

How to say in Arabic?

A project in teaching Spoken Arabic in "Ramot – Hefer" High School

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According to the memo of the new policy of linguistic education in Hozer Mancal of Ministry of Education (April 15 1996) it was decided that the teaching of Arabic as second foreign language in 7th to 9th grades will be obligatory from the beginning of the following year. This obligation will be expanded to 10th grade as well in the year after.

The emphasis in teaching Arabic is on the literary language thus stressing mainly reading, listening and writing. Students are hardly taught how to speak. Those who oppose to teaching the Spoken Arabic claim that there are endless dialects therefore it is difficult to decide which one to teach. In addition , Arabic is a language in which there is a linguistic variety of written language alongside the spoken one , which is also made of different dialects. (Ferguson1959). Al-Batal (1992) notifies that this situation in Arabic is not only a matter of linguistics but also a political, religious and national one.

That is why when we talk about linguistic variety while teaching Arabic we deal with a highly delicate issue. This influences students' attitudes and motivation to learn this language. Research shows that students lack motivation and maintain negative approach towards studying that language. As far as they are concerned this is not a language through which one may communicate. (Brosh 1988; Kraemer 1990; Ben-Raphael and Brosh, 1994; Kraemer and Olshtein, 1994).

And yet here and there we find blessed local initiation

In "Ramot–Hefer" experimental school in Kibbutz Maabarrot the issue of teaching the Spoken Arabic has long bothered teachers, parents and student. Therefore, they have decided to take the initiative and try and teach it as a communicative language.

It was decided to create speaking workshops for 9th grade students who have studied, so far, only how to read and write. In order for this step to be relevant, efficient and authentic it was suggested to hold a meeting of Ramot – Hefer students together with Arab students from Kalansawa once the workshops end. Both groups have met before, yet previous meetings were done in Hebrew. The present encounter was all about Arabic language. The Arabic teachers were helped by students from College Beit – Berl, who did their PDS practical training in Arabic at school.

Two Arabic teachers and four training students took the lead. New and varied teaching ideas and materials were developed. In addition all kinds of games to stimulate motivation were invented. The students worked in small groups, role plays and group competitions. After two months of ten workshops Ramot – Hefer students met with students from Kalansawa.

It was an exciting and fruitful meeting: there were cases in which students spoke and used materials which they have learned and cases in which they spoke pretty freely while asking questions about their private details or wished to know how to say or pronounce some word or other. Some students switched phone numbers. The Arab guests said that it was the first time in which they felt that they were equal and that the Jewish students were interested in their language, culture and identity.

This unique project was sponsored by Beit- Berl It was filmed in three different days and made into a documentary movie. At the beginning of the process the students only read but could not speak; the second time was during the workshops and finally the meeting with Kalansawa.

The consequences : teaching Spoken Arabic is just as teaching any other foreign language , which should not be underestimated. This is a different language than the written one, and that is why one should not expect fluent speech after several workshops. Nevertheless, this is the beginning of a process that has aroused students' awareness towards the language and elevated their motivation. It is important to mention that the teachers , Beit – Berl students and the students were all tremendously enriched by this experience.

In the meeting we will introduce the movie and will be more than happy to share with our thoughts and future plans with you all.

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