

The Journey

I teach a combined class of third and fourth graders. The students' abilities, upon entering my class, range from first to fifth grade level. Catering to the needs of each student is a challenge.

Last year, I created videos demonstrating to the students how to decode every *pasuk* (verse) that I taught. When one group was watching the video, I was able to work with other small groups of students. The students' interest and engagement increased. However, as exciting as it was, my first challenge was that creating digital media was very time consuming. Second, and perhaps more important, my curriculum ceased to be child-centered! All the videos were on the same level and I was unable to differentiate instruction to reach the whole class. Additionally, I had no way to assess the growth of each of the students.

To address these areas of concern, I decided, at the start of this year, to transfer the responsibility of video creation to the students. This empowered students to create rather than receive, to learn rather than be taught, and it greatly motivated them to master the material. Upon completion of their own video mini-lesson, they would use it to teach the class the *pasuk* (verse), furthering their motivation.

As each student would be working on his own video at his own pace, I found that now it was possible for me to individualize and differentiate instruction. In addition, I also had specific and targeted goals for each student, and by monitoring the videos, I was able to assess the attainment, or lack thereof, by each student.

I discovered that this new approach energized the class, allowed them to proceed at their own pace, gave them confidence in their abilities, and challenged each one of them to attain high levels of achievement in the production of their own lesson.

Now the challenge was that many of the students did not possess the skills to make a meaningful video creation. To address this, I created short teaching videos of each Chumash (Bible) skill (i.e. each prefix and suffix) in isolation, and shared them with the student. The student would use these to learn the skills on his own, and then use these skills to teach himself the *pasuk* (verse).

By simulating my video and with a bit of instruction, the student now had to create a video of himself teaching the *pasuk* (verse).

After implementing this approach for a while, the summative assessments showed me that the learning curve in the class had increased exponentially. Additionally, there was the benefit of increased retention of the material by the students, because as it is known, the level of learning increases substantially when the learner verbalizes what he learned, and even more so when he teaches the material to others.

After the composition of the videos, they are used to teach the class. The *psukim* (verses) are thus learned as a cooperative and communal learning experience.

At first, I found that the quality of the videos that the children-created, was poor both technically and educationally. The students were lacking the skills, experience, and some of the tools needed. With coaching and instruction, they have improved with time, and hopefully will continue growing in their skill levels and love of learning.

Upon completion of the class's learning the content, the videos are posted to a website for future teaching or reviewing of the material by other students.

Moving forward, I envision having many schools create Chumash (Bible) digital media, enabling TeachingTorah to be a student-created Khan Academy for Torah (Bible) Skills and content.