Wikipedia, the Hebrew Language Academy website, and so on. The students are also referred to media files and are therefore convenient for the users, and because the references and links render the written course the “tip of the iceberg” as regards the material that is accessible to the learners, thus tempting them to constantly increase their knowledge. This trend predominates both in the mid-term and in the final assignments: The objective is to refer the students to the sources that exist on the Internet and to challenge them to continually expand their search.

Following are examples of references that were required during the course:

In the 1990s, the ACTFL (American Council for Teaching Foreign Languages) laid down guidelines for ranking achievements [continued on page 43]
HEBREW is a language of poetry. The Tanakh is filled with poems of all kinds—love poems, religious poems, victory poems, poems urging, pleading, praising, expressing despair and giving thanks. The siddur starts with the poetry of Psalms, expanded to include prayers written by the ancient rabbis in language drenched in poetic cadence and imagery. There was never a time when Jews did not write poems in Hebrew, from the era of the paytanim to the brilliant scholars of medieval Spain, up to the achievements of the Hebrew revival in modern times. Until recently, Israelis could quote their poets like rock stars, and popular Israeli songs continue to be written to the words of classic Hebrew poetry. To write poetry in the Holy Tongue, whether secular or religious, was always regarded by Jews as a holy task, a way of “restoring the crown to its former glory.”

We are pleased that so many RAVSAK students took up the challenge to participate in RAVSAK’s first Hebrew poetry contest—nearly 500 from 25 schools! We received poems as diverse as their predecessors: love poems, religious poems, lyric and narrative poems, poems humorous and reflective, patriotic and private. Acrostics, rhymes, free verse, poems with pictures, imagistic, philosophical, metaphysical poems! The sheer outpouring of creativity reflects our students’ passion for connection, to add their voices to the choir of Jewish tradition; and the remarkable quality revealed by so many of them testifies to the heights of Hebrew learning taking place in our schools.

We were truly honored that Robert Whitehill-Bashan, widely considered the leading Hebrew poet in America, agreed to serve as judge for the competition. Not only did he read each entry with great care, he also gave generous comments to all of the winning entries. We encourage you to read these winning poems out loud, with your students. Savor them, discuss them, study them as you might the works of Bialik and Rachel. Then continue to teach and write Hebrew poems, so your students can enter next year’s competition.
A Flower Stands Alone
A flower stands alone in a field
Waiting for rain, wind or a bumble bee.
For what is my beauty with no one to see
I’m pink, red and beautiful, but no one is here.
Oh, is that a rain drop?
No, just a tear.

Judge’s comments:
This is a delightful poem, full of both feeling and imagination. The “I” of the poem is a flower waiting for rain or the wind or for a bee. The writer inhabits the “self” of the flower, who says:

Hawaii
The waves shatter on my feet
The chilly wind is on my face
The air smells like fresh fruits
I love being here
It’s the best feeling in the world
The sun is shining it is so beautiful.
Now the sand covers my feet
This is the Garden of Eden,
Here is where I want to stay forever.

Judge’s comments:
Generally I disassociate myself from poems about special places, unless the poem is itself very special, and this poem about Hawaii is very special indeed. The “I” of the poem is thrilled by the scenic, breathtaking quality of the Hawaiian shore, and she uses strong verbs and metaphors about the waves crashing at her feet, the cool wind on her face, the wind that smells of fresh fruit, the sand covering her feet. And she ends the poem:

Category: Elementary School
Nonnative Speaker
First Place
Leah Wachs
Amos and Celia Heilicher
Minneapolis Jewish Day School
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Category: Elementary School
Nonnative Speaker
Runner-Up
Amalia Birch
Shalom School
Sacramento, California

For what is my beauty with no one to see
Waiting for rain, wind or a bumble bee.

This is a delightful poem, full of both feeling and imagination. The “I” of the poem is a flower waiting for rain or the wind or for a bee. The writer inhabits the “self” of the flower, who says:

No, just a tear.

Interesting enough, the poet’s somewhat nonstandard use of the verb מיח to mean “the air gives off a smell” instead of the more standard use which would be “I smell the air” is indeed backed up by Agnon himself in his short story “The Garden.” There the author poses the same usage question herself, and discovers that it is perfectly legitimate to use the verb for “giving off” a scent, based on usage by Rashi himself.
The Funny Tree

Four little monkeys sitting in a tree.
All get stung by a bumble bee.
Four little monkeys heads in the ground. 
Hope they so ever get found.

Judge’s comments:

This poem was written as part of general class assignment to write a poem about a tree (judging from the other entries from the same school). I enjoyed reading al the poems in that group, but Eli’s somehow stood out. Here we have four small monkeys sitting on a tree. A bee comes by and stings them. Now we have four small monkeys, “their heads in the dirt.” This is the kind of impish children’s literature that both children and adults love! I think that children’s author James Marshall would be inspired by this poem.
Loneliness

Loneliness is a ray of sunlight
That was swallowed in the sea,
A bird as light as a dainty flower
That has flown away from me.

Loneliness is a burning fire
That scorches from within
A bleak, gray wave full of bitter salt
That burns and stings your skin.

Loneliness is a reaching hand
That tries but cannot reach,
An endless, awful darkness
That hurts you like a leech.

Loneliness is a once-beating heart
That stopped—because of sadness,
Two dancing feet that lost a rhythm
In a mob of madness.

Loneliness is a kippah and a tallit
Between a million baseball caps,
The boy whose feet don’t walk
And the girl in bandage wraps.

Loneliness is a person, a stranger,
With different skin and hair,
It is something with a secret
That is heavy and hard to bare.

Loneliness is a black spot on your heart
A sign that you feel sadness,
A spot the remains until you find a friend
And is then replaced with gladness.

Judge’s comments:
The poet confronts an abstract subject, shaping the poem with tangible metaphors, drawing a clear, arresting picture. The first stanza gives one example of several:
Loneliness is a ray of sunlight
That was swallowed in the sea,
A bird as light as a dainty flower
That has flown away from me.

The Hebrew employs a complicated rhyme scheme that one finds only in the most sophisticated poetry. The poem develops to an appropriate, satisfying conclusion, emotional but not sentimental.
From Gray to Orange

One rainy morning I walked in the forest, it was very cold, and I got a shower from the rain. All of the sudden, the wind blew strongly and moved the clouds away. The sun appeared from behind the clouds and discovered the rainbow with all its colors; As beautiful and colorful as a young, shy lady; disappearing as the sun conquers the sky. The day gets better, and mother earth is slowly getting warmer, and with her, all the forest comes alive again. Song birds, flying up in the air, whistle and sing a sweet song, the deer hop, A turtle peeks out of a bush sticks his head out and announces: “the spring is near.”

It’s getting late, and the sun is decorating the sky in colors like orange and purple,

Until the moon comes out, yellow and big.

The day is ending, and I am trying to find my way to my house, walking along the path, and praying for another Of comfort, harmony and of dreams come true. In the front of the house, my mom waits for me, believing in her dear child, feeds care for me and put me to Sleep, with a warm hug, and soft kiss; and I fall asleep.

Judge’s comments:

It’s truly rare to find a fifth grade student with the patience needed to formulate such a long poem from beginning to end, but this is what Jonathan Ofek achieved in his narrative poem “From Gray to Orange.” This beautiful nature poem is crowned with internal rhyme and regular rhythm. It reminds me of Bialik’s series of poems entitled “Winter Songs.”

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The Dog Ephraim

Everyone knows the dog Ephraim,
He wears socks all the time.
He has many black dots,
And a limp that is hard to spot.
It’s true that he runs really fast,
Although yesterday he got a cast.

Once on a Jerusalem trip,
He stole my video Flip,
I got really mad,
But then he went sad,
So I gave it back so he won’t tell my dad.

From now on he is very careful,
And sometimes even graceful.
Although he’s annoying like a thorn bush curled,
He is still the best dog in the whole wide world.

Judge’s comments:
This poem is nothing but pure pleasure! It is full of life, full of humor. It reminds me of the best children’s literature like Dr. Seuss. In sum, it is a gorgeous poem that awakens the reader’s interest and admiration—not to mention surprise that it was written by someone “only” in the third grade!
Nightmare

I see from the window
Rain; it is very painful
Their stories hit me like a recurring dream

Day after day, there are tears on the survivors’ faces
Those who survived the nightmare of genocide;
To remember and never forget
In me sleep, I hear them
Talking quietly, at night, in the Ghetto
Trying to survive the nightmare of genocide

I see the concentration camp
The bodies lay there and never move
They don’t kick
They don’t open their eyes
Submissiveness
I see the light and the light that does not exist
The light that leads to the ovens
Tears of my sisters and my brothers and my ancestors
Everything stopped
Life ceased
The Nazis, too
The Holocaust is over
The nightmare stays…

Judge's comments:

This poem approaches the Holocaust with a rare honesty and control that is usually lacking in this genre of poetry, even when written by supposedly mature poets. The poem effectively uses internal rhyming and assonance:

A poet who can accomplish this can feel assured that she can follow her instincts—a clear sign that she has the “poetry gene.” She uses, also effectively, repetition to emphasize a mood:

And the riveting ending:

structor: Middle School
Nonnative Speaker
First Place
Alexandra Silverman
Donna Klein Jewish Academy
Boca Raton, Florida
The Cyclamen

Sleeping on the slopes of the valley  
Stranded and poor,  
Whispers on the back of the wind  
The sounds of shouts, impure shouts.

Bound to the side of the rock  
Cries weak tears,  
Hears the sigh of the cyclamen  
And wails terrible shrieks.

Who is there in the depths of the wadi?  
Night approaches.  
Who is there crying quietly?  
It is you, it is you, the cyclamen.

Judge’s comments:

This is a very effective poem, full of rhythm and drama. One feels that one standing on one of the slopes overlooking the Jezreel Valley, listening to the strange sounds that arise in a rural setting (which was a veritable wilderness in the days of the chalutzim). This poem has an air of mystery, for the sounds are intermingled; we do not know whether these are human, animal, supernatural or imagined sounds.

Spirit

I’m not focused  
My thoughts are only on the spirit of things  
The spirit of the heavens  
The spirit of the sea and the soul  
Then there is the spirit that is love  
It blows silently  
Bringing waves of affection  
What is its source,  
The divine or just me?

Judge’s comments:

This poem shows a great deal of spirit as well as ambivalence toward its subject: What is spirit? Where does it come from? The Hebrew word רוח can mean wind, the movement of air according to the laws of physics, and also spirit. The poem is simple and direct—it doesn’t mince words. It ends with an internal question, one every person asks him- or herself.
**The Great Ocean**

Soft and sticky sand scattered on the shore  
The giant waves break atop rough boulders  
A light wind is blowing between the small flowers  
Seaweed on the water’s edge like an old doll  
The sun rises to bring light to the sparkling waters,  
rays of light dancing.

**Judge’s comments:**  
This short poem about a great ocean is short in length only, not in its horizons. The poet describes the sea with delicacy and sharpness. One can almost hear the sounds of the waves breaking against the rocks on the shore. As opposed to the great waves rising and falling by the gravitational pull of the sun and the moon, the wind blows lightly, the flights are small, and the poem presents us with a vibrant picture like an impressionistic painting. The seaweed floating on the water resembles an old doll, a linen doll tossed away. The sketch’s final touch comes at the end, when we discover the poem’s time: the hour of daybreak, when the sun’s rays dance on the water.

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**The Dance**

A young and pretty girl  
Graceful as a swan  
Spinning round and dancing  
In a world that isn’t hers  

A handsome man, also young  
Strong like a lion  
Helping her to spin, to dance  
Her hands resting in his  

Together they move around  
Through the massive room  
Lost in the world  
Of a boy and a girl  

Spinning, spinning  
Dancing and dancing still  
Amid whispers of love  
They don’t hear a word  

And suddenly, the music stops  
The dance is already done  
They separate and they return  
To the world, to reality.

**Judge’s comments:**  
The title is that given by this judge, for convenience’s sake only; the poem itself is actually untitled, and that too is always an option. The poem is painted with detail and grace and rhythm in five delightful stanzas. She handles the situation without any trace of hackneyed sentimentality; the scene is depicted so honestly, as a dream, rather than just a daydream.
My Girlfriend

Her eyes are like the sky
Her ears are like the flowers
She is the most beautiful creature in the world
She cooks like my grandma
We talk everyday
But I do not have enough words to describe how I feel
But it does not stop there
Bro, I promise
She is the girl that I will love the most
She has the cutest laugh that anyone has ever heard
And we understand
That together we are the happiest people in the world.

Judge’s comments:

Generally, love poems written by teenagers end up in some folder that will be explored years later by curious children or grandchildren. But Ari’s work stands on its own legs as a quality poem. This poem has an audience—"Ari"—here translated “Bro”—and that is enough in my mind to bring it out of its private box and make it a poem to be read by an audience of readers. The poem goes beyond the mere “the, cry” of stereotypical love songs, and it shows interest in the girl in a way that shows maturity of character. The fact that she can cook like his grandmother—well, it looks like she might have a serious relationship developing here. Suggestion to Ari: don’t get married too young—and finish your higher education. Poets don’t make a lot of money.

Still Waters Run Deep

Sometimes
There are moments
Impossible to hold inside
A closet full of secrets
Of diverging paths

People come across roads
With closed eyes
Don’t stop for a moment
Don’t dare to break the touch
Of routine

Always
Past memories, many
Future memories, numbered
As an extinguished flame
Between her fingers
Disappears with everything
Reappears with the voice

Judge’s comments:

This poem is deep and requires multiple readings—like the best of modern poetry, which deploys a range of colors. The poet treats time that slips away from us, disappearing forever, that time of its own powers, with no thought to human quandaries, time that passes through our fingers like dust. The poet creates a strong metaphor: time is like an extinguished flame. How potent! I wish I had written that! I offer my jealous applause!
Ending remarks

The ending of my life has now arrived
My blood flows in the streets like a red river
My eyes begin to slowly fold
My soul is, no longer, concealed
My world slowly becomes white
The whiteness surrounds me

But from my glance you’ll never disappear
The smile that has disappeared - will renew
As the sun of the east shall arise once more
Not a day past when I did not wonder
If our union was just a dream,
A dream that one day I will awaken from
And once again dream of the far, distant future.

Slowly, the power drains from my heart
And in the next world I’ll be alone.
But, until my power is uplifted from my body,
My blood,
My heart, hold me, know where I am
So in the next world I won’t be alone.

The Prayer of a Stranger

I will fly to bright skies,
on the horizon mountains, seas, and lights.
I will walk on earth’s pathways
to discover new horizons and shooting stars.
Between blue, yellow and red
I will leave my footsteps in the sand.

From grey highways to no-entry signs,
Between rushing pedestrians and traveling times.
Among airports and flight attendants
Between, snow, rain and air pockets
between tomorrow, before and yesterday
and maybe, even today.

Between present to memory or a dream,
Who will let me enter
The forgotten land,
Land of peace, harmony and joy
To the east of Eden, where mother of all living things
Spreads her wings and guards me.

Categories: High School
Native Speaker
Runner-Up
Bar Hass
American Hebrew Academy
Greensboro, North Carolina

Judge’s comments:
This love poem reminds me of the
Metaphysical Poets such as John Donne and Andrew Marvell. The poet speaks
of her death, but the discussion is
woven with elaborate metaphor as in
the work of the Metaphysical Poets.
Here the poem concerns the soul and a
woman, with the two themes interlacing
in a way that lends it a rich texture
of hues. It also has the energy and
emotion of a poem of youth, of “carpe
diem”—seize the day, for life flies from
us more and more each day.

The Prayer of a Stranger

I will fly to bright skies,
on the horizon mountains, seas, and lights.
I will walk on earth’s pathways
to discover new horizons and shooting stars.
Between blue, yellow and red
I will leave my footsteps in the sand.

From grey highways to no-entry signs,
Between rushing pedestrians and traveling times.
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Between, snow, rain and air pockets
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Between present to memory or a dream,
Who will let me enter
The forgotten land,
Land of peace, harmony and joy
To the east of Eden, where mother of all living things
Spreads her wings and guards me.

Categories: Teachers
First Place
Roni Stone
Abraham Joshua Heschel
Day School
Northridge, California

Judge’s comments:
The poet fashioned a very beautiful poem
in three stanzas with a complex rhyme scheme, a sign that she devoted much time
and effort into shaping the work. The poem
expresses personal and spiritual longing to
connect the “I” with all of existence. The
“I” of the poem wants to experience life in
all its risks and uncertainties, and seeks to
influence others and to soar to new heights
and to realize dreams. The poem ends on a
concrete note: the “I” does not search for
Gan Eden but “East of Eden,” meaning
the world of reality where even there the
“mother of all living things spreads her
wings.”
Tools and Contents in the Online Teaching of Hebrew as a Foreign Language

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 31]

in Hebrew, a document that enables institutions that teach Hebrew to measure achievements. See the link to the document titled “Standards for Foreign Languages” of this organization: http://www.actfl.org/files/public/StandardsforFLexecsummary_rev.pdf.

On the topic of standardization in other languages, see the European Union’s language/linguistic website: http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Portfolio_EN.asp.

On the controversy concerning Gilad Zuckerman’s book Israel: A Beautiful Language, see Yaron London and Motti Kirshenbaum’s interview with Zuckerman in the program “London & Kirshenbaum,” on Israel Television’s Channel 10. The interview can be found at the following link: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vjU1rnaONG8.

I shall now present some of the assignments given in this course:

Assignment 1: Surf the site of The Hebrew Language Academy (hebrew-academy.huji.ac.il) and Wikipedia, and read about Eliezer Ben-Yehuda and his work. Assess his personality and his contribution to the revival of the Hebrew Language.

Assignment 2: Read S. Haramati’s article, “Eliezer Ben-Yehuda and the Development of the ‘Hebrew in Hebrew’ Teaching Method” (Qatedra 63), and answer the question: What are Haramati’s reasons for favoring Epstein over Ben-Yehuda as the father of the ‘Hebrew in Hebrew’ method? The article in its entirety can be found at the following Internet address: http://www.snunit.k12.il/heb_journals/katedra/63166.html.

Assignment 3: The Ministry of Education published a new program for teaching Hebrew as a Second Language in the education system in Israel (first–twelfth grades). The complete version of the program can be found at the following Internet address: http://cms.education.gov.il/Education-CMS/Units/Olim/HoraatIvrit. Read the introduction to the program as well as the list of principles underlying the program. Is there an affinity to the “Hebrew in Hebrew” method, and if so, to what extent?

As is evident, the references to Internet websites—articles, curricula, information websites of professional bodies as well as media websites that are relevant to the teaching topics—enrich and enhance learning. The crux of the matter is the fact that “everything is available at a click of the mouse.”

B. INTERACTION IN THE FORUM SETTING

The existence of a discussion forum is an essential component of the program and reflects one of the principles of the online program: communicability. Through the forum, a discourse develops between the community of teachers and learners: between the teachers and their students, between the students and their teachers, and among the learners themselves. In addition, the forum encourages an exchange of opinions as well as consultations regarding anything connected to the pedagogy of teaching Hebrew and to questions from the field of Hebrew language. By external measures, our school was doing well with Hebrew instruction. Students were being placed in high Hebrew levels in Jewish high schools; our all-Hebrew musical was an impressive signature program for our eighth graders. The challenge in arguing for a Hebrew initiative lay in articulating a vision for how we could do better.

The aim of this learning discourse is to engender fruitful learning as well as afford a framework for questions and deliberations with regard to professional topics.

C. LANGUAGE TEACHING BY MEANS OF ADVANCED MEDIA TOOLS

One of the courses offered by the program, “The Internet and Multimedia as...” [CONTINUED ON PAGE 68]
Tell us something about your upbringing.

I was an only child to bizarre, older-than-average parents, first-generation American born—my father was a psychiatrist from New York, and my mother, from Petersburg, Virginia, was trained as a registered nurse. Each of them had a lot of personal baggage. From the time I was five we lived in Lubbock, Texas. There was a small Jewish community there, but my parents severed ties with it when I was in the third grade. As time went on, my parents also broke from their families back east. My mother had a mysterious neurological condition, and my father was her only physician. He kept her stoked with Phenobarbital. My mother was warm and outgoing, but emotionally and intellectually shallow. My father had a sharp mind but was a failure as a human being and a Jewish anti-Semite. With all of the negativity and strangeness in our home, I am thankful that I didn’t become a bitter and nonfunctional neurotic. Luckily, I looked to the outside for normalcy; I had friends; I participated in school activities; I dated; I was the token Jew in my college fraternity.

How did you develop a passion for Hebrew language and Hebrew poetry?

It probably would never have happened if my parents had been normal. With the lack of Judaism in our home and the nasty things I heard my parents say about Jewish people, I could well have assimilated into the Christian milieu of my friends. But in the summer of 1961, when I was 14, we stayed at a local hotel for a few days while our house was being painted. I bought a paperback book about the Dead Sea Scrolls with an intriguing title: The Lost Years of Jesus Revealed. Reading this book became for me a sort of “Franz Rosenzweig experience,” a sudden, overwhelming, inspired, even atavistic refuge into Judaism, albeit only in theory, because my entire exposure to Judaism was through books. I read every book available on Judaism in the Lubbock Public Library. I decided that I would move to Israel after college. I told no one. I decided to learn Hebrew, first from books and later from phonograph records. My parents were a bit nonplussed by this, but they didn’t act to prevent it. Seven years later I visited Israel for the first time and studied Hebrew at Ulpan Akiva in Netanya. The poetry part came later.

Why did you decide to write in Hebrew? Isn’t it difficult to write poetry—the language of the heart—in a second language?

Until I was in college I didn’t care for poetry. But at Texas Tech I studied Shakespeare and Milton, along with 18th, 19th and 20th century British and American poets and became captivated by them. But the ambition to write poetry did not come until I discovered a new volume in the Texas Tech library, a dual-language anthology of Modern Hebrew poetry compiled by Ruth Feiner Mintz. That lit my fire. If Bialik and Tcher- nichowsky could write Hebrew poetry in Russia, I could write Hebrew poetry in Texas. While in law school at UT Austin I simultaneously took undergraduate and graduate-level courses in Hebrew literature, grammar and syntax and started writing poetry. I sent some poems to HaDoar and Bitzaron, the Hebrew language journals of the time. The Israeli poet and songwriter Yossi Gamzu was studying in Austin at that time, and he helped me collect and edit poems that eventually become my first book, Orvim Chzanim (Brown Crows, Eked 1976). My poems also appeared in Israeli literary supplements and journals such as HaAretz, Davar, Maariv, Yediot, Al Hamishmar, and Moznaim.

Do you write English language poetry as well?

English is my language of daily discourse, but not my language of art. As Uri Zvi Greenberg so blithely put it, “the language of my blood.” I have, however, translated some of my narrative poems into English and delivered a reading this January at Portland State University before a large and very receptive audience, as a part of the celebration inaugurating Michael Weinberg’s new book, American Hebrew Literature: Writing Jewish National Identity in the United States. Michael graciously included me in his last chapter.

Does it feel lonely being a Hebrew poet in America? Is there any sort of community of Hebrew poets here, or elsewhere in the Diaspora?

I should feel lonely, but I don’t. It would be nice to have an audience here, to be invited to deliver readings. My audience is in Israel. While at Portland I also did a He-
Does being a Hebrew poet on “ad-mat nechar” (foreign ground, Psalms 137:4) make some kind of political or cultural statement?

My “persona,” the “I” of my poetry, in one poem might identify with life in Israel; in another poem it may identify with life in the Diaspora; yet other poems will have the “I” disenfranchising itself from life in either locale and simply be an omnipresent, rootless observer. Hebrew has always been the language representing the aspirations of the entire Jewish people. No other Judaic language can claim such a role. Although I am personally religiously observant, my poetry tends to be proto-Judaic, Canaanite, pagan, and I like to write about the about the unseemly side of life—Baudelaire is a favorite of mine—and about quirks, paradoxes, with an occasional historical aside. I hope to give my Israeli readers some insights into American life that they can’t get from Israeli writers, even the ones with green cards. Are these things a political statement? Maybe.

Are you in regular contact with poets in Israel? Do you see them, and do they see you, as colleagues?

I keep in touch with my writer friends via Facebook and email. Whenever I am in Israel, I visit with them, give poetry readings and hang out in literary cafes and bookstores. Do we see each other as colleagues? I guess so, but poets tend to be a rather self-absorbed group of people who tend to think that their thoughts and feelings are of more importance than they really are. I hope that life experience has cured me of such delusions. I identify with any group that realizes that good poetry, like any art, requires hard work and revision, revision, revision. Not every “deep thought” is worthy of publication, i.e., sharing it with others. I was very happy to see that my last book of poems was tagged with “Staff Favorite” at the Steinmatsky bookstore on Sheinkin Street in Tel Aviv. People I don’t now come up to me at events and say that they like my work. The ones who don’t like it simply don’t say anything. As a whole, the Israeli literary scene doesn’t know what to make of me, because I don’t fall into the neat little categories invented by obtuse professors. Thus, I am still an outsider, because the Israeli literary scene, despite its pretensions of worldliness, is, with some notable exceptions, still as provincial as it was thirty years ago, if not more so.

Which poets, both Hebrew and in other languages, are your biggest source of inspiration?

I find continuous inspiration in the Hebrew Bible, the Midrashim, Midnat HaZohar, medieval poetry, Hebrew translations of the Roman and Greek classics, Helit Yeshurun’s Hebrew translation of Marcel Proust, Dory Manor’s translations of Baudelaire and Malarmé. I also derive inspiration from Leah Goldberg, Bialik, Haim Gouri and Agnon. In English, I read a lot of history, anthropology, cosmology, and am currently caught among the following poets: Pound, Dicksen, Hart Crane, Samuel Greenberg (whom Crane plagiarized), Whitman, Basil Bunting and Avid Jones. My favorite Jewish Biblical scholar is Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg, for her depth and her humanity, and my favorite Biblical historian is Professor Mark S. Smith of NYU, whose insights into the origins of the Jewish people are unsurpassed in light of his analysis of the Ugarit—which are to Hebrew literature what Beowulf is to English literature. My favorite literary critic is Camille Paglia, especially as she presents herself in Sexual Personae. Such are my inspirations.

At one time, in the early to mid-20th century, there were several significant American Hebrew poets. Please tell us a little about them, and if they have special interest for you.

If you want to know about these poets, you must read Michael Weingrad’s new book American Hebrew Literature: Writing Jewish National Identity in the United States. Of the writers mentioned in his book, the only ones that I appreciate most, and whom I had the honor of visiting with on two occasions, was Gabriel Preil, who was a sublime poet and a wonderful human being. The other poet I knew personally was Eisig Silberschlag, who toward the end of his career held a chaired position at the University of Texas at Austin, and I studied in some of his classes. Years ago, while browsing in a used book store in Austin, I came across, much to my surprise, a book of poems by Gabriel Preil. Even more to my surprise, it was autographed by Gabriel Preil with a personal dedication to Eisig Silberschlag!

Family Picnic, 1950s

We stopped for a picnic: We sat in the car on the side of the road, and not far from the flattened little bodies of road-kill skunks, Their carcasses crisp in the July sun, their stench now just a whisper. My mother opened a brown paper bag containing sandwiches made from Swanson’s canned chicken, wrapped in wax paper. We disinfected our hands with a bottle of

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 47]
Over 100 students and teachers from 22 schools gathered at the Moot Beit Din Shabbaton on March 31-April 3, over a cloudless weekend in beautiful San Francisco. The students, selected by their schools as delegates to this unique competition in Jewish studies, showed overwhelming enthusiasm to participate in all the activities and to meet peers from throughout the continent. This is a program that enables stars to shine: students lead davening, deliver divrei Torah, perform a chesed project, compete in a variety of games, engage in discussions during a variety of shiurim delivered by their teachers, and sing their hearts out during Shabbat zemirot.

On Sunday morning the teams watch their friends from other schools stand before a full audience and a panel of learned judges, delivering their halakhic decisions on this year's case—whether a couple would be allowed to clone their dead son—and answering challenging questions. They performed with unfailing poise, intelligence and creativity, representing their positions with the insight and conviction of seasoned lawyers presenting before the Supreme Court.

RAVSAK congratulates this year’s winning teams:

**Group A**
- First Place: Tanenbaum CHAT—Wallenberg Campus (Toronto, ON)
- Second Place: Charles E. Smith Jewish Day School (Rockville, MD)
- Judges’ Choice: Jewish Community High School of the Bay (San Francisco, CA)

**Group B**
- First Place: Solomon Schechter School of Westchester (Hartsdale, NY)
- Second Place: American Hebrew Academy (Greensboro, NC)
- Judges’ Choice: San Diego Jewish Academy (San Diego, CA)

Mazal tov to all schools and students who took part!
Integrated Lesson
Using Trees as Metaphors

by Susan Couden, Krista Foster and Eran Rosenberg

For the poems submitted to RAVSAK’s Hebrew Poetry Contest, fifth grade students at the Columbus Jewish Day School examined biblical and liturgical texts and melodies to uncover our tradition’s use of trees as metaphors for humanity. Upon the completion of text and melodic study, the students extended and integrated their learning experience by creating brush paintings of trees. Finally, they wrote original poetry to compliment their visual art renditions.

The lesson began with students closing their eyes and listening to a rendition of עץ חיים היא (Proverbs 3:18) and of righteous katamar yifrach (Psalms 92:13). Afterwards, the students were encouraged to share ideas and feelings that the melodies evoked for them. They then looked for clues to meaning in the words of the texts. Students discovered that the songs and the words told stories of aspiration, longing, beauty, righteousness and gratitude. They noticed that in both songs trees are used as metaphors for the Torah and its followers.

The brush painting process began with students carefully listening to the sound of water being poured into their bowl. Students then laid a drop of water onto their page and filled it with watercolor pigments representing the seed. Then, using a straw, they blew across the surface of the seed to create roots. Next, students added more pigment and blew again to create the trunk and branches.

Next, students wrote poems in free verse. The poems included similes and/or metaphors. Students had their artistic tree in front of them for inspiration as they created poems that meshed with their artwork. Students were inspired by character values learned and discussed thus far in the year. They expressed an idea, a story, or a feeling in a rhythmic form. The poems (written in English and in Hebrew) have no particular pattern, and they may or may not contain rhyming phrases. The poems merely represent the beautiful tree paintings.

After creating the poems, students returned to their paintings and added the titles of their poems as micrographic horizon lines. Finally, the students created background to illustrate the mood of the poem, as portrayed through their written word. An example of the result can be found in Eli Lubow’s poem "העץ מצחיק" (“The Funny Tree”) on page 34.

[continued from page 45]

Walgreen’s isopropyl alcohol.
The bitter chemical taste wafted from our fingers to the sandwiches and to our tongues.
We ate quickly.
Then we drove away.

Here’s my take on the poem:

I remember this event. I think we were on the way to California or Arizona on a summer vacation. But all our picnics were like this. When we stopped to eat—we never got out of the car—never sat on the grass, never sat at picnic tables, never had a meal with friends. It was always isolation. I think I remember four times when my parents had dinner guests over between 1952 and 1968. So our family events were always isolated. Instead of people, we had animals—not just animals, but dead animals, and not just dead animals, but flattened road kill animals, and not just road kill, but skunks, very common on Texas highways.

The mechanical process of stopping and eating is what I remember, and the purification process of rubbing alcohol—to remove all vestiges of germs—as if we were going into surgery—and how it made our hands taste bitter—and the bitterness wafting over into the food, giving the tasty (and treif) canned chicken packed into two slices of white bread an acridness that I can still taste today.

In the Hebrew version, I use language for the dead skunks that one would use for a fine wine—“the skunks were at the pinnacle of dryness, and their stench was light.” In the English version, the skunks are more like sun-dried banana slices—crisp in the heat, but their stench, just a “whisper.”
The message of this well known quip is clear: It’s more efficient to learn from research than to reinvent the wheel. But educators in the field don’t always have the luxury of keeping up with research.

Here, then, are five specific tips—one about vocabulary, two about grammar, one about modern versus biblical Hebrew, and one about assessment—that will help you improve your Hebrew-education program. Each one takes advantage of clear research results.

Vocabulary: Be Careful of Clustering

It’s easier for students to learn words that are not related to each other. Or, to put it differently, it’s harder to learn words that either cluster around a common meaning or sound approximately the same as each other.

Articles of clothing—“shirt,” “pants,” “socks,” etc.—demonstrate the first group. The meanings of those words are all related. Similarly, segolate nouns in Hebrew—melekh (“king”), yeled (“boy”), rekhev (“vehicle”), etc.—sound similar, so they are an example of the second group. The first pattern is called “grammatical clustering.” The second is “semantic clustering.”

Both kinds of clustering make it harder for students to learn vocabulary, so both kinds should be avoided. That is, the worst way to teach words that center around a common theme is to present them all at once, just as the worst way to learn words of a certain pattern is all at the same time.

Most of the color words in Hebrew—kachol (“blue”), adom (“red”), katom (“orange”), varod (“pink”), etc.—demonstrate both kinds of clustering simultaneously, so certainly the color words shouldn’t be taught all in one lesson.

But surprisingly, most textbooks (and therefore most teachers) do just that. They teach color words all at once, just as they do with articles of clothing or a new pattern of noun. In so doing, they ignore a basic research result and make vocabulary acquisition much harder for the students than it needs to be.

Rather than giving students a list of colors one week, a list of clothing words the next, and so forth, a well-designed program will pick one or two words from each category, so the students will learn, say, one color, an article of clothing, a verb or two, and so on.

Word Forms: For Whom?

Hebrew words forms—binyanim and mishkalo (verb and noun patterns), prefixes, suffixes, etc.—are such a basic part of the language that they inevitably play a central role in Hebrew education. So teachers and other educators face a variety of crucial questions about the role of grammar in their programs.

Two of the most important questions are how old children should be when they first learn Hebrew grammar, and how that grammar should be presented.

The answer to the first question may surprise a lot of people.

Grammar is most appropriate only starting in middle school. Developmentally, grade-school students are generally too young to know what grammar is. So just as, say, metaphysics is an inappropriate topic for grade-school students, so too is grammar, Hebrew or otherwise.

This isn’t to say that younger children can’t pass tests on grammar. They can. But they won’t know what it is that they’re learning, because until about middle school, children are ill-equipped to study language the way adults do. They just speak. (Or not.)

So a well designed program will not
overtly teach grammar to children until middle school.

Related to the issue of age is the question of how best to teach grammar, because flawed grammar-teaching often teams up with flawed assessment (see below) to mislead educators, creating a disconnect between what teachers think they’re teaching and what children learn.

Again, children can pass a test on grammar, so it might look like children can learn grammar. However, instruction in grammar often leads to short-lived positive test results but little real knowledge. In a typical scenario, children are taught, say, that “plural words end in -im.” Then they are asked on a test either how plural words end or what -im indicates. Either way, they get the answer right. But all they’ve learned is to answer what the teacher expects. They haven’t learned anything useful about Hebrew, because they are too young to fully appreciate what grammar is.

Even in middle school and onward, grammar should be taught in context rather than as its own topic. So, for example, rather than teaching that “an aleph marks a future first-person verb,” teach “this is how to say, ‘I will go’...” Otherwise, even middle-school students may study the material and pass the test, but skip the part where they learn something useful about Hebrew.

Making the Old New: When Hebrew Isn’t Hebrew

One particular challenge in teaching Hebrew is that most people who learn modern Hebrew (also called “Israeli Hebrew”) encounter older dialects of the language as well, in prayers, for example, or in the Bible.

But Hebrew has changed significantly since it was used in the Bible. In fact, Israeli Hebrew is so distinct from biblical Hebrew that most Israeli schoolchildren have trouble understanding the Bible in its original Hebrew. Schools in North America, however, often teach modern and biblical Hebrew simultaneously, creating a jumble in the minds of students.

As an example of the magnitude of the problem, we need only look to common biblical passages that are quoted in the liturgy. The first word of the Ve’ehavta, for example, not only has a different meaning in modern versus biblical Hebrew (“you loved” versus “you will love”) but the pronunciation is different: ve’aHAV’ta in Israeli Hebrew and ve’alavTA in the Bible. Similarly, uvish’arekha (“and in your gates”) is most naturally expressed as vebash’arekhem shelkha in modern Hebrew. (And, for that matter, the biblical word refers to the gates of a city, a concept foreign to most children in the West.)

Programs typically adopt one of two flawed solutions to the dilemma created by these competing dialects.

One mistaken approach is to teach both dialects at the same time. Judaic teachers,
for example, might present biblical Hebrew during one period, while Hebrew-language teachers present Israeli Hebrew during another. Not surprisingly, this confuses the students, who, at best, are generally able to excel at only one of the two.

Or worse, programs ignore the reality of modern Hebrew, wrongly assuming that Israeli Hebrew is “pretty close” to biblical Hebrew. This approach justifies teaching both at the same time, but it comes at the expense of teaching modern Hebrew accurately. Students spend time learning myriad details of biblical Hebrew (such as the nuances of BeGeD KeFeT, which have gone the way of the dodo in spoken Israeli Hebrew), at best never really learning the material, or at worst working hard to master a language that no one speaks anymore.

Not surprisingly, issues surrounding the role of ancient Hebrew in our modern lives are emotionally charged, and it’s sometimes hard to make rational decisions, but a good program will recognize the vast differences that exist in various Hebrew dialects, and choose carefully which ones should be taught. Here ideological concerns mix with pedagogy, so answers are sometimes elusive, but reasonable questions include: Should students learn the Hebrew that their peers in Israel speak? Should students learn to speak the language of the Bible? Should students be able to compose prayers in liturgical Hebrew? And so forth.

One sound solution is to teach Israeli Hebrew as a spoken and written language to younger children, offering biblical Hebrew to older students much in the way that Shakespeare is presented to native English speakers.

**Evaluation: What You Hear Is What You Get**

Not surprisingly, evaluating progress in something as complicated as language is not easy. For example, even though an accurate accent is one of the least important parts of learning a foreign language, a native speaker tends to judge other people’s competency in a language primarily based on their accent. In other words, native speakers who hear someone speaking with a good accent will think that that person speaks the language well, in spite of any grammatical or other mistakes. The same native speakers will tend to think that someone who speaks with a flawed accent doesn’t speak the language well, even though that person’s speech may have much better grammar and vocabulary.

This is one reason that most people think young children can learn foreign languages faster and better than their older counterparts. (It’s not true, as researchers have demonstrated—teaching a language too early can impede progress later, and high-school students make the fastest progress learning a foreign language.) It is true, however, that by and large children do a better job learning a foreign accent. Combined with the disproportionate weight most people put on accent, this creates the false impression that young children are always better equipped to learn a foreign language.

More generally, this situation highlights the importance of objective evaluation when it comes to foreign language acquisition.

Unfortunately, most Hebrew evaluation so closely mirrors the method of instruction that students are able to succeed even if they bypass the step of actually learning Hebrew. For example, a typical lesson might teach four Hebrew roots techniques used to teach the material. For example, a test might ask questions about a Hebrew passage than can only be understood by students who have mastered certain material.

The drawback of this kind of evaluation is that it creates double work for program designers, who now have to create lessons in one way, and tests in a completely different way. But the payoff is a much better sense of what kinds of teaching work, what kinds don’t, and how well the students have learned Hebrew.

**Summary: Five Steps to Success**

Five things you can start implementing this summer include:

1. Don’t teach vocabulary in clusters.
2. Don’t teach grammar to grade-school students.
3. Don’t teach grammar in isolation to anyone.
4. Don’t mix biblical and Israeli Hebrew.
5. Don’t make tests a mirror of instruction.
**STEER YOUR SCHOOL TOWARD FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY**

**What is Sustained?**

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<td>The attitude we must have if we’re going to build viable Jewish day schools for an enduring future.</td>
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Chair, PEJE Board of Directors

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Between Catch-Up and Intimidation: Teaching the Alef Bet to High School Freshmen

by Miriam Harpaz and Rabbi Harry Pell

Named after the famous Rabbi Akiva, who began his Jewish education at age 40, Akiva is Solomon Schechter School of Westchester’s program for entering ninth grade students who have not previously been in day school.

When an upper school was added to the Solomon Schechter School of Westchester ten years ago, we created a track for entering students lacking a day school background. The Akiva program would allow the new-to-day-school students to be mainstreamed in their general studies, while providing them with their own independent track for Hebrew, Tanakh and rabbinics, as well as special support to feel comfortable in tefillah alongside their peers, most of whom take navigating the siddur and davening from the amud for granted. The overall goal was and has remained for these students to learn as much Hebrew as possible, and develop as much skill in text study as possible, in the limited window of four years of high school, while benefiting from the overall avirah (atmosphere) of day school.

The Akiva program has brought with it many successes and benefits, but also its fair share of challenges, disappointments and frustrations. One of the greatest benefits is the infusion of excitement Akiva students bring to the school as a whole. While they represent no more than ten percent of a given grade in our school, everything is new for these students, and their enthusiasm is often inspirational for their more jaded day-school-since-kindergarten peers.

The flip side of everything being new is that the Akiva experience can be daunting for students and overwhelming for their teachers as they struggle to determine what works and what doesn’t in teaching Hebrew to this unique student population. For us, this has been a process of trial and error, but we have learned as much from our failures as from our successes and we are excited to share what we have learned.

First and foremost, we learned to validate what students are feeling and to not take anything for granted. Students often arrive to the Akiva ulpan Hebrew class experiencing a significant amount of anxiety. They might feel vulnerable and inadequate, having to start from the Alef Bet as high school freshmen. In essence, they are learning to read and write a completely new language, which has no roots in the romance languages with which they are familiar, but which their new day school peers mastered in elementary school. Validating these emotions does not make them go away, but it does help. Before we realized the importance of addressing these anxieties directly, students expressed that they felt we didn’t “understand what they were going through” and we risked losing their trust, and even their participation in the program.

By the same token, we have also learned from our mistakes not to limit Akiva...
The teachers must strive to put the students at ease, helping them build their confidence while teaching them as much and as quickly as possible. They must be experts in both Ivrit and TLC.
We found that the common denominator of entering day school in ninth grade didn’t make students any more homogeneous than their mainstreamed peers.

need to see quick, positive results to reassure them that they made the right decision to take on the challenge of day school.

One other major lesson we learned had to with the heterogeneity of the Akiva classroom. We came to realize that by creating an Akiva track we had not eliminated the need for differentiation. Some students learn best through repetition, others need some vocalization (vowels) in order to read, and still others find reading and speaking relatively easy but need extra time to develop their writing skills. We found that the common denominator of entering day school in ninth grade didn’t make students in an Akiva classroom any more homogeneous than their mainstreamed peers.

Akiva ulpan classes begin with students learning accessible, introductory material including oral introductions, while building their vocabulary with basic words and adding words that sound the same in English (such as television, telephone, banana). By the end of the first class, students are able to say their names, ask for their classmates’ names, and identify themselves as students and tell each other where they live. When they realize they can do this, they are thrilled! As the course evolves, classes continue to follow this model of quick building and reinforcing basic skills.

In terms of curriculum, we don’t yet have a formal written curriculum, although we are moving in that direction. For the time being, we have developed lessons that bridge curricular materials designed for newcomers to Hebrew with other materials in conversational Hebrew more appropriate for older students. This unique pairing is called for based on the fact that the students must start at the beginning, given that most know little more than the Alef Bet, if that, when they begin. By the same token, at this age, to be successful they must achieve at least a modest level of conversational ability.

Overall, by the end of tenth grade the average Akiva students has a vocabulary of about 240 words that they have completely mastered and can use independently in all four areas of language acquisition (reading, writing, conversing, and listening), as well as a growing vocabulary of additional words that they understand and often use in conversation. Students can conjugate verbs in the present and past tense, and can read short stories and answer questions about the stories in Hebrew. Given that the students started from alef, this progress is a great accomplishment. However, given how much we would like them to learn, it is also fair to say that this is a bit disappointing. For the time being, these are instructional goals that we have found to be realistic. As we continue to refine and develop the Akiva program, there is reason to believe that we will be more successful at helping students acquire greater mastery in the future.

**IN THEIR OWN WORDS: AKIVA STUDENTS WRITE ABOUT THEIR EXPERIENCES**

“Coming to school, I was nervous about being able to keep up with Hebrew. In the beginning it was difficult to adjust to the new language, but as the class progressed I was surprised at what I learned in such a short time.”

“My teacher started us off from the beginning which was great… Today, six months after class started, I feel confident that I have learned so much in such a short time, that I know Hebrew will be ok for me.”

“At first I felt lost and I was behind, but soon enough I caught up and now I feel confident when it comes to Hebrew. The beginning was slow, and I was scared, but now I feel I know almost as much as the other kids.”

This ties in to what has probably been the greatest disappointment of the Akiva program, and the largest shift in program design since its inception. When it was inaugurated, Akiva was seen as a two-year mechinah program that would prepare students to be mainstreamed for junior and senior years. That has proven impossible for most students. While it is possible for Akiva students to gain a sound footing in Hebrew, and for particularly motivated and high-achieving students to be mainstreamed successfully in the rabbinics and Tanakh tracks, this has not been possible in Hebrew. As a result, the Akiva program has shifted to a program that continues throughout all four years of high school for all but the most exceptional students.
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Making the Most of Hebrew Primary Sources: Five Projects

by Tal Grinfas-David

A sk a student or a teacher why Hebrew language instruction is important; most will give you two reasons: (a) to better connect to, and understand, Biblical and Jewish texts, and (b) to better communicate when they travel to Israel. But how many students would venture to say that Hebrew allows us to explore Zionism, pioneering, state-building and Jewish national identity?

One of the most important enduring understandings educators can impart to students is that Hebrew is not static, it has changed and shifted over time, served multiple purposes, and mirrored the fate of the Jewish people over centuries. For example, when Jews were autonomous in their homeland, the language flourished, and when Jews were exiled to live as (often persecuted) minorities in other lands, the language suffered. The last century saw the successful revival of Hebrew language as Jews returned to the Land of Israel, sought to regain autonomy, and ultimately achieved sovereignty. However, this paradigm no longer aptly describes Hebrew’s status.

Despite the successes of the State of Israel and the Jewish people worldwide, Hebrew has been eroding due to internal and external forces. Widespread grammatical and lexical errors made by Israelis in the vernacular, and an increasingly challenged Israeli education system, are creating a generation of native Hebrew speakers who do not have command of the ancient liturgical or modern literary sources. Further exacerbating the issue, the last two decades saw a large influx of non-Hebrew speaking immigrants from Russia and Ethiopia. But perhaps most significantly, the impact of the Internet, rapid global technology change, and the central role of English in these, have led to the common phenomenon of speaking Hebrew interlaced with English vocabulary. If the language is to persevere and flourish, it will be because of the intentional efforts of the Jewish people, both inside and outside the Land of Israel.

How can the trend be reversed? Empower students to take ownership of the language, its history and its fate. Seeing is believing; it is far more powerful for a student to say “I saw the document with my own two eyes” than to say “because my Hebrew teacher told me so.” In fact, the more schools engage the community in learning from primary sources, the more they impart critical perspectives of historical context. Advocacy training has been proven to be less effective than desired, leaving students wary of political agendas and unarmed with deep historical understandings. Hence, school leaders would be wise to make the most of the limited frontal time educators have with students, by limiting advocacy courses designed to counter college campus rhetoric while expanding and amplifying modern Jewish history lessons. To that end, this article provides five suggested primary sources (available at www.israeled.org) and corresponding research-based activities that foster an appreciation for the dynamic history of Hebrew in modern times and challenge students to critically examine their roles and responsibilities as Hebrew language learners.

Primary sources reveal that Hebrew revival in the 1880s was a grassroots movement, strongly supported by many of the early pioneers, contrary to the mythology of Eliezer Ben Yehuda as the sole reviver of Hebrew. Have students read an 1886 diary excerpt from David Shuv, the principal of the school in Rosh Pina, describing his challenges as he attempted to utilize Hebrew immersion techniques (“Ivrit beIvrit”). Shuv’s conviction and determination, despite parent opposition and lack of textbooks, is reflective of the early Zionist pioneering values and spirit. Students could write their own journal entries as though they were students in Rosh Pina in the 1880s, describing their lifestyle, schooling and aspirations, as well as their thoughts about Shuv’s then unconventional approach to Hebrew instruction.

Utilize Various Genres

Have students read the letter of protest written by senior students of Hebrew schools in Eretz Yisrael to the Board of Directors of the Technion (1913). In the letter, students express their outrage that the language of instruction was not to be Hebrew, but rather German. They wrote: “We…protest against those who dare to break away from the Hebrew language in our land and those who shake the very foundation of our young culture—the result of massive nationalistic work. No
other language in the world can replace the Hebrew language in our convictions and in our consciousness." Ask students to compare this formal letter and Principal Shuv’s diary entry, and analyze how both genres demonstrate a commitment to language revival as a Jewish national ethos. Students could write a formal letter to the school board describing their ideal Hebrew language policy. Alternatively, students could examine Hebrew Passover Hagadot written by Kibbutzim in the 1930s as another genre. Have students explore how those pioneers utilized ancient and modern Hebrew texts with their own creative writing to express the similarities between the story of Exodus and their experiences of leaving the Galut and resettling the land. Students could then create their own Hagadah passages, in which they express the challenges they perceive as now facing the Jewish nation and how they intend to overcome these.

DIFFERENTIATE INSTRUCTION AND ASSESSMENT

From the 1930s to the 1950s, several Zionist organizations produced posters encouraging immigrants to enroll in Ulpan and learn Hebrew, which was vital to their successful absorption in the new economy (see http://www.zionistposters.org/). Have students analyze the posters by asking guiding questions about how the imagery, symbolism, words and colors on the posters support the message directed toward the target audience. Students could create their own Zionist posters promoting Hebrew language learning for that era, thus addressing the styles of visual/artistic learners. Create a rubric for evaluating student-made posters and consider employing peer evaluation for such project-based tasks. Students could display their work and rationale as an exhibition for other community members to enjoy.

MEET STUDENTS WHERE THEY ARE

Since the establishment of the State of Israel, the Hebrew Language Academy has been responsible for introducing new words into the language. However, it is having a difficult time keeping pace with rapid technological advancement over the last two decades. While many new words have been generated, most Israelis do not know or employ them, preferring to use the English terminology. Ask students to learn five Hebrew words generated in the last year, to examine their etymology (see HLA website http://hebrew-terms.huji.ac.il/), and to present these to the class. Ask students how technology has changed their lives over the last five years, and what effect it is having on Hebrew. Have students debate whether Hebrew speakers should learn these new words or continue using the English terminology.

INVOLVE THE COMMUNITY

Technology isn’t the only force eroding Hebrew today. Over one million immigrants from the former Soviet Union and over 100,000 from Ethiopia, few of whom spoke Hebrew prior to arriving, are changing Israel’s demographics and its language. Recognizing the impact of globalization, Israel’s Minister of Education enacted a new policy, stipulating that every day, K-12th grade classes begin with five minutes of Hebrew language instruction. Have students read Israeli newspaper articles and op-eds about this policy (for example, see http://www.jpost.com/Features/MagazineFeatures/Article.aspx?id=166669). Invite parents and community members to a panel discussion on Hebrew language erosion and revival, and the role individuals/schools can assume in these processes. Celebrate what your students have learned with the community in a festive evening...
of Israeli dance to Hebrew songs where student works are on display. Cultivate book clubs for staff, parents and students to read Israeli literature and other primary source materials.

**Conclusion**

There are vital lessons to be learned from our nation’s past, specifically about Jews’ ability to view challenges as opportunities for growth and adaptability. This can be seen in a plethora of primary source materials, all of which are easily accessible online. This article highlighted the determination of a principal to revive Hebrew through immersion, the steadfastness of students to maintain graduate studies in Hebrew, the yearning of kibbutz members to be free and safe in their homeland, the creativity and efficacy of Jewish organizations in absorbing new immigrants, the declining influence of the Hebrew Language Academy, and the present endeavors of the minister of education to reverse Hebrew erosion. The article also demonstrated how multiple genres of primary sources, including diaries, letters, Haggadot, posters, HLA publications and news articles, can illuminate modern Jewish history and culture. There are many more worthy sources and genres to explore with students. It now falls to educators and publishers alike to become inspired to design meaningful and rich learning experiences around these Hebrew sources.

The task is not without its challenges. First, identifying and locating suitable primary sources requires an investment of time, which unfortunately is a rare commodity for teachers. Second, translations for learners who cannot access the document in Hebrew must reflect nuance, tone and context. Third, educators should possess sufficient background knowledge and skills to make these primary sources come alive in the classroom. These challenges are not insurmountable; educational leaders should be ready to critically examine textbooks for their incorporation of primary sources before their adoption, hire skilled educators who are bilingual and bicultural, and allot funds toward teacher professional development. National organizations, such as the Institute for the Study of Modern Israel (ISMI) and the Center for Israel Education (CIE), are already working to house such primary sources, their translations, pedagogical materials and background information in one searchable online repository, to help educators and schools become more effective.

Analyzing primary source materials promotes critical thinking skills across disciplines, sheds light on Jewish history, solidifies the centrality of Hebrew to Jewish national identity, and encourages students to take ownership of the future shifts of the language. Jews in Israel and the Diaspora are inextricably connected through common history, texts, values, practices and more; with over half of the world Jewish population living outside of Israel, the future of Hebrew will depend upon how vested these learners and educators are in preserving it, developing it, and cherishing it.

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**SuLaM Cohort III Wrestles with Israel and Zionism**

This past April Cohort III met for their final shabbaton as a group in a long weekend focused on the theme of Israel and Zionism. Needless to say, the shabbaton was rich with conversation, debate, and learning. Highlights of the shabbaton included a private audience with the Council General to the Permanent Mission of Israel to the United Nations, a personal tour and lunch with Israeli photographer Yael Ben-Zion of her work now on display in the Weil Art Gallery at the 92nd Street Y, and an Israeli beit cafe complete with Israeli music, food and wine.

We extend a heartfelt mazel tov to everyone in Cohort III for their successful completion of Project SulaM and we welcome them to the SuLaM Alumni Network.
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Returning Literature to the Hebrew Language Curriculum

by Yaron Peleg

Hebrew poetry and literature have been integral parts of the curriculum ever since Hebrew began to be taught as a modern language sometime in the middle of the nineteenth century. Indeed, for many years literature comprised almost the entire curriculum. It was not until the professionalization and standardization of the study of Hebrew in the second half of the twentieth century that its size in the curriculum began to shrink. Today, literature competes with a rich variety of cultural sources that threaten it even more. Films and various Internet sources, including Youtube, have pushed the study of literature to the margins of Hebrew studies. There seems little need to even mention poetry, which has all but disappeared from the Hebrew classroom, save for rare cases where the brevity of the form remains one of its only virtues. One feels thankful for Etgar Keret, whose poem-size short stories have recently bolstered the retreating forces of literature from Hebrew pedagogy. But that is an exception that proves the rule.

Some of the reasons for this decline have to do with general cultural trends; poetry has all but vanished from the artistic discourse everywhere. Once the crucible of modern Hebrew, where many of the modern language’s innovations took place, this form of art has become marginal today. And poets are not the only ones who have been deprived of the prophetic role they had for the last two hundred years. In the last few decades, authors seem to share a similar fate that increasingly regulates them to the margins of cultural importance. With the growing spread of a visual, multi-sensory culture, literary texts suffer by comparison. Bloggers are the poets of today and filmmakers are our novelists.

The question whether this is good or bad is moot, of course. It is what it is. What we do with this reality and how we deal with it in the classroom is more germane. While almost all teachers of Hebrew today incorporate electronic media into their courses, I would like to make the case here for a return to a more text-based curriculum or at least for an increase in the proportion of poetry and literature as part of it. My professional interests notwithstanding, this is not a nostalgic call. My argument is based on what I believe to be sound pedagogical reasoning that includes the use of language, the history of language, cultural exposure, and rhetorical skills. While most of these aspects of language teaching can certainly be augmented by electronic media, literary texts provide both teachers and students with a much more structured and controlled environment on the one hand, a broader and deeper access into the culture of the language, on the other, and as a result, greater opportunities to exercise a variety of rhetorical skills that require advanced reasoning.

Let me start with an example from my own experience, and davka from my use of electronic media. In the last few years, I have been using the Israeli TV drama A Touch Away (מרחק נמציה) for a third-year Hebrew conversation class. Since the class focuses on developing speaking skills, I want the course materials to include “authentic” spoken Hebrew. While students love the show and are very excited to watch it, in reality, they are not able to understand it without subtitles. This clearly takes away from the effectiveness of the visual aid. I try to compensate for it by giving students vocabulary lists and dubbing exercises, but in fact, these are all forced drills that are superficially contextualized in the material and remain outside of the actual television drama. The same difficulties arise during the discussion about the show and the important issues it raises, all related to the general problem of using films and other authentic materials in lower levels. In summary: the TV show is marginally effective as a

Dr. Yaron Peleg teaches Hebrew literature and Israeli film and culture at George Washington University; he is the co-author of Brandeis Modern Hebrew and is currently co-developing the second volume of that textbook. He can be reached at ypeleg@gwu.edu.
language-teaching tool, although it certainly acquainted students with contemporary Israeli culture and encouraged them to continue their Hebrew studies—important goals in and of themselves.

Again, I am not arguing against the use of films and other electronic sources in class. On the contrary. But I think it is important to remember their limited use as an actual language teaching tool. Far more effective, I think, is the use of poetry and literature, even in lower level classes, to enrich expression (lexically and syntactically) and expand cultural horizons and sophistication. The idea is not to replace formal grammatical instruction with belle lettres, but to add a necessary and layered cultural dimension to it in increasing quantities commensurate with proficiency. Hebrew literary texts provide far richer cultural references than electronic media because they span a far greater time period and include an almost infinite spectrum of subjects and genres. And since they are fixed on the page, written and not fleetingly spoken as language in films, they are much more accessible, regardless of their level of difficulty.

I would like to give another example from my own experience, this time from a fourth-year Hebrew class, in which I specifically addresses the pedagogical aspects I mentioned before of language, history, culture and rhetoric. As this is an advanced language class, the proportion of literature in it is obviously greater than that in lower classes. Still, I make sure to diversify the literary offerings beyond the more obvious categories of author, genre, subject, and style to that of time period or history as well. I want to expose students to different “Hebrews” in order to give them an idea about its exceptional development in the past century and expose them to the culture of the language itself. Thus, some of the works I assigned this past semester included Yaacov Steinberg’s classic short story “The Blind Woman” (1920s, “העיוורת”), Y. H. [continued on page 67]

With the growing spread of a visual, multisensory culture, literary texts suffer by comparison. Bloggers are the poets of today and filmmakers are our novelists.

Hebrew literary texts provide far richer cultural references than electronic media because they span a far greater time period and include an almost infinite spectrum of subjects and genres.
Empowering Middle School Students to Take Ownership of Their Hebrew Learning

by Eti Zehavi

I was thrilled to learn I would be teaching Hebrew in the middle school this year. Although I taught middle school students in the past, it’s been ten years since I welcomed a group of adolescents into my class.

Soon, I realized that these sixth graders were not the enthusiastic, cooperative, and approachable learners they had been in fourth and fifth grade. Every day brought a new challenge in my relationships with them. Students mostly checked my sense of fairness; they became more argumentative and judgmental. “It’s not fair!” was exclaimed repeatedly in my class: “It’s not fair! You give too much homework”; “it’s not fair! I was supposed to get an A+, not a B.” In addition, I noticed that they were entirely occupied by personal social concerns and their peers were a source for standards and models.

On top of the age developmental challenges, I had to teach a subject which was not considered useful in helping the students solve real life problems. In their words: “It’s not cool to do well in Hebrew.”

In spite of the fact that I faced so many challenges early in the year, I was committed to doing my best in order to turn this experience into a successful and productive one for all.

BUILDING THE CURRICULUM AROUND THE CHARACTERISTICS OF MIDDLE GRADE STUDENTS

I began by asking myself a few questions: What characterizes middle school students? What interests them? How do I make the curriculum relevant to their everyday experiences? How could I convince them that speaking Hebrew is useful and will play an important role in their Jewish life? I was overwhelmed with all these thoughts, knowing that time worked against me. I didn’t want my students to give up on Hebrew. Yet, I had a set curriculum that included a textbook, grammar book and a chapter book for guided reading. Should I neglect these materials and start searching for a new curriculum?

Utilizing the materials I had, I decided to focus on the chapter book Nissim Veniflot by Israeli poet Leah Goldberg (a story about a group of adolescents who founded a circus based on their own talents, and a monkey that was found in the neighborhood). I engaged the students by letting them dramatize episodes from the book and by encouraging them to be as creative as they could be using props and costumes. Although this approach was good and it seemed to engage the students, I felt that something was missing. From teaching them in younger grades, I knew I could get them more involved and passionate about the program.

The turning point came the day the students were asked on a test to write a story using the new vocabulary they just learned. Each one of them took the time to write the best story they could. The stories I received were fascinating and mainly reflected on each one’s personality. I liked their stories and was impressed with their ability to write so nicely. The topics ranged from sharing their hectic morning before school, to helping people in need, to the elephant that was different from the other elephants in the zoo.

The next day, I came to class excited and cheerful; I shared with the students all the stories. I read them one by one, complimenting the work of every student. I told them that I loved the stories and I wanted to share them with my colleagues and their parents. The students were so proud of their achievement and really wanted to seize the moment.

They all said, “Why can’t we now act out the stories?”

“But there are thirteen students in the class. Are we going to have thirteen skits?” I asked.

They replied, “We will discuss it among us and decide which skit we will perform.”
From that moment on the class was conducted without me. I watched as my students enthusiastically paired up, spread their stories on the tables, read the stories to each other and decided which story would be acted out. Then each group found a spot to discuss the details of the process. The students worked on their skits for a week. During the week I was just observing, helping with Hebrew grammar and vocabulary, and giving advice. Then, when the students were ready, I brought a video camera and filmed their performances. The room was abuzz. All the students were extremely excited, they all wanted to speak correctly and look good, especially in front of the camera.

When we saw that we had stories and video clips, the students decided that the next step was to make their own storybook. Soon enough, we found ourselves sitting in the computer lab typing our stories. In the following weeks the students continued to write more stories using the new vocabulary. They continued to act out their stories and type them out. The students felt so good about their accomplishments and tried hard to implement correctly all the new vocabulary and grammar that they learned. They wanted to impress their classmates more than they wanted to impress me. They enjoyed when their peers listened attentively to their stories and later became a character in a story they wrote.

It was amazing and extremely satisfying to see how students become so passionate about learning when they take an active part in the learning process.

Through the stories I learned about my students’ thoughts, likes and feelings. I definitely got to know them better and was able to build the curriculum around their world and needs. In addition, my grammar units came out of their writing.

Students were more motivated to learn from their own mistakes.

We are now deep in the middle of sixth grade. My students are engaged in the learning process, are very proud of their achievements and, most of all, don’t say, “It’s not fair!” anymore.

That is the story of how my sixth graders took ownership of their Hebrew learning process and became my partners in building their curriculum.
Transliteration Hebrew: How We Do It at HaYidion

by Elliott Rabin

ONE of the most vexing issues surrounding Hebrew concerns the proper method of transliteration. Hebrew scholars are generally passionate that there is one correct system, and all others are in grievous, even heretical, error. Without q for kuf, th for taf, and a dot under the h denoting chet, the world descends into chaos, as described in the last sentence of Judges: “In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did as he pleased.” On the other extreme are the many people who seem to think that making it up as they go along, approximating English equivalents that sound right to them, is a perfectly acceptable technique. Everyone will get the idea. Needless to say, these two camps engage in an eternal, simmering, low-level war.

Challenges: Multiple Hebrews, Lack of Uniform Standards

There are two main challenges to Hebrew transliteration. The first lies in the fact that, when we’re talking about Hebrew, we are not talking about one consistent language. In its orthography, the Hebrew language has indeed preserved remarkable consistency: unlike English, whose spelling has changed radically over the centuries, the Hebrew of the Torah is spelled the same way as the Hebrew of Tidiot Achenrot today. However, in its pronunciation Hebrew has varied significantly across time and culture. Take, for example, the ayin. If you want to hear a “real” ayin, listen to a Yemenite speaker, who can produce the right inflection in the back of the throat thanks to his or her familiarity with the same sound in Arabic. (Increasingly, Torah readers are picking up on this “authentic” way of distinguishing ayin from alef.) In contemporary Israel, the ayin falls silent, an approach pleasing to American speakers whose throat muscles are not accustomed to guttural sounds. The original Ashkenazi pronunciation can be gleaned from the nickname “Yankel” for Yaakov.

When we transliterate, then, we must ask several questions: how was the Hebrew pronounced in the source text, how do the readers pronounce it, and which system takes preference? Biblical norms (which themselves were not uniform, but that’s another story…) dictate one transliteration; poems of Bialik were written for an Ashkenazic (“Yiddish”) pronunciation; there are several variations of Sephardic Hebrew; and modern Israeli Hebrew, often referred to as “Sephardic,” is in reality a simplified hybrid of elements not found in any other Hebrew dialect (for examples, see “Homophonic vowels” below). This challenge is compounded by the fact that we teach more than one kind of Hebrew in our schools at the same time. Students may learn rabbinic Hebrew during tefillah, biblical Hebrew in Tanakh class, and modern Hebrew during “Hebrew.” They may speak with an Israeli accent at school and an Ashkenazi accent in shul. Who is doing the transliterating, and in what context, may make a great deal of difference for how the language looks on the page.

The second challenge to Hebrew transliteration is the lack of uniform standards. There are different guides used by different communities: academic, rabbinic, denominational, camps, etc. This welter encourages a kind of willed ignorance on the topic among many Jews. Just consider how many ways the holiday of Chanukkah is spelled—is the first sound H, Ch, or Kh? Two ks or one? Ending in a or ah? Or even this Yiddish version: Chanike? Additionally, with such a common Jewish word, the question arises as to whose pronunciation the spelling aims to replicate, that of an American (Hanaka) or an Israeli (Chanookkah)?

Aside from these issues, any person or organization designing a standard for Hebrew translation must grapple with the question of goal. Is the aim to enable someone who does not know any
Hebrew to approximate Hebrew pronunciation by getting as close to the original using English (or American) spelling and sounds? Or is it to help people who know Hebrew, whether novices or experts, to reproduce the original quickly? Each goal would dictate a different set of transliteration choices. If the goal is the former, then Hebrew letters that sound alike in modern Israel should look the same; if the latter, those letters should always look different.

At HaYidion, we chose to create a transliteration style that adapts elements from existing systems in a way that seems faithful to the Hebrew language although not beholden to any one particular pronunciation. Our style is not pedantic—no q’s or dots under letters, for example—but it does preserve distinctions between letters that are not generally audible on the streets of Israel today. In other words, the style tries within reason to be as faithful as possible to both the written and oral language. There are two main goals of our transliteration system. It should be easily legible to a nonspecialist reader, so that someone who knows just a little Hebrew can make out the sounds, and people with no Hebrew can come close to pronouncing it. At the same time, people who do know Hebrew, whether modern Israeli, biblical, or another variety, should be able to decode it quickly.

Choosing a Style: Legibility in English and Hebrew

Here are a few technical comments explaining some of the choices made in HaYidion’s transliteration guide (see sidebar):

The apostrophe. This symbol is used promiscuously in Hebrew transliteration as a separator: after a prefix (ha’yidion), for a shva (sh’nei), between a vowel and a “furtive patach” (e.g., battu’ach). It is, in effect, the “I-don’t-know-what-to-do” sign. Because the apostrophe can go forward and backward, it is most usefully reserved to distinguish between the alef and ayin, letters otherwise indistinguishable in Israeli Hebrew because they are both unpronounced. These apostrophes have the look in English of these letters’ function in contemporary Israel: letters holding space between two vowels. By distinguishing between the alef and an ayin, we show a) that the letters differ as written, and b) that most Hebrew dialects distinguish between their pronunciation as well. Nonetheless, we chose not to use these symbols at the beginning or end of words, where they can be misapprehended as punctuation marks.

Homophonic letters. Hebrew contains several letters that today sound identical, although originally pronounced differently: alef and ayin (see above), khof and
Homophonic vowels. The Hebrew language does not have many vowels to begin with, and modern Israeli Hebrew has flattened the distinction between four of them: patach-kametz, and segol-tzerei. In both pairs, the second vowel today sounds identical to the first. At HaYidion we have chosen to preserve the second distinction, since it continues to be taught and preserved, especially in the context of synagogue and Torah study. The first distinction (“ah” vs. “aw”), however, is generally ignored outside of Yiddish-speaking Ashkenazi circles (whether chasidic or “yeshivish”), and hence dispensed with in our pages.

Shva. As students of Hebrew grammar learn, there are really two shvas in Hebrew. The shva nach (ש ו) marks the end of a syllable (nach means “resting”), hence produces no sound (e.g., in machshever, computer, the shva between “ch” and “sh” is silent). By contrast, the shva na (ש ו) acts like a regular vowel (na means “moving”) and makes the sound we associate as “shva” from English phonology. (Of course, the term “shva” derives from the Hebrew vowel sign.) Since we at HaYidion reserve the apostrophe for aleph and ayin, we use a simple e for the shva na, such as the first vowel in menasheh (tries). (Disclaimer: linguistic rules are made to be broken; in current Hebrew, the vocalization of these two shvas is messier than presented here, with shva na sometimes unpronounced [zman, time] and shva nach pronounced [the last vowel in lamadet].)

Heb. We mark the hch at the end of a word with an h, even though it is not pronounced, to indicate Hebrew spelling. It is important to note that words ending in achat, such as sahta (grandmother), do not take an h.

Double letters. A dot in a consonant that is not at the beginning of the word indicates a doubled letter according to Hebrew grammar. Although this phenomenon is no longer heard in speech, we include it in HaYidion both because it helps to identify the original form, especially verb morphology (for example, showing that the word melammed is pi’el) and to help with pronunciation (e.g., melammed does not sound like someone crippled me).

Italics: Marking What’s Foreign

One of the most persistent questions surrounding transliteration is, to italicize or not to italicize? Out of a desire for consistency, some would italicize every Hebrew word, even those that appear in English dictionaries, such as Chanukkah. The reason for this policy, I believe, is to play it safe: the author or editor simply does not wish to spend time worrying over when to italicize, so he or she chooses the default of marking all Hebrew terms (and those from other languages) in italics.

At HaYidion, we take a different approach. Our thinking runs as follows: The purpose of italics is to mark words as foreign. “These are terms we are importing into our discourse from another language and culture,” say the italics. In our view, a Jewish mouthpiece should not make such a statement a priori about Hebrew expressions. For ideological reasons, then, we do not italicize most Hebrew expressions. Expressions that are common to Jewish religion and culture, expressions that are common to our schools—talmud Torah, derech eretz, Shma, Adar, etc.—are not italicized in our pages. Our policy is to err toward not-italicizing: if we’re not sure, leave it. The implicit message to the reader thereby is, if you don’t know this expression, ask someone; it’s worth learning as part of our cultural literacy.

Ultimately, italicization comes down to a choice, a judgment. I would like to encourage Jewish editors and writers everywhere not to fear making this kind of choice. By choosing not to italicize certain Hebrew expressions, you are making a statement about what is our language, what is native to Jewish culture. You are quietly proclaiming that expressions such as gemilut chasadim and kld Yisrael are as much a part of our language, the language of English-speaking Jews, as “Brevity is the soul of wit” and “A house divided against itself cannot stand.” Do not worry if people question your choice or disagree with it, for the very fact that people may wonder about your policy or motive raises this larger issue to the fore. As we learn from the Passover Hagadah, when people ask questions they come to learn things better and in new ways. May your use of Hebrew, in transliteration or in the original, both teach your readers and inspire them to learn more about our sacred and old-new language.

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1 Italics originally were a special font, like Rashi script, designed at the birth of the age of book printing purely to save space on the page.
Returning Literature to the Hebrew Language Curriculum

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 66]

Brenner’s “The Offence” (1910s, "עושה"), Binyamin Tammuz’s “The Swimming Contest” (1960s, "תחרות שחייה"), and Koby Marenko’s “Emendation” (2010, "תיקון חצות"). These selections, as can immediately be seen, encapsulate Hebrew and its culture in a unique way that I don’t think can be conveyed as readily and as neatly by other means. Steinberg conveys shtetl life and echoes of a maskilic Hebrew (a flowery style predominant in the 19th century). Tammuz conveys the early Yishuv period and the first attempts at inventing a native vernacular. Tammuz conveys the shift from pre-Independence to later times in his more modern-standard Hebrew. And Marenko conveys the contemporary search for meaning in his twenty-first century “Israelese.”

This is a very demanding lineup of works that naturally reflects my own interests. But I give it here as a suggestive example of the unique role literature can and should play in the Hebrew language curriculum to access both the language and its culture in ways that cannot be achieved otherwise.

Some practical advice: when considering augmenting the syllabus with literary selections, it is important, of course, that you choose them yourself and select poems and excerpts from works you like well. I seldom rule out works because their language level seems too high for the students—although I don’t usually include excerpts by Mendele, Bialik or Agnon in first or second year Hebrew, unless they are very short sentences with an exceptional message or beauty. In such cases, I might actually ask students to memorize the phrase or sentence by heart. Indeed, my chief criterion for selection is usually the transcendent worth of the excerpt. Very often, teachers choose children songs and other excerpts because of their simplicity. But if we include a work of great worth, students will inevitably see it and appreciate it much more than a pedestrian story. And cutting an excerpt short can usually compensate for its difficulty.

Very often, teachers choose children songs and other excerpts because of their simplicity. But if we include a work of great worth, students will inevitably see it and appreciate it much more than a pedestrian story.

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WHAT IS PARDES?
The Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies brings together men and women of all backgrounds to study classic Jewish texts and current Jewish issues in an open, warm, and challenging learning environment.
The recent emergence and rapid spread of Hebrew language charter schools (HLCSs) in the United States has begun to change the education marketplace, with impact felt most sharply in the Jewish day school world. Reaction to this trend has been both quick and varied. Some see HLCSs as an existential threat to Jewish day schools; others, as an attractive and affordable option. Some believe that these schools represent a new chapter in Jewish life, while to others, they chip away at the wall between church and state. Still others aren’t yet sure what to think given their newness and a lack of information about their goals and impact. Regardless of one’s perspective, HLCSs are a part of a new reality, and day schools must be prepared for the challenges and opportunities which come with this game-changer.

RAVSAK sees HLCSs as presenting a clarion call to Jewish day schools. Their arrival on the national scene stimulates two conversations that remain critical to the success of the day school enterprise: How can Hebrew language education in day schools be improved? and, How well do we promote the true value-added of a Jewish day school?

Hebrew education in North America has, broadly, suffered from challenges regarding pedagogy, teacher training, developmentally appropriate classroom materials and dedicated time. HLCSs may ultimately face the same limits on success, though their purported dedication to Hebrew immersion will undoubtedly allow for more Hebrew learning. Will there be lessons to be learned and shared from the HLCSs to enhance Hebrew education in our day schools? Are there opportunities for collaboration that will leverage the strengths of each of these institutions for the benefit of the field of Hebrew acquisition?

HLCSs are not Jewish day schools, and for the most part their proponents do not claim them to be so. Yet their appearance challenges us to articulate more clearly the values and hallmarks that distinguish a Jewish day school experience. Schools will need to better understand how they uniquely prepare students to be educated and engaged members of American Jewish life.

RAVSAK is forming a national task force to explore ways for day schools to capitalize on the changes brought by HLCSs, rather than fall victim to them. We see the work of this committee as threefold: to understand the phenomenon, to develop replicable strategies for responding to changes in the marketplace, and to identify approaches for promoting the unique benefits of a day school education. Details regarding this task force will be announced soon.

We invite all who are interested in this topic, particularly those in communities with (or which are soon slated to have) HLCSs, to join in the conversation. Email HLCS@ravsak.org to share your thoughts and for more information.

Tools and Contents in the Online Teaching of Hebrew as a Foreign Language

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 43]

tools for developing oral and written expression,” which was developed by Ram Steiner, aims to employ audiovisual media, Internet websites, multimedia tools, and advanced “new media” tools for the development of teaching.

This course is an example of the use of advanced learning resources such as social networks, blogs, Wiki, google docs, and other software and platforms that are included in “the new Internet,” Web 2.0, in teaching Hebrew as a Foreign Language. Steiner shows how it is possible to utilize these resources for creativity in Hebrew. The trend he promotes is the use of “open software,” usually by adopting games and clips for creativity and activation in Hebrew, instead of “closed programs,” which deal with defined topics in a given way. The course also demonstrates collaborative work: The teacher starts off by imparting the learning material, but from then on the students create by themselves. Students in this collaborative world can create exercises that the teacher will use in the classroom later on. They collaborate on writing papers, devise exams, and express themselves in the language they are learning—all online.

Another development that Steiner aimed at is the use of the “virtual worlds” for language teaching, such as Second Life. In this world, “cartoon” characters controlled by computer users work, build, create, and enjoy themselves—just like in the real world. In the world created by Steiner, there is a synagogue as well as a Hebrew ulpan in which lessons, conversations, and various activities take place in Hebrew. Steiner has therefore shown how it is possible to make use of this virtual world for developing expression in Hebrew.

CONCLUSION

The uniqueness of an online Hebrew-teaching program is not merely the “tool” aspect, that is, the learning setting and its inherent advantages. Innovation is attained by internalizing the pedagogic worldview that is expressed in this form of learning, and by taking judicious advantage of the resources offered by the Internet. Thus, online teaching of Hebrew as a foreign language is not merely a technological framework, but rather different teaching and another kind of learning.

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Back to the Future: Achieving Hebrew Fluency in the Contemporary Day School

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 17]

hand, this allowed us to present and discuss Jewish studies content on a sophisticated level, without being constrained by the children’s emerging facility with Hebrew.

While a traditional visitor to a K/1 classroom might be initially surprised to see a Hebrew lesson devoid of what they might think of as Jewish content or to see a parashah discussion conducted entirely in English, this break from traditional Ivrit be’Ivrit methods is the very thing that allowed us to cultivate both Hebrew fluency and a sophisticated approach to studying Jewish texts and ideas. These skills and dispositions, nurtured through the hard and rewarding work of five- and six-year olds and their incredibly dedicated teachers, served as the foundation for the ensuing years of learning, in which children became immersed in Torah study, and in which Hebrew became the language not only of daily life but of joining the conversation about Torah across place and time. Once the foundation of basic fluency was laid, children’s Hebrew language development went hand-in-hand with the increasing sophistication of the texts and ideas that the children were challenged to encounter and discuss in Hebrew.

Every community and every school is different, and each has different constraints and different capacities. My brief description of Beit Rabban’s approach to developing early fluency in Hebrew is not meant to be prescriptive. It is meant to offer a challenge, as well as to offer some ideas that can be adapted to different settings. I believe that children are well-equipped to learn a second language, and I believe that we are for the most part failing to bring our students to a robust level of Hebrew language fluency. The first step in addressing this situation is to acknowledge our failure and to recognize that, given what we know about children and language learning, and given our expectations of our schools and of our children in every other domain of their education, the situation can and must be changed. At Beit Rabban, we started with the basic assumption that young children can learn Hebrew well, and we set about making sure that they did by developing and implementing the program that I’ve described briefly here. I believe that elements of the program, and the approach to language learning that underlies it, can be implemented in many kinds of schools. But, most importantly, I hope that the outcomes that we saw at Beit Rabban, like the outcomes that I and others of my generation experienced in elementary schools like my own, will challenge others to implement in their own settings an approach to Hebrew language instruction that cultivates real fluency in both modern Hebrew and the Hebrew of our classical texts.
his column features books, articles and websites, recommended by our authors and people from the RAVSAK network, pertaining to the theme of the current issue of HaYidion for readers who want to investigate the topic in greater depth.

Books


Carter, Lisa. Total Instructional Alignment.


Curtain, H. A. & Pesola, C. A. Languages and Children: Making the Match.

English, Fenwick W. Deciding What to Teach and Test.


Harshav, Benjamin. Language in Time of Revolution.

Hoffman, Joel M. And God Said: How Translations Conceal the Bible’s Original Meaning.


Wormeli, Rick. Fair Isn’t Always Equal: Assessing and Grading in the Differentiated Classroom.

Online Resources


benyehuda.org: a repository of the classics of Hebrew literature

Hebrew-terms.huji.ac.il

hebrewbooks.org: over 40,000 religious books out of copyright

hebrew-academy.huji.ac.il: Hebrew Language Academy

israelcd.org

jtec.macam.ac.il/portal/: Mofet JTEC, Jewish Portal of Teacher Education

overseas.huji.ac.il/hebrewmultimedia: multimedia Hebrew courseware designed by the Sfatarbut program at the Hebrew University

zionistarchives.org.il

zionistposters.org
On Sunday morning, April 3, 2011, nearly fifty lay leaders from schools across the Bay area came together under the auspices of RAVSAK to celebrate the growth and success of the area’s Jewish community day schools. The event enabled high-caliber leaders to engage in a community-wide conversation about the opportunities and challenges facing Jewish day schools today. Among the many critical topics raised were the retention and pipelining of students, investment in leadership, and the need to “make the case” for Jewish day school education.

Graciously hosted by Suzanne and Elliott Felson, brunch attendees heard local day school leaders reflect on the importance of Jewish education to their families and communities and learned about some of the ways that RAVSAK has had both local and national impact. The morning’s speakers included Suzanne Felson, Brandeis Hillel and Jewish Community High School Board member; Adam Mizock, Board president of Tehiyah Day School; and Dr. Joan Gusinow, head of school at Sacramento’s Shalom School. RAVSAK Board member Lisa Breslau and RAVSAK Associate Executive Director Dr. Idana Goldberg also offered words of welcome.

Neil Taxy, Dan Cohen, Andy Fradkin, Marlee Taxy

Host Committee member Dr. Barbara Rosenberg

Host Committee member Fran Lent and RAVSAK Board member Lisa Breslau

Host committee member Bobby Lent and event host Elliott Felson

Event hosts Suzanne and Elliott Felson with their daughter

Dr. Joan Gusinow, Head of School, Shalom School in Sacramento

Dr. Jonathan Breslau and Judy Lewis

Amy Berler, Amy Sosnick