

A Case Study of Failure to Achieve Learning Lishmah

Cheating Lessons & Our Eureka Moment

Last year, the Jewish Philosophy and Modern Middle East instructors decided to investigate the reasons why so many high school students resort to cheating in school when so many other aspects of their lives seem aligned with sound ethical judgment. What we soon discovered from our survey of the available research was that the learning environments that reduce incentives and opportunities to cheat are the very ones that lead to greater and deeper learning.



Why Not Reinvent the Wheel?

Rather than leave sound theory on our bookshelves, we dared to reimagine our approach to teaching Jewish Philosophy and Modern Middle East. We asked ourselves, what would our courses look like if the expectations from day one were that students would take increasing responsibility for their development as engaged and critical thinkers, readers, and writers? We anticipated that for some, the adjustment to this type of coursework would

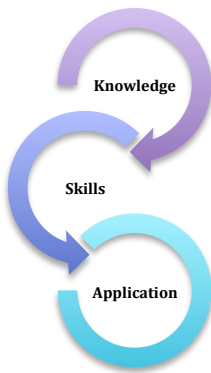
initially be frustrating, but we also believed that over time, most students would find this to be a liberating way to learn.

If we were willing to innovate rather than rest on our laurels, we could possibly tackle three significant challenges that hound Jewish high school education; first we would significantly reduce (if not eliminate all together) academic integrity infractions, simultaneously we would increase authentic student engagement and promote deeper learning and finally, we hypothesized that increased personalization would also reduce student stress because learners would have greater control over their workload.

Four factors that regularly contribute to cheating are, emphasis on assessment performance, high stakes outcomes, extrinsic motivation and low student expectations of success. Performance orientated classes tend to promote students to focus on their letter grades. The high stakes outcomes of most summative exams reinforce that focus and lead to shallow and strategic learning.

Therefore, we understood the need to foster intrinsic motivation for students to find agency in their individual learning. To accomplish that goal, we realized the need to center our courses on questions and issues that students already care deeply about and partner with them to discover connections between course content and the questions students were bringing to class. Once engaged, the teachers would promote mastering of skills that we hoped would in turn would foster even more intrinsic motivation that would provide the intellectual momentum for students to take even greater ownership over their learning.

Our Approach to Learning



Student performance will be judged by how well each learner understand concepts, masters core academic skills and applies what they have learned to formulate well reasoned positions.

- **Integrity-** Maintain the highest standard of honesty in all of your work. Unless explicitly stated otherwise, all of your graded work must be your individual work product. Do not share or do group work, always cite and give credit to your sources. You have ownership over your reputation and therefore, it is your responsibility to keep yourself above suspicion at all times.
- **Reflection-** Develop the ability to think about your learning and foster the self-discipline to use those insights in future practice to improve your performance.
- **Transfer-** Apply skills, knowledge and strategies learned in one context to another.
- **Mastery-** Aim for achieving the highest degree of competence within a certain area (ex: writing, reading, turning news into comedy, debate etc.).
- **Critical Thinking-** Push yourself to use higher order thinking that will enable you to transfer skills and knowledge, solve problems and apply wise judgment.

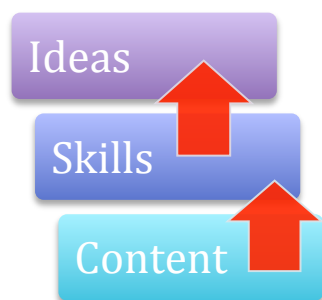
Failure is Definitely an Option

The mastery orientated tasks we created for our courses were intended to provide students with multiple opportunities to respond to authentic challenges as well as a larger measure of student control over the assessment process.

We both spent countless hours devising entire suites of “self directed assignments” (SDA) that each student choose to complete and earn credits toward their final

grade. Some SDA were worth more credits than others and many of the SDA were designed to carefully scaffold skill building and spiral content so that students would find work at their own pace and remain motivated to take on more complex SDA. As such, not all SDA were worth the same amount of credits and many would be available only after students reached a certain level of mastery over both content and skills. While each student was challenged to be strategic about their course work, we employed frequent check ins and reflective learning exercises to increase the probability that students had a clear and attainable path to get the most out of their learning experiences.

Learning From Our Mistakes



An immediate challenge we faced in turning theory into practice was the scarcity of time that is inherent to any dual curriculum that lives to the beat of the Jewish calendar. Even with the best of intentions, providing students with the time *and* space required for them to authentically engage with the material in ways that foster deep learning often took second fiddle to students' more pressing academic deadlines and an overall cultural expectation that still rewarded "earning the grade" over much else.

Moving forward, we can better appreciate the need to widen the collaborative effort beyond our own classrooms and engage what the educational theorist Joseph Schwab termed the "commonplaces" of our sociocultural and institutional milieus that impact both educator and learner on a daily basis.

SUCCESS MATRIX, YEAR 1*

Goals	Intrinsic Motivation	Mastery	Reduce Cheating	Stress Reduction	Deep Learning
Jewish Philosophy	X	+	+	X	X
Modern Middle East	X	X	+	X	+

* X REPRESENTS FAILURE TO MEET EXPECTATIONS
+ MET EXPECTATIONS