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**MEANINGFUL LEARNING AND MOTIVATION TO WRITE.
TEACHERS-STUDENTS BUILDING A WEBSITE TOGETHER**

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Abstract

Meaningful learning (ML) consists of three elements: 1. Value, 2. Relevance, and 3. Engagement. In a process of learning Hebrew writings in the language class, an attempt to create engagement of students in the frames of a new kind of pedagogy unfamiliar to the students, was conducted to achieve an educational change. As a teacher instructor of integration of internet in education, I lead a teacher in "Ulpanit Tiberius", (A junior and high school for religious girls); to engage her students in a website building as an outcome of the discussion that is going on at her lessons. This article elaborates on constructivist and motivational aspects of pedagogy that recruit students to help the teacher and contribute to world knowledge and crowd wisdom. A test case on working together teacher and students, on site building to contribute to society was conducted and is still conducting in this school as a pedagogical method to achieve ML in writing assignment. The learning process described here shows how engagement was an essential element in meaningful learning for the students. Learning from successes and discovering ones' own learning style, alongside with a process of creating an inclusive study environment, developed all the participants' confidence to be creative and publish their creative outcome. Learning Hebrew writing from being a hated subject matter, turned to be desirable.

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Keywords: Meaningful learning, motivation to write, familiar technology, authentic assignments, collaborative writing.



1. Introduction

Ulpanit Tiberius is a regular religious junior high and high school for girls, located in the eastern north of Israel. The school teaches Hebrew language according to the Jewish religious curriculum of the ministry of education. Teaching is done in classrooms of about 30 girls per class. Most of the lessons are transferred in a frontal manner. The students are familiar with this kind of instruction that consists of lecture, reading in text books, answering teacher/text book's questions and working on work sheets. Periodically students are being tested on the material that was taught up until the test. In search for meaningful pedagogy, a new kind of instruction in Hebrew to 7th grade classes were tried: The student's curricular mandatory language writings, will be conducted on the school's website. Gradually writing will move from the students' paper notebooks to the web. At the beginning, lessons on language and writing styles were typed on the school websites pages within the flow of the lessons. Discussions that run in the class normally in a lesson were recorded like written protocol in a web page. This change in the lesson conduction and the outcome of this pedagogy came as a shock to the students and the teachers. The results in motivation to be engaged and participate, alongside with the ability of the students and the teacher to keep evidences of what was said and learned, amazed all the participants: This pedagogy of providing a stage and publicity to what was going on in the lessons, lead to both advancement of writing and motivation to learn.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Meaningful Learning

Meaningful learning instruction strives to create a situation of learning that become part of the learner's inherent behaviour. (Heddy et al., 2016). The assimilation of technology is, in this case, essential for evoking engagement and collaboration between the students, their peers, and students and teachers. In the process of collaborative creation all the participants in the educational doing are engaged. That leads them to be more involved personally in the learning process. The journey to ML has to change the inter relationship of teacher and students. (Harpaz, 2014). Internet site building in a collaborative manner, can be one of the meaningful ways to achieve this goal. According to the official definition of the Israeli ministry of education, a definition that came after the former Israeli minister of education Rabbi Shay Piron's ML program in 2014, ML is a kind of learning process that the learner is involved in questioning, detecting and processing data and creating new knowledge that is relevant to his/her personal world. (Harpaz, 2014). Harpaz also points that ML is an activity that is done in the present and modifies the past and the future. ML demands intrinsic conditions—engagement, task and understanding. ML demands extrinsic conditions—reconstruction of school's foundations. Therefor those who are interested in ML must provide extrinsic to internal conditions. (Harpaz 2014).

2.2. Motivation to Write

Motivation to write, an issue discussed in this article, elaborates on a wishful approach of democratic atmosphere in the school. Ideally, students within democratic societies are prepared to take up their roles as informed voters and responsible citizens who engage in dialogue about the central issues of the day. In democratic classrooms that exemplify goals of the larger society, students are prepared for this dialogue by learning to consider multiple points of view, understand complex issues, engage in thoughtful self-

expression, and have a voice in their learning. Unfortunately, as we have seen in the United States and elsewhere, (say the authors), these dreams are often not fulfilled. self-expression, and have a voice in their learning, dreams that are often also not fulfilled. (Oldfather, & Hynd Shanahan, 2007).

2.3. Pedagogical constructivism

Pedagogical constructivism is perceived to be "... stimulating learners to interactivity, social communication and to the development of their own knowledge, structures of knowledge and to critical assessment of information, the transition from 'teaching you' (transmitted teaching) to 'teaching myself', to self-initiation, self-organization and self-evaluation" (Juvova et al., 2015).

3. Situation Before Commencing

3.1. Extrinsic Conditions-School structure

Ulpanit Tiberius school is divided to classes of between 25-30 students in the class. The classes are divided by age. Most of the lessons are conducted in the home classroom. Lessons are usually divided to units of 45 minutes. The subjects of studies are called professions. Hebrew is on profession among others. Every class has a homeroom teacher which is called "Mechanechet"-educator teacher. Other teachers, that give mainly frontal subject matter lessons, are called professional teachers. They see the class about 1-4 hours per week. Some lessons are given outside of the class mostly physical education lessons. Other subject like computer assignments are few, seldom and being given in the one and very poor computer lab. Hebrew lessons belong to frontal instruction in the classroom and mostly extend for 45 minutes each one separately one from each other during the week. The only computer in the classroom may be the teacher's computer that the ministry of education supplied to most of the teachers of Israel about four years ago. In the classrooms, there is a computer projector, (Barco), that the teacher may use for presentation. Students are sitting in rows, two in each desk. Most of the lesson is transferred on the white board and sometime the teacher presents on the projector. When the teacher asks a question, one or two student answer and usually he/she reply if the answer is correct or wrong and passes to the next subject. Between the lessons there is a short break. Hence, the students change lessons and subjects several times a day, mostly after 45 minutes. Often lessons end without completing the lesson plan. A significant time of the lessons is spent on procedure. (Pollak et al., 2015). As the Hebrew teacher said in the interview: "I had to spend a vast amount of insufficient time on solving discipline problems in the lessons, before I began the new method of teaching discussed in the article". In another part of the interview she said "I sensed a big amount of dissatisfaction among my students from the old style of teaching I conducted before the new pedagogy".

3.2. Intrinsic Conditions

Interviewing the Hebrew teacher was mainly aimed to view her description of the intrinsic preconditions of her students.

Teacher: "Although I did not use the Hebrew site of the school portal, I did use the method of having a student type into an interface such as a Power Point presentation during discussion. The students created computerized testimony, they were familiar with a form of computerized protocol. Despite this knowledge, the action of writing a protocol into a presentation was done very seldom. That is out of curricular pressure.

The work on the computer was somehow familiar to the students since at the beginning of junior-high, i.e. 7th grade, I commenced with a pedagogical approach that assimilate computer in teaching. I made sure that writing will be submitted to me by computer so I could effectively assess their work. I emphasized on dialogue between peers. I started to receive products and spread them anonymously among the students for peer assessment. Thus, I confronted with a lot of frustration. I felt that my students were not ready for such type of work on text. I withdrew and sent my students to individual writing. Collaboration was not achieved and the teacher-student relationship withdrew to linear student-teacher assessment like the old pedagogy. What occurred was a situation that I had to give assignment and check the results personally, no peer involvement at all. I had to neutralize all action of peer assessment because I did not sense that the students were ripen for it. Very seldom my students and I check text together, and this was done only for procedural considerations".

"At the beginning of 7th grade I met students that perceive the teacher as a person who knows everything. Students must listen to what the teacher says and learn to succeed. It is mandatory for students to fulfil assignments and do well in tests. Motivation derived from the wish to get a better score i.e. egoistic engagement (Harpaz 2014). The student's perception of the "self" must receive a reinforcement by the teacher. One could sense a huge fear to write independently. No mistake is allowed; the learning existence of the student is depended only on the adult. A phenomenon of perfectionism linked to the unknowing what was the correct answer started to interfere the atmosphere of the lessons. Lessons were conducted almost exclusively by me-the teacher with very few occurrences of self-thinking an expression of self -opinion or academic argument.

4. Learning program's demands in Hebrew teaching

4.1. General

The national Hebrew learning program written by the chief inspector for junior and high schools recognizes the advance of the 21st century and the new following challenges in pedagogy. The new teaching approach listed in the official letter to the Hebrew teachers, a letter that was published by the chief inspector in August 2014 (Chief inspector site) commands a meaningful teaching that promote deep, active and experiential learning. A pedagogy that encourages high order thinking, inquiry and peer learning and to prepare the students to confront the challenges to the 21st century. Among the demanded skills the program puts and emphasis of the nurturing of digital literacy. The program recognizes the vast changes that happened in the past few years in pedagogy and in the culture and demands to adapt teaching and assessment methods to these changes. Farther in the document the chief inspector goes into details about what contents to teach but the main conclusion is that the teacher is permitted to choose texts with an upgoing degree of complication as the process of teaching is ongoing. There is an emphasis on text with cultural and social values such as dilemmas and texts that evoke high level discussions among the students. The program puts an emphasis on drafts and rewriting as a pedagogical approach to be kept by teachers of language.

4.2. Writing Expression Demands

Instruction of the area of expression in writing is spiral. Many subjects repeat themselves in different levels of deepening and difficulties per age group. Therefore it is important that the assignments will be graduated and adapted to the age group. It is also important to analyse the writing demands according to the assignment. The writing assignments will be focused on these goals:

- Persuasion
- Delivery of report/information
- Activity

Types of writing:

- Writing of an argument (expressing opinion/personal position and its reasoning).
- Writing a summary of one or more texts.
- Writing a report
- Organizing information by visual display.
- Transcription of visual display.
- Writing of a compressing according to 2-3 parameters.
- Writing in logical sequences such as: Time, cause and reason, problem and its solution, phenomenon, its causing and influence etc.

*Keep affinity to a given text or two, pay attention: it is important to budget constant time to writing at least an hour or two per week. It is important to insert writing in every lesson and to perform at least 2 active long term writing activities during the school year.

5. Website Building as a Tool of Motivation To Write

5.1. General

Although computer-based learning has been one of the major innovations of the last two decades of the 20th century, there has been considerable debate over the effectiveness of computers in improving student learning (Ainley, 1998; Ainley, Corrigan, & Richardson, 2005; Clark, 1994; Kozma, 1994; Mayer, 1997; Molen & Voort, 1998). A wide range of studies have shown that computer presentation of learning materials arouses students' interest, although this is often akin to a response to the novelty of the medium and the elicited interest is not necessarily maintained (Ainley, Hidi, & Berndorff, 2002; Malone & Lepper, 1987). Based on these references and based on a feeling of a need to change, the teacher and I as the regional computer education instructor in the northern ministry of education, started to plan a change of pedagogical approach in lesson conducting at the 3rd part of the 2016 school year beginning after Passover holyday at about the end of April. Not many days of study have left to the end of the school year. We based our approach on the feeling that the students would be glad to "help" the teacher to take what they conclude in their lessons and use that material to guide other school, since the teacher is also a teacher guide in Hebrew. "The subject I wanted to teach was: moral dilemma". Instead of teaching that term, we plan to enter the lesson with an internet page in the school portal that had the following text: "My dear students, in the frame of my instruction to the Hebrew teachers of the ministry of education, I was asked to construct a lesson on moral dilemmas. I thought it is appropriate to ask your help in doing that. Let us watch a video on the

subject and comment on it in this site". The video and this text were the only material appeared on the internet page. Before the beginning of the discussion the students watched the video that was used as a stimulator and an example of moral dilemma. A student was asked to type on the teacher's computer, while the site was on edit mode everything that was said in the conversation like writing a protocol. Later within class discussion the students and the teacher decided together what to leave on the page and what to delete. At the end of about 3 sessions like this, the definition of moral dilemma was completed and written at the top of the site. It was one of the first times that the students refused to go to the school break and leave the lesson. They were waiting from week to week for what was unlinked before: Hebrew lessons. "After this change the students would go after me in fire and water" said the teacher. Motivating them to help instead of instructing them became a powerful didactic tool in recruiting the mission engagement (Harpaz 2014), in a manner that supposed the ego engagement. This pedagogy touched the student's life because it was authentic and technologically derive form their daily life. What occurred from the student's answers to our question: What gave you the motivation, was the fact that they felt that they help the teacher, which they where they were proud of doing and that they took place in advancing other users contributing their knowledge to society. They became part of a bigger operation. In a research done in 2002 called "The Role of Interest and Self-Efficacy in Science-Related Expository Writing", some conclusions are close to same motivational factor wxisting in this article's case. This research was concerned with the relationship between measures of interest and measures of self-efficacy in the context of students' expository writing on science topics. How differential access (Electronic vs. hard copy format) to topic-related information influences writing performance was also investigated. The result showed that there was some evidence that the web access as opposed to the hard copy condition contributed to students' self-efficacy. In contrast, the findings indicated that the hard copy condition produced higher quality compositions than the two electronic conditions. (Hidi, Ainley Berndorff & Del Favero, 2007). Furthermore, in A cross-case study of writing motivation as empowerment, (Oldfather, P., & Hynd Shanahan, 2007)., findings were very close to what we found In the Ulpanit Tiberius case. Deep motivation to write occurred when writers had something to say that connected to the students' identities and to what they cared about, and to emancipatory experiences. The students were provided with specific tools or strategies that stimulated idea production, collaboration in meaning construction, and opportunities for empowerment through self-expression. Written self-expression, as we conceptualize it here, has to do not only with expression of feelings, as expected in various forms of creative writing, but encompasses any form of authentic writing through which authors document their own ideas, constructions, conceptualizations, or beliefs. Therefore, self-expression can be embodied in academic writing as well as through narrative, famous images of historic events, emotional cards, and so forth. Writing was about thinking, and was bound up with broader dimensions of literacy, including reading, speaking, class discussion and a process of choice, and other tools for thought (Bakhtin, 1981; Vygotsky, 1978; Gee, 1996).

5.2. A New Pedagogical Approach to School's Website

School site-portal is perceived in many schools as a bulletin board and hardly more. Many schools use the site to publish ex-internet activities with internet tools such as websites or web magazines. (PDF form). The idea that the language web page can be converted to the platform to teach was foreign for the

teachers in the Ulpanit. They were captured by the concept of school web page as a platform of giving assignments and notifying their students about activities or publishing a gallery of pictures describing activities done out of the web. The language website had to include, in the teachers' minds, some links to relevant web based learning environments. In fact, the language site was abandoned short time after it was constructed and stayed untouched for about 4 years. Conceptualizing the website as a motivational tool alongside with perceiving it as instruction platform, made a tremendous change. Not only the website itself enlarged its content and became active, but the students started to "wake up" from their regular learning style and began to be active and eager to write in the website and contribute to its expansion. One of the most motivating to write pedagogical action was inserting cloud based presentation-google drive slides into the web page. Technically, this allows for a change of teacher-student relationship. Every student must be responsible for her/his window. The teacher and the student decide together to insert the google slide presentation at any step of the writing process whether it is at the beginning or at some other level. What is written in the slides immediately appear on the website so the student is responsible for what is written. This way it encourages them to write in a proper language, to phrase according to the grammatical rules and to communicate in a well understood manner. Inserting the students' slides became a window from them and at the same time to them. It is yet to be researched about how effective is that pedagogy but according to some interviews done by the teacher asking the students about how they felt about this, results were very positive. The students appreciated the fact that they were given the opportunity to collaborate and be a partner with the teacher. They mentioned that this kind of pedagogy helped them improve their writing ability. It was obvious from their assignments how they improved immensely.

6. Development Over a Year

6.1. Extrinsic Conditions

The attitude to learning change took place in two channels: The students and the teacher. Students became more confident in their independent writings and started to trust themselves more and more in expressing their opinions, arguments and emotions, in a better and more coherent style of writing. The publicity they earned increased their motivation to write and "appear at the front". Resistance and dissatisfaction of writing reduced to minimum, in fact, satisfaction of both teacher and students grew. Using the webpage technique and other interfaces like google drive documents and slides, google classroom and google blogger, created a completely different attitude to learning. The students' concept of teacher changed too: The teacher became in the students' eyes a source for empowerment. The teacher who at the beginning asked them the help her, became a person to look up to. Less and less discipline problems occurred since the students were occupied in what they perceived as a challenge to achieve and joining together to help each other and the teacher in the achieving the goals that are commonly put upfront. Homework became an interesting engagement to advance the class mission. The feelings of responsibility urged students who usually never completed their home assignments to "ask for more". The teacher before the change was very afraid of not completing the mandatory material and not to comply with the curriculum. She was also debating about assessment issues. She had to dare and since that expressed a need for support frequently. Letting go of the old teaching paradigm was considered in her view losing control. Along the process and the positive results that were coming from the students point of view, together with significant improvement

in their writings change her attitude completely. She created more and more website building activities involving demands for creative writing, learning history through famous historical pictures and telling family stories, writing about feelings over story telling cards and class discussions about various subjects. The teacher guided other teachers of Hebrew language in the school and followed their success too. She developed her own new approach to assessment and nowadays testify that she will never go back to the old teaching style.

7. Conclusion

Students learn what they care about from who they care about and who they know who care about them- Barbara Carson.

The learning process described here shows how engagement was an essential element in meaningful learning for the students. Proof to meaningful learning could derive from students' comments on the change in their pre-conceptualization of learning. The increase of students' will to cooperate and collaborate with the teachers and their peers, was achieved by engaging them personally in the project to developing the Hebrew website. Learning together became gradually authentic and natural to both students and teacher. Learning from successes and discovering ones' own learning style, alongside with a process of creating an inclusive study environment, developed all the participants' confidence to be creative and publish their creative outcome. Learning Hebrew writing from being a hated subject matter, turned to be desirable.

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