

CAJE 33
Beyond Hebrew Languish

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Suggestions for a Language-Based (not Languish-Based) Hebrew Program

In the Gan Yeladim and Kitah Alef (Kindergarten and Grade 1)

- ✧ Develop a language context: emphasize oral vocabulary. You learned to speak your native language before you started to read it.
- ✧ Use direct instruction. Show rather than tell; demonstrate rather than explain. Use objects and pictures (and people!) to teach vocabulary. If you use *Now I Know My Alef-Bet*, be sure to use the poster cards.
- ✧ Introduce letters casually—**ש** is the first letter of שופר, **א** is the first letter of ארון—but drill on vocabulary, not letter recognition.
- ✧ Avoid references to English letters (at all levels).
- ✧ Decorate the classroom with Hebrew signs; sing Hebrew songs. Teach simple *brachot* as songs.

In Kitah Bet (Grade 2)

- ✧ Continue to teach oral vocabulary through direct instruction. *Journeys Through the Alef-Bet* reinforces the vocabulary from *Now I Know My Alef-Bet* and adds new words for each initial letter.
- ✧ Introduce vowel marks and non-initial letters (*sofiot* and *bege-d-kefet* letters without *dagesh*) but don't press for mastery of them.
- ✧ As the year progresses, encourage students to use the letters they know as aids to memory of vocabulary. This helps them to learn vowel marks and new letters naturally.

In Kitah Gimel (Grade 3)

- ✧ Teach decoding for mastery. If students don't master it now there is a risk that they never will.
- ✧ Encourage students to associate the shape of the letter directly with the sound of the letter. The name of the letter and how to write it are secondary to this. Teach reading, not spelling.
- ✧ Avoid unnecessary mnemonics. For children they're impediments to reading.
- ✧ Allow enough time. You can probably get through a primer faster than most students can internalize Hebrew decoding.
- ✧ Continue to work on vocabulary: maintain the words already learned and drill students on the meanings of the primer's key words. Teach additional vocabulary if you can—for example, the reading selections in *Shalom Uvrachah* contain many words that it would be appropriate to teach, but they aren't defined in the book.
- ✧ Use practical Hebrew in class.
- ✧ Teach script writing, but don't demand good handwriting.

In Kitah Dalet (Grade 4)

- ✧ Teach comprehension of simple Hebrew, but emphasize functional understanding (“getting the idea”) rather than translation. Until children develop the capacity to paraphrase in their native language, meaningful translation is difficult.
- ✧ Emphasize language *acquisition* (“picking it up”) over systematic learning of rules. In *Shalom Ivrit*, much can be deduced from the illustrations.
- ✧ Encourage students to speak Hebrew (even badly). Create games to reinforce conversational patterns and vocabulary. Review readings with questions and answers in Hebrew.
- ✧ Focus on topics that make sense to the students. Stories in *Shalom Ivrit* deal with everyday lives of children—home, family, school, familiar holidays.
- ✧ Drill students frequently on vocabulary, using objects, acting, etc.
- ✧ If tests are required, test comprehension with multiple-choice answers in Hebrew. Compose answers that test only one element at a time.
- ✧ If your curriculum requires prayer mastery, combine it with decoding practice by requiring reading in preference to memorization.

In Kitah Hay (Grade 5)

- ✧ Conduct as much of each class session as possible in Hebrew—in addition to routine, formulaic conversations, give instructions in Hebrew. Work toward having each student reply in Hebrew five to ten times in every session. Recast brief replies into complete sentences, but overlook trifling errors.
- ✧ Introduce more complex sentence structures and grammar, but continue to emphasize language acquisition through imitation over formal grammar.
- ✧ Use skits and role-playing to vary and reinforce conversational patterns from the textbook.
- ✧ During the year, begin working to translate complete sentences and paragraphs. Only some students will be able to make good English out of the Hebrew.
- ✧ If you also teach prayer, devote more attention to meaning, especially to recognition of words from familiar roots.

In Kitah Vav (Grade 6)

- ✧ Continue to review stories with questions and answers in Hebrew.
- ✧ Spend part of each session conversing in Hebrew
- ✧ Encourage students to express their own thoughts in written Hebrew. Their original expression in Hebrew will probably lag behind their comprehension.
- ✧ Introduce more translation (Hebrew into English), but try to keep 50% of everything that is said in class in Hebrew.
- ✧ When feasible, use prayer texts and Torah texts to reinforce points of grammar, especially if your students also have weekly Torah study.
- ✧ If this is your school’s last year of formal Hebrew instruction, celebrate with a *siyyum*.