B. LEARNING

Enhancement of Autonomy in Language Learners

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Abstract

Successful second language acquisition presumes a sustained active involvement of the learner. The approach suggested is to complement and enhance the strategic teaching of new language. Development of students' autonomy through focused augmentation of awareness in language learning in general and individual learning style in particular is emphasized. Detailed description of implementation and positive feedback is presented. This model of psychological support in language learning is the result of observations, research and intervention projects with new immigrants in acquisition of a second language and can be applied to any case of new language learning, particularly at critical initial stages.

Keywords: autonomy promoting; language learning; psychological support; second language acquisition

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Introduction

Israel is a natural laboratory for research in bilingualism and language acquisition, since for more than a century it has been absorbing people with different native languages, who eventually shift to Hebrew at different rates and with differing degrees of mastery. Thus the effectiveness of Hebrew teaching and learning was always a matter of public concern and critique, and became especially so after the influx of about one million Russian-speaking new immigrants at the end of 20th century, when the educational system was not ready for such a challenge.

The initial stages of any new language learning are critical since affective factors related to the process can lead to frustration and development of psychological defenses detrimental to learning. The high correlation between affective factors and motivation to learn a foreign or second language is well known (Gardner, 1990; Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Gardner & Tremblay, 1994; Kotik-Friedgut, 2003; Kraemer, 1993). The problem of the "affective filter" (Dulay & Burt, 1977) becomes especially acute in the context of the stress of immigration. Accordingly special counseling can provide support during the transition period (Brilliant et al., 1995). Counseling should facilitate the counselee's understanding of self, others and his or her environment and result in increasingly positive changes in attitudes and behavior (Dunn & Griggs, 1995). It seems that the earliest description of counseling in the field of language learning can be found in M. Ehrman's book (1996) based on her experience as a counselor for intensive courses of foreign languages, analyzing problems that impeded progress. My aim is to develop an approach not only for remedial but also for *preventive psychological support* and counseling which would help all learners, but particularly new immigrants, who can rarely discuss their problems with their language teacher.

Given the uncertain economic and social situation that new immigrants face, and the need for prolonged, self-directed continuation of learning of a new language after an initial subsidized course, fostering autonomy may be seen as a particularly appropriate goal.

I will try here to proceed "From Student to Learner" as Galloway and Labarca (1990) formulate it. The basis for learner autonomy is that the learner accepts responsibility for his or her learning, which has both socio-affective and cognitive implications: it entails at once a positive attitude to learning and the development of capacity to reflect on the content and process of learning (Little, 1995). Thus the essential aim of my

research and intervention projects was to develop a system of psychological support and counseling to help new immigrants become more successful autonomous learners. This is a completely new field of counseling which needs development.

The Problem of Autonomy in Language Learning

The combined influence of humanistic and cognitive psychology encouraged the development of a learner-centered approach to language teaching. In a constructivist spirit in education this approach supposes more freedom for students to choose, assuming that they are aware of their goals and know how to study. It presumes that the teacher does his/her best to serve the goals and needs of the students and adjusts materials accordingly.

As an expression of the need to attend to the learner's needs and constructive abilities, two main interrelated trends have emerged and developed during the last two decades: promoting students' autonomy (Nunan, 1996) and a strategy based instruction approach (Cohen, 1998, 1999; Cohen & Dorney, 2002). While in the context of university studies providing strategies works well, the context of the challenge of immigrants' second language learning is different. Some of the new immigrants may lack experience in language learning, or approach the new challenge with an affective filter "clogged" with low self-esteem due to unsuccessful learning of a foreign language at school. These learners need more individualized psychological support and guidance.

Today, drawing on the work of Vygotsky (1978/1930) and his followers (Cole & Bruner, 1971; Wertch, 1991; Williams & Burden, 1997) a new and promising approach named socio-constructivism has emerged regarding the understanding and improving of learning. This approach emphasizes the impact of collaboration, social context and negotiating on thinking and learning. A central idea in socio-constructivism is *assisted learning*, which takes place in the "zone of proximal development." The zone of proximal development is the discrepancy between actual and assisted ability of a student to accomplish any given task.

This concept causes us to reconsider the nature of relations and, consequently, the type of interaction between the learner and the provider of assistance in language learning (in the person of a psychologist or a trained teacher). For this purpose, that person has to take the role of a counselor rather than a teacher. The aim of such interaction is not the teaching of

language but scaffolding, guiding and assisting learning through providing effective learning strategies, i.e. training "how to learn", empowering the student and consequently promoting autonomy.

This means that the focus is now on fostering the learning skills of the learner – on creating a more effective learner (Wenden & Rubin, 1987; Cohen, 1990; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Wenden, 1995; Oxford, 2001). Consequently the roles of the learner and of the teacher have to be reconsidered and seen as sharing responsibility for results. But in fact the realization of such a role has several problems. First, often the teacher is a native speaker of the target language and not in full command of the language of the audience, especially if it is a multilingual one. At the crucial beginning stages, when understanding of the target language is still limited, support has to be given in the mother tongue of language learners. Another problem is that recommended strategies may stay at the level of declarative knowledge and be easily forgotten if they do not make sense to the student, if it is not clear why they should be adopted.

From data gathered through e-mail discussion groups,[1] it seems that the few teachers who are aware that students need help in understanding how to learn a language most effectively, discuss with students myths about language learning such as: "There is one best way to learn vocabulary", or "Learning grammar is not important as long as you can communicate", etc. Others provoke brainstorming on a specific relevant problem. For example: "Should we always look up in a dictionary those words whose meaning we don't know?"

L. S. Vygotsky (1986/1934) claimed that a basis for awareness is in the generalization of one's own psychological processes leading to self-control. Accordingly, awareness is a key to self-control. Consequently, any discussion of the language learning process by learners, as mentioned above, is beneficial, since it promotes awareness. In this case it is important that the teacher lead students to accept the more plausible strategies; otherwise there is the pitfall of just sharing misleading views. However, a more elaborate monitoring is desirable for student's development of proper psychological concepts about learning in general, and of language learning and learning style in particular.

A key problem here is metacognitive awareness, the process of using knowledge and reflective thinking to develop awareness about one's own

1 Such as TESL-L, Teachers of English as a Second Language, and FLTEACH, the forum of teachers of Foreign Languages, etc.

person, the task and strategy in a given context (Ridley et al., 1992). Metacognition has been shown to be related to students' developmental maturation and expertise in a given domain: conscious control of learning, ability to plan, monitor and correct errors and ability to change their own learning behaviors (Brown, 1987). For development of the approach presented here, the "personal" factor must be specified to include awareness of an individual learning style.

Researchers have tried to analyze how successful language learners learn, in order to implement the results in learner-training programs (Holec, 1979, 1987; Wenden & Rubin, 1987; Wenden, 1995). The "good language learner" has a developed *metacognitive awareness*, and can more or less consciously monitor his/her own learning activities, i.e. elaborate beneficial *metacognitive strategies*, which facilitate both motivation and performance. Moreover, such developed awareness can be positively influenced by education and supportive interpersonal relationships (Mendelsohn, 1995; Carr et al., 1989; Skinner et al., 1990).

Metacognitive strategies are those procedures used by students *to think about their learning in general*, to plan their individual approach and strategy use, to monitor their performance, and to evaluate their progress (Nunan, 1996). Oxford (1990) lists over forty distinct tactical types grouped into six major groups of strategies: memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective and social. What all these strategies have in common is: (1) the active mental engagement of the learner and (2) the formation of stable and meaningful connections between prior knowledge and new information (Galloway & Labarca, 1990; Chamot & Kupper, 1989).

The prevalent way of promoting autonomy is to provide students with effective metacognitive strategies adopted from the experience of successful students. Empirical studies have shown that the choice of learning strategies is influenced by cultural differences. Asians responded less positively to strategy instruction than did Hispanics (Russo & Stewner-Manzanares, 1985). Oxford and Crookall (1989), cite data of Sutter, who found that if suggested strategies opposed the learners' cultural backgrounds they were usually replaced by old, culturally accepted ones. In his work with refugees in Denmark Sutter tried to "camouflage" new strategies under the guise of familiar ones.

In studies of learner strategy use, Chamot and Kupper (1989) found that intermediate students used metacognitive strategies more frequently than beginners, and while beginners relied on focusing attention and delaying production, intermediate students incorporated advance preparation and

self-monitoring. This fact is of particular importance, because it means that metacognitive strategies are potentially subject to *spontaneous development*, but we can expect that with assistance they will develop more quickly and in a more complete form.

D. Thanasoulas (2000) states that there are degrees of learner autonomy and that greater autonomy can be fostered. Based on ideas of A. Wended (1998), he uses several methods of promoting autonomy: students' self-evaluation, based on introspection; retrospection or semi-structured interviews or structured questionnaires; diaries and evaluation sheets; and persuasive communication as a means of altering learners' beliefs and attitudes.

Even a motivated adult language learner may be inexperienced in introspection and may not have a developed metacognitive and metalinguistic awareness. His or her repertoire of familiar strategies may be limited due to cultural-educational influences of past learning experience. Such learners are at a disadvantage. A learner facing the challenge of intensive acquisition of a new language, as is the case with new immigrants, needs external help in developing metacognitive awareness. One can expect that learners can benefit even more if assisted in finding and adopting individually appropriate strategies.

The problem of whether learning strategies should be presented to students as separate instruction or as an integral part of language learning is relevant to the substantiation of our approach and has been discussed in the research literature. Advocates of the separate instruction approach argue that students will learn to use strategies better if they are able to concentrate on analysis, development and use of strategies without having to learn language material at the same time (Jones et al., 1987). On the other hand, those who support integrated learning of strategies suggest that it is more effective to teach strategies in context, in which case the student can immediately try to apply the suggested strategies (Wenden & Rubin, 1987). When students learn strategies in the task-specific context of language learning they rarely transfer them to other tasks. It appears that with indirect strategy instruction (that is, incorporated into language learning), attention is split between the material to be learned and the use of strategy, which has to become a skill (Brown et al., 1986).

In my opinion, a combination of separate and incorporated teaching of strategies would be the most effective. Separate workshops on learning strategies allow learners to concentrate attention on the process, while task-specific strategies incorporated in language lessons help to practice the

metacognitive approach. It is also important that strategy learning include explanation why any particular strategy is effective, i.e. recommendation of a certain strategy has to be corroborated with psychological facts and data. Such an approach helps the student become aware of not only "how" but also "why".

A Model of Psychological Support in Language Learning

There are three main components of the suggested psychological support. Students may receive A. *Information*; B. *Recommendations*; and C. *Consultation.* The first two components of the program are performed in a workshop, as detailed below.

A. *Information relevant to learners' context, including*:

1) The aims, methods and program of the specific study program. This is an important factor in making the student a partner in the learning process, and shaping realistic expectations regarding the aims, the process and personal achievements. Such information has to be given in the mother tongue, so in multilingual classes it may perhaps be provided in the form of a brochure containing the most important information;

2) Providing learners with basic knowledge about the psychology of learning in general and of language learning in particular. This information helps students understand the significance of different forms of assignments, exercises, suggested strategies;

3) The issue of individual learning styles. Based on diagnostic tests students become aware of their individual learning style, and can choose the most appropriate strategies.

Each point is introduced with examples, discussions and experiential participation of the students. General knowledge about learning processes, together with involvement in discussion of data from their own individual tests, helps students to accept recommended strategies by clarifying them. This development of interest in language learning is intended to increase the learners' intrinsic motivation and through this augment their degree of autonomy.

B. *Recommendations on use of strategies with emphasis on awareness of individual preferences*. A variety of strategies is provided with explanations

of how each one works and in what way they can be useful. Recommendations are also given on how to account for individuality in avoiding or overcoming specific problems. At the same time, we emphasize that we leave the student to make the choices, an important step for stimulating a creative attitude toward the learning process and thus preparing for learner autonomy.

C. *Individual consultations.* These are suggested in case of specific and/or persistent problems. Any kind of psychological help can be provided only for a motivated person. It cannot be imposed. Thus it can be done only at the request of the student, even if the teacher recommends it.

Workshop Procedure for Language Students: Topics and Discussions

Usually the workshop starts with the question: "What is the starting point in new language learning?" Through discussion of different answers ("Alphabet", "Sounds", "Need to communicate," etc.) it is possible to present details on the role played in learning by *motivation,* and the *motivational-affective complex*. The concept of "*affective filter*" is introduced in the context of selectivity of attention and perception. The roles of social and cultural factors in selectivity of attention are discussed to reinforce the idea of the importance of attitudes and motivation in language learning. The notions of input versus intake are presented to substantiate the student's active role in learning.

Such important characteristics of personality as self-confidence and self-esteem are also discussed. The notion of culture shock in immigration helps the new immigrants, experiencing acute changes in many aspects of their lives, to become aware of the "normality" of their present state.

Through examples and by displaying a diagram, the problem of optimal activation is presented. While the disadvantage of low motivation is immediately obvious, it is generally only after discussion that students become aware of the pitfalls of over-motivation that may lead to distress and block activity. Several examples of the harmful effect of distress induced by over-motivation are presented. A comparison is offered of motivation to a light illuminating the way: when too dim, it is hard to advance, when too bright, it is blinding. Another way of demonstrating this is to use a bulging purse as a metaphor for memory. If you go through the purse in a quiet

and orderly fashion you will find what you are looking for, or find a proper place to put something new in, as opposed to rummaging through it hastily and almost at random.

The next topic relates to *strategies in language learning*. Adult students usually have some experience in foreign language learning and it is important to emphasize the difference between foreign language learning and second language acquisition. Learners' attention must be guided to the advantage of the variety of available sources and channels of verbal information while living in the culture and among the native speakers of the target language. They are encouraged to try out the acquired vocabulary outside the class, to ask help from neighbors, shopkeepers, children, and friends. They are encouraged to register the language consciously, in its aural and visual forms, to "open eyes and ears" in order to let in information from all possible sources. These points may seem obvious, but they often require a trigger and so need to be emphasized. The possibility of learning outside the classroom is available uniquely in a second language acquisition (SLA) setting, and its ubiquity is of course the main facilitator of its acquisition. But this extracurricular possibility has to be emphasized because it contradicts both the learners' experience and their habitual approach to learning a foreign language. The following case may be presented as an example. After five years in the country a man failed to formulate a simple request in Hebrew; to ask a salesperson at the marketplace to reach a hanging plastic bag. When I expressed my surprise at the inadequacy of his Hebrew, he replied: "But, you know, because of illness upon arrival I had to leave *ulpan* after only a month of studies". I reacted: "But for such expressions you do not need any *ulpan*. You have been going shopping for five years. All you have to do is to open you eyes and ears and try to pay attention!' The very next day he proudly told me that following my reprimand he became attentive to his language environment and learned a new word in Hebrew. When looking for a parking place he heard somebody say, "*Tafus po*," and immediately understood that it means: "The place is taken".

The workshop next deals with *cognitive strategies of organization of material*, which are presented with demonstrations of both visual and verbal material. First a randomly scattered set of shapes is presented, and while it is not impossible to remember all the figures, it requires some effort. The same shapes are then presented in an organized pattern. The effect speaks for itself. Other examples of the *facilitating effect* in organization of verbal material are also considered. The phenomenon of "magic number seven" is introduced to show the range of short-term memory: one can remember

about seven letters, seven syllables (many more letters), seven words (many syllables), and seven sentences. This is discussed in terms of the facilitative role of organizing information for remembering. These demonstrations make it clear why semantic processing, grouping and organizing of material are effective.

This discussion leads to the problem of the *role of context* in perception and memory. A visual parsing paradox is demonstrated: first, separate details of a face, unrecognizable as such, are presented, and then a picture of a face is presented, which makes all the details easily recognizable. Then once more separate parts of the face with redundant details are presented and it becomes obvious that recognition without context is problematic, and is possible only with some additional data. The role of context in the understanding of messages in communication and in the interpretation of unclear or unfamiliar verbal information is discussed. It is related to the question of the possibility of guessing the word's meaning based on context (derived either from a text or from a real situation) as opposed to relying only on a dictionary. The possibility of verbatim translations causing misunderstanding when context is not considered is also discussed.

Students take part in an exercise of *remembering and immediate recall* of an orally presented ten-word list in the mother tongue. Discussion of the results proceeds from basic facts about memory revealed by learners' recall. Usually students report remembering mostly the first and last words of the list. This fact helps introduce the concept of interference, and application of this knowledge to the organization of learning. It is recommended that the most important tasks be done at the beginning and recalled at the end; not to exaggerate the pace of going through material to be learned and to change types of activities and subjects in order to decrease interference. Special emphasis is then placed on their activity and creativity in the choice of strategies. Usually, those who recalled only five or six words do not make, or are not aware of making, any special effort. When asked how they remembered, they say "Just so. as you presented it". Those who remembered eight or nine words are often aware of using various strategies, such as creating a picture, visualizing the objects, composing a story focusing on how the words sound, or a combination of these. This introduces the concept of *mediated remembering*, which can also include physical means, like a tying a knot or switching a watch or ring to the other hand. The creation of contexts as a major principle for development of different mnemonics is discussed as well as the activation of imagery and construction of sentences, etc.

Discussion of *individual differences* in the use of strategies for remembering leads to the aspect of individual differences in language learning. Subsequently the role of input modality, preferred channels of input and types of memory (visual vs. auditory) in learning are discussed.

At this stage of the workshop students may start to fill out questionnaires on their learning styles (communicative vs. non-communicative or linguistic) and on their preferred modality of remembering (visual vs. auditory). They are instructed on scoring, which can be performed under guidance in class immediately after the questionnaire is completed. The characteristics of the two major styles in language learning, communicative vs. linguistic approaches, are described (Kotik & Yonatan, 1997; Kotik, 1998). Discussion of the questionnaire results promotes the awareness of individual differences in approaches to language as a factor shaping the process of learning. Differentiation of language and speech, of verbatim and emotional message, is stressed, as is the role of paralinguistic factors (voice, intonation, gestures, etc.) in conveying the emotional message. This dimension is well illustrated by the example made famous by Stanislavski and Method acting, where the actor has to achieve a wide range of emotional messages (anger, surprise, excitement, etc.) while repeating a short, simple phrase, such as "Good Evening" or "You are a good dog". This discussion helps learners to understand the importance of context, body language, intonation and facial expressions in decoding verbal messages, and encourages them to attempt guessing even when encountering new words for the first time.

This example is also relevant to the idea of learning styles. These can be recognized by typical behavior: there are learners who tend to rely on clues from communication, who easily initiate conversation, and are oriented primarily towards the meaning of the message, while others will not speak unless they are confident of the grammatical correctness of their utterance. Being more "communicative" usually means speaking fluently, but often comes at the expense of grammaticality. The more linguistically-prone usually learn to read and write more easily but find it harder to initiate oral expression. Answering questionnaires on preferred strategies and typical behavior in language learning, students become aware of their individuality and can place themselves on the continuum, allowing them to reflect knowledgeably on their learning styles.

As a result of such sharpened awareness, students are more ready to accept recommendations of strategies for maximizing the advantages of a particular learning style. They learn that there are ways of overcoming their weaknesses and benefiting from their strengths. For example, it is

highly recommended for all students to use textbooks together with tapes of recorded texts and exercises, but in an individually matched manner. For students with a dominant auditory channel, as determined by results of the questionnaire, it is recommended to start with listening, then parallel listening and reading, and finally move to reading. Learners with a dominant visual channel should start with reading, then proceed to parallel listening and reading, and finally to listening without a written text. The principle is to make use of the learner's strong points while training the weaker functions.

The repetition of orally presented samples of language, correctly phrased and pronounced, is recommended as a transitional study form between passive understanding and active speech. It is recommended to start with words and short expressions and to proceed to retelling of paragraphs and complete texts. "Linguists" will benefit greatly from this activity since they will start to train the most problematic function, oral expression, in a situation free from the stress of real communication, and where grammatical correction by a teacher is assured (a point of concern for the linguistically inclined student). "Communicators" will gain from internalizing correct grammatical constructs and idiomatic expressions.

Implementation

Some components of the program, especially the informational part, may be introduced at the very beginning of the process in the form of a workshop. To date such workshops have been conducted in about 25 centers for the study of Hebrew as a second language in Israel, the *ulpan*, as well as in a number of American ESL contexts. All these learners learn according to a "one-size-fits-all" model, while the individual students' levels of adaptation and motivation, though in many respects similar, also encompass significant differences, which are often not sufficiently addressed. Their teachers are traditionally and primarily concerned with the input aspect, providing relevant material in the target language and organizing activities to heighten proficiency. But there is not enough attention to the learners' individual problems in mastering the language.

In this context the information given and discussions during the workshop help students to develop awareness of the process as well as of their own individual problems in new language learning. It should be emphasized that such discussions can usually be effective only if conducted in the mother

tongue, especially at the initial stages of new language learning. In the case of foreign language learning this is less of a problem, but in the context of immigration, where the teacher is a speaker of the host language and may not speak the language of the immigrants, psychological support should be provided by a trained educator who can communicate with the learners in their mother tongue. The content of such workshop may be found, in Russian, in a recent book addressed to students (Kotik, Solovey, 2003).

Feedback was usually gathered through informal conversation with the whole group. Students often reported about activities that revealed the development of a more autonomous and creative strategic attitude to their study, as evident from feedback by T. L. of a medical professionals' group: "In our studies everything is centered around medical terminology and our professional prospects. Now, while doing my homework or in my independent studies, I try to imagine some totally different context: I think of how I would write a letter to a friend, or how I would behave in some daily situation".

Students develop more realistic expectations towards their prospects for future achievements. One of the immediate results of the workshop is that they feel more confident and in control, more relaxed, ready to work hard and understanding the need for patience in the long journey towards proficiency. At the feedback session some of the students noted that they accepted the principle "open your eyes and ears" and it was helpful. Some discovered their own preferred learning style for the first time, giving them confidence to use their natural advantages more effectively.

Thus, A. R., a successful 17-year-old learner, reported that since he discovered that his auditory memory is dominant, he started to rely on it not only for language learning, but listening carefully at other lessons, giving him an advantage in tests.

In a feedback session J. B. was still not aware of the use she made of the information received, but after some questions she began her report. As she spoke, her voice became more and more confident: "I thought that if my classmates speak, why shouldn't I? I am no worse than they are.. I became more active in language lessons. Previously, even if I knew how to say something, I was shy about speaking out. The results were encouraging, so when I needed to talk to my instructor, I gathered all my courage and spoke Hebrew to him. He was very surprised. I started to speak Hebrew to Israelis, and you know what? (She smiled as insight entered her consciousness), such a little thing changed so much in my life! It not only helped my Hebrew acquisition, because words began to collect themselves

in my memory without special effort, but it changed my social life: Israelis began to respect me for my Hebrew and befriended me. Thank you so much!" Another student reported an increase in memory after creating visual images, as suggested to her in consultation. These cases reveal that even motivated students with high learning potential do not always have a developed awareness and they may gain from psychological support, learning information, recommendations and consultation.

Student A.: "Thanks to the workshop, I realized that I am a "Linguist" with dominant visual memory. I try to communicate in Hebrew when possible. I benefited mostly in English: I started to read adapted books and have already achieved a much higher level. I gained vocabulary and fluency of reading. I am very satisfied for now, and I will work on my speech later." Now she is more autonomous and can set goals (to communicate in order to complement her linguistic achievements) and plan her language learning (will work on speech later). In one intermediate class a feedback questionnaire was used in addition to conversation, which showed that they were not experienced in introspection and that their awareness of language learning was not highly developed. The problem of individual style in language learning attracted most attention from the students since it is seen both as new and as a personally related finding. The majority focused on the discovery of their own learning styles and of the strongest channel for remembering. They often emphasized that among the effects of the workshop was the diminishing of anxiety and a rise in self-confidence.

Even high motivation and developed language learning capacities do not guarantee a developed learning awareness. Predominant use of the visual modality in learning impeded progress of students with developed auditory memory.

It could be suggested that some development of *intrinsic motivation* was achieved. Intrinsic motivation refers to learning situations where learners undertake an activity for its own sake, rather than because of external pressure or promise of rewards (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Our students began to practice different approaches, which shows their involvement in the process.

In their feedback reports students mention all the strategies listed by O'Malley and Chamot (1990). Some began actively monitoring their ways of learning, in other words they developed *metacognitive* strategies and monitored their efficacy. All students reported active use of *cognitive strategies*: visual and/or acoustic imaging for remembering, choosing the type of imaging according to their dominant type of memory. An increase in self-esteem and self-confidence can result in increased learning success,

and this is an important factor in diminishing the affective filter. Student J. B. overcame excessive anxiety, which had been an obstacle to active participation in lessons. She started to use *social/affective strategies* consciously, communicating in Hebrew and consequently advancing both socially and in language skills.

Conclusions

There are sufficient grounds to conclude that the experiential approach to psychological support in Hebrew learning was successful. All learners were cooperative both in sessions during the workshop and in the feedback, and expressed appreciation, which is itself a sign of awareness. It has to be stressed that in most cases their teachers were not involved in this process.

Thus, the main aims of the workshop – development of metacognitive awareness and the promoting of students' autonomy – were achieved. The emphasis on cognitive aspects in a concentrated way outside the context of the specific language was particularly beneficial for development of metacognition. The students not only used the recommended strategies but, what is most important, they sometimes autonomously created or adopted new approaches. This will enable them to make strategic decisions about learning, planning studies according to their individuality and circumstances of learning Hebrew and English. Another important outcome of the intervention was that students developed more realistic expectations and got into a "working mood", ready to invest their time and effort in language learning and felt empowered for achieving this goal. Thus it can be concluded that sharing relevant information about language learning with learners may be considered as stimulation of their proximal development.

The majority of participants felt that the discovery, or sharpened awareness, of their individual learning style was the most important result. Spontaneous development of this complex subject is usually a prolonged process, while the assisted procedure evidently was much more rapid and effective, stimulating students to autonomous activity at an earlier stage.

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