ERD 2017
Education, Refection, Development, Fifth Edition

A PRAGMATIC PROGRAM
WHEN TEACHERS USE THE RIGHT TEACHING METHODS AND TOOLS

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Abstract

English as foreign language (EFL) is most significant in the Israeli educational system: it is not only mandatory, but the level of proficiency achieved also determines accessibility to university studies. Under-achieving students (UAS), who remain at school by law, until they have completed 12 years of studies, have a greater challenge than to overcome numerous barriers. They have to reach a higher level of proficiency in EFL, which will provide them the Israeli matriculation (Bagrut), and open access for higher education. This paper suggests a teaching program (The Program) with the aim of achieving the goal of preparing the UAS in high school, to successfully pass the higher level of English. At the same time, give them the genuine equality of opportunity of their peers, ensuring equal facilities, budget and hours of tuition. Research suggests that everyone can study a foreign language and that it is only a matter of finding a suitable approach for each student. In the wake of these claims, and as the result of a two-year case study of eleven UAS in a Jerusalem high-school, The Program was compiled, following the Mixed Methodology, combining interviews, record follow-ups and questionnaires. It enabled all eleven young men to successfully pass the higher level of the final English Bagrut, thus building their self-esteem and perception of their academic efficacy, and has been successfully introduced in various middle and high-schools in the South of Israel, presenting a methodical, well-structured and consistent teaching program, covering all four skills of language acquisition.

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Keywords: UAS-under-achieving students, English Bagrut, teaching EFL, equality of opportunity, academic efficacy, access to university.

1. Introduction

"Raise a child in the path he should take; and when he is old, he will not depart from it." (The Book of Proverbs, 22:6)

English as a foreign language (EFL) is significant in the Israeli educational system: not only is it mandatory, but the student's level of proficiency determines access to university studies (The Ministry of Education, Israel, 2013). Under-achieving students (UAS) have great challenges successfully achieving the Israeli matriculation, hereafter referred to as the BAGRUT. "EFL for UAS" prepares the UAS in high school for the BAGRUT. This program results in learning opportunities, educational facilities, budget and hours of tuition equal to those offered to non-UAS peers.

Research suggests that everyone can study a foreign language (Smith, 2007; Gardner, 2011; Muir, 2017; Rahamim, 2003), and that achieving success is only a matter of finding the suitable approach for each student. In light of these claims, and as the result of a two-year case study of 11 UAS in a Jerusalem high school, "EFL for UAS" was established by Mixed-Methods Research combining interviews, follow-ups, and questionnaires (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2003; Creswell, 2009). "EFL for UAS" enabled all to successfully pass the final English BAGRUT. This built their self-esteem and an awareness of their academic self-efficacy, an essential component for successful learning (Hsieh, Sullivan, & Guerra, 2007). EFL for UAS has been introduced successfully in middle and high schools in the southern school districts of Israel. EFL for UAS presents a methodical, well-structured and consistent teaching program covering all four skills for language acquisition.

In addition, implementing this program enables the teachers of EFL to lead and support the students while guiding their own hard work and investment. This is expressed in the final words in Muir's study (2000) on UAS: "Finding out what motivates our UAS will help inform and equip teachers in the struggle to lead all students to academic achievement." (Muir, 2000, p.5)

2. Literature review

According to Yoseph Rahamim, the head truancy officer in the southern school districts of Israel: "The belief that everyone can is no longer a slogan but a reality that is occurring in various schools." (Rahamim, 2003, p.ii)

Howard Gardner, Hobbs Professor of Cognition and Education at Harvard Graduate School of Education presents his Multiple Intelligence Theory in his book Frames of Mind (2011). Gardner's First Law: Don't ask how smart someone is; ask in what ways is he or she smart. Muir further posits: "Learning is an internal and personal process that does not happen simply because the teacher wants it to." (Muir, 2000, p.10).

Muir (2017), further suggests that some of the students in the overcrowded classrooms of high school might not be interested in learning what the teachers decide to teach.

Briefly, Rahamim believes everyone can, Muir points to the will of the students, while Gardner emphasizes the way (or the path as mentioned in the Book of Proverbs) which is unique for each student and for the teachers. To these, add the common phrase: "Where there's a will, there's a way" (Anonymous). It can be concluded that stimulating the resolve and the motivation of our students to succeed, and having

the right methods, will eventually result in huge and unanticipated accomplishments. How can that be accomplished?

2.1. Research Questions

1.What barriers prevent the UAS from succeeding in EFL studies?

2.What methods and tools help the UAS above these barriers?

3.How does studying EFL on a higher level impact the UAS?

3. Findings and Discussion

Research analysis exposes the following obstacles: First, the students' self-efficacy is negative. This is the most dominant barrier, which might even be the trigger for some of the behaviour issues. Furthermore, students lack learning habits. Students are not engaged, cannot concentrate for long periods of time, procrastinate, usually do not prepare homework or bring their textbooks to their lessons. Because they under-estimate themselves, they are anxious to hear words of encouragement. They need the teachers to believe in them and practically convince them that they can succeed. They all want to be close (physically) to the teacher (see diagram P-5, p.9).

The teachers expose another barrier: there was no specific method designed for teaching EFL to UAS. The teachers were desperate for a practical program that has a positive track record. Thus, the "EFL to UAS" design requires no extra funding and is similar to the 'regular' classes, textbooks, schedule, and resources. By the end of 12th grade, all UAS students successfully passed the higher level of EFL BAGRUT, which indicates that the method and tools are suitable for overcoming the identified barriers. These UAS are then able to apply to any university in Israel. Furthermore, they are respected and looked at as equals by their peers. They experienced success, through engagement and motivation, and reported full satisfaction at the end of the process. All these findings point to the success of the "EFL to UAS" program.

3.1. The Ten Commandments of Teaching EFL to UAS

"EFL to UAS" is established in accordance to the following "Ten Commandments":

1.Believe in your students. Tell yourself and your students at the beginning of every lesson they can succeed. This will encourage everyone on "rainy days".

2.Respect your students. Remember how challenging it must be to come to a place where you might not be appreciated.

3.Smile and Listen to your students. Remember that in some cases you might be the only person doing this.

4.Don't surprise your students. Tell your students what you expect them to do, what exactly to bring for each lesson (have them write this down). Don't surprise them with the final grade. The students should write the components of the final grade on the first page of their notebook. Refer back to these guidelines as necessary. UAS cannot cope with surprises. They waste a lot of time and energy assuming. (See suggested Grading Grid P2, p: 7)

5.Record Readiness and Engagement including attendance, bringing their textbooks and necessary tools for the lesson, prepared homework. Each element is recorded at each lesson and figured into the final grade. (see P3, p: 8)

6.Record assignments and achievements. The lesson, constructed of assignments, starts with a 10-minute assignment and slowly increases in length. The first should always be done together as a class. Then a second one, which will be graded and recorded, should be given to be done independently. (see P4, p: 8)

7.Repeat (don't be creative).The homework will always be a repetition of the assignment done and graded in class. Homework will be graded and recorded. Each assignment will be repeated three times in class and twice as homework.

8.Familiarize the students with the assignment. After at least 5 repetitions of each assignment, quiz the students on the topic using a mirror image of the practiced assignment. The quiz must be graded, recorded and returned the next lesson.

9.Make the students Succeed. Turn every second assignment (if not the first one) into a success story. The UAS cannot afford to face any more failures and we cannot afford "losing" them anymore.

10. Be Persistent. You must set an example for your students. Always keep your word. Educate them to understand that practice pays off in the end and persistence does exist! (Don't be another person to disappoint the UAS).

3.2. EFL to UAS: The Program

EFL teachers of UAS should present their students with the foundations of the program, as described hereby:

First, it pays to come to class, bringing the textbooks and preparing the homework, since the students get rewarded for doing this. This makes it possible to conduct a proper lesson with students who have teaching materials and completed homework assignments. Secondly, the topics and skills are presented in small steps followed by consecutive assignments very similar to the final exam. Every task is completed by the end of each lesson when a score is recorded as the grade for that day's lesson. After repeating the same task five times, a test is given in the exact same format as the assignments given in class. Likewise, students should be told precisely the objectives, the requirements, and the results, i.e., no vagueness at all, and full transparency. Thirdly, the teaching focuses each time on a specific skill: reading comprehension, listening comprehension, written, or oral presentation. Students will work on each skill separately until each skill has been practiced and tested separately. Then two skills may be combined to test.

Furthermore, every accomplishment is celebrated, emphasizing the way that has led to success, thus enhancing the students' self-efficacy. The students will repeatedly hear how convinced their teacher is of their ability to succeed. Finally, the 'mantra' is: "I believe in you, do you believe in me? If you do, then trust me and follow my lead."

3.3. Planning the schedule

1. The school week:

Provided that the schedule consists of 5 weekly hours of EFL, the teachers may use one of the following suggestions:

A. Teach and practice ONE skill for two weeks (10 hours), including testing, then move to another skill. In this frame work, it is recommended to start each lesson with one oral presentation, for about 3-5 minutes.

B. Divide the 5 hours as follows: 1 hour literature; 3 ½ hours practice and test either reading or listening comprehension, or written presentation; 1/2 hour oral presentations.

It is important that in every lesson all students leave with a numerical accomplishment recorded in the class journal. Therefore, oral presentations are presented for 20 minutes only, followed by a short assignment that is graded right away and recorded. This will keep all students engaged even if they don't present.

2. The school year

A. Introduction: The First Month

During at most a month teachers get acquainted with the class, learn as much as possible about each individual student and observe each as part of the group. In addition during this period, the teacher should gather information from others, such as the school counselor, the classroom teacher, and the relevant documents. During this period, the program should be introduced to the students, familiarizing them with the different steps and the final grade components. (See: Commandment #4).

The first lessons are dedicated to learning as much as possible about the students' level of English. The teacher's findings should be shared with the students. At this stage, the first class interview should be conducted (see: P-1, p: 7). The objective is to make the students aware that they must plan and act in order to achieve.

B. Master the Skills: The Next 6 - 7 Months

A major period of time is dedicated to establishing the students' control of the different language skills to the required level of proficiency, in accordance with the suggested program. At this time, the teacher should present Commandments 5, 6, 7, and 8 to the students, inform them of the program and start implementation.

Each skill initially is done together with the students and only following this practice session are they asked to perform on their own. This step reflects a small portion of Commandment 8: familiarity. In addition to giving students more confidence by familiarizing them with different tasks, they get a chance for a fresh, new start, rather than one based on failure or lack of knowledge.

C. Practice: A Busy Two Months

Practice and test the students, using BAGRUT exams from previous years. The last three are used as pre-tests. The students see their successful grasp of such exams through this practice.

Student Consent: The students should be fully informed as to each and every step in this program. They must give their consent to this method and to each step over and over again. It is essential to make the students our partners. All along, students should be reminded of the goal, of their will to succeed, and of their agreement to put a little time and effort to make them successful via this program.

4. Conclusion

The results of this study suggest that UAS can successfully pass a higher level of EFL BAGRUT exam, given the right methods. The main obstacle that was detected was the low self-efficacy of these

students. Using the same textbooks and schedule as the non-UAS peers put the UAS on the same status as their peers. That was best expressed when students from other, non-UAS classes came to borrow books from the UAS, or when on one occasion a non-UAS saw what was written on the board of the UAS' class and exclaimed: "Did you learn that? This is exactly what we had studied too!" Certainly, this raised the UAS self-efficacy better than anything else.

This study also pointed at the need of teachers to follow a very structured, well organized and persistent plan that detects any deviance from the path, following each student's achievements, every lesson. "EFL to AUS" presents a pragmatic program which provides the necessary tools to accomplish these goals during school hours.

Referring back to the proverb related to King Solomon: "Raise a child in the path he should take; and when he is old,   he will not depart from it." (The Book of Proverbs, 22:6)

It can be concluded that this study has designed a successful path for UAS. The immediate implications are the completion of the BAGRUT certificate and the positive experience given to these students. It still remains to be studied whether these students do not depart from the new path they had learned, as King Solomon had promised, and whether the self-efficacy of UAS has remained high in future years. This calls for further research.

4.1. P1- Perception and Motivation

The following charts, P1 - P4, are presented, to help keep record of the activities in class. Chart P5 is a suggestion for seating the students in the class so that each student gets to be as close (physically) to the teacher as possible.

In P1 the perception of the students should be recorded as follows: each student should report to the teacher which level of EBE they thinks they can pass, which grade they believes they can achieve, and how much of their spare time they can devote to English each day. (e.g.: 10 minutes / day)

P1 should be filled out twice: during the first lesson of a new school year and again at the end of that school year. It can be shown or reported to the students after having passed the BAGRUT Exam, or just at the end of the year, to show how much they have improved and to strengthen their self-perception.

Table 01. Activities in the class

	First Lesson (Commitment)			End of the Year (Accomplishment)		
Student's Name	Level aspired	Expected grade	Time / day	Level	Expected grade	Time / day

4.2. P2- Grade Breakdown

We note here that 25% is rewarded for coming, having the necessary materials and doing homework.

Table 02. Percentages for the final grade

Student's Name	Attendance 10%	homework 10%	Materials 5%	Literature 25%	Quizzes 15%	Tests 15%	Pre-test 20%	Total 100%

4.3. Readiness & Engagement

Following is a Class Journal designed to record the information according to this teaching method: A=attendance; M=textbooks, notebook, etc.; H=home work.

Table 03. Class Journal

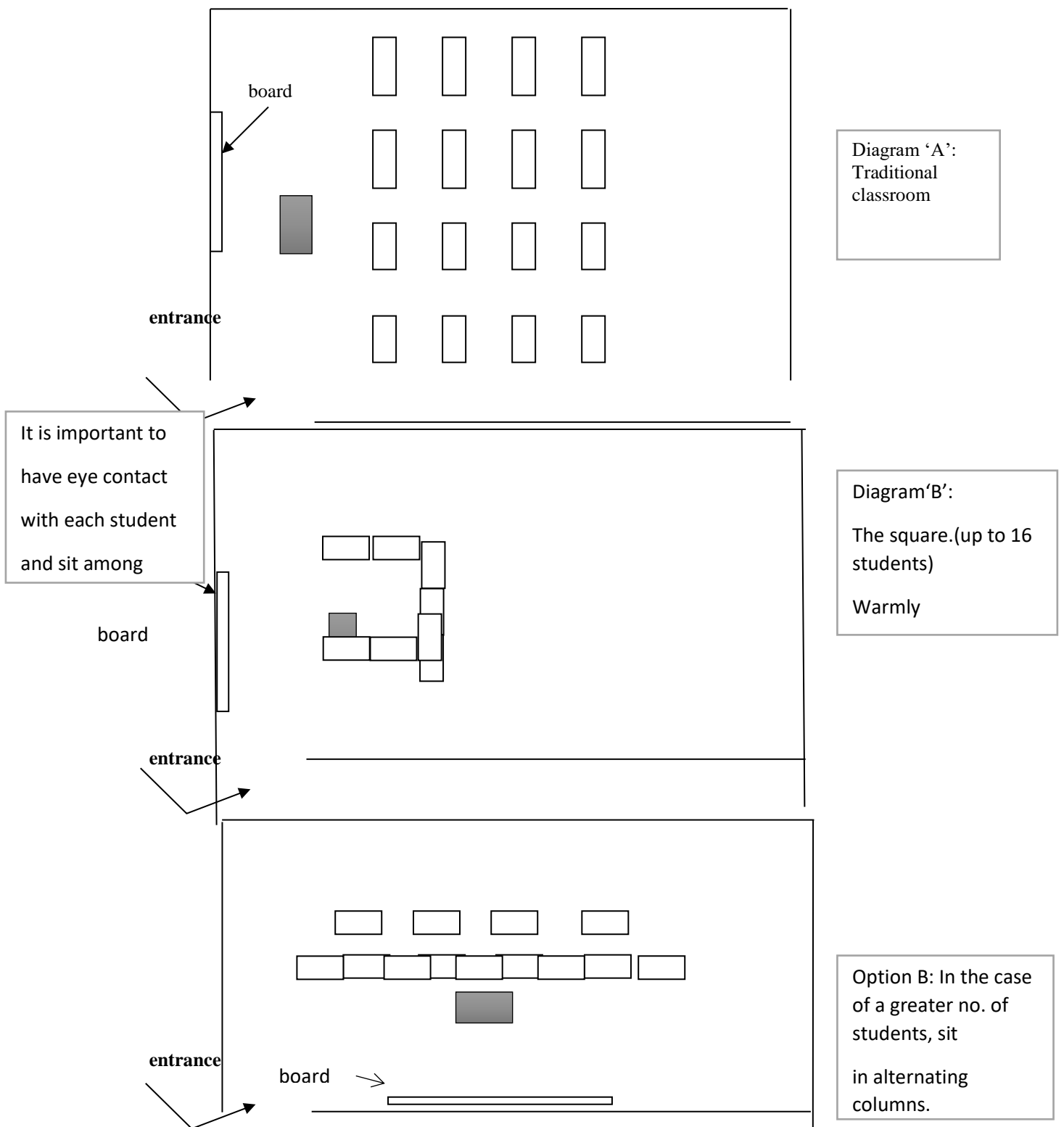| Date																									Total		
Name	A	M	H	A	M	H	A	M	H	A	M	H	A	M	H	A	M	H	A	M	H	A	M	H	A	M	H

4.4. P4- Academic Achievements

Each assignment is practiced and recorded 5 times, either as class work or homework, and then tested. The test must be exactly the same as the practice tasks. Next, an assignment using a different skill is given for 5 times, followed by a test. This is followed by a test consisting of the two different skills that had been taught. For example, if the first skill is a reading comprehension assignment and the second a listening comprehension, the closure is a test with both a listening and a reading comprehension component. After mastering these two, a writing assignment is taught and practiced for 5 times, recording each practice. Then a test is administered checking the writing competency. This is followed by a test containing a reading comprehension task together with a writing assignment.

Table 04. Types of Assignments

Type of Assig.	I Reading Comp.						II Listening Comp.						1 + 2	III Writing Assign.						1 + 3	MOC	MOC	MOC
Name	1	2	3	4	5	T	1	2	3	4	5	T		1	2	3	4	5	T		K1	K2	K3

4.5. P5- Class design diagram

Diagram 'A': Traditional classroom

board

entrance

It is important to have eye contact with each student and sit among

board

Diagram'B':

The square.(up to 16 students)

Warmly

entrance

entrance

board

Option B: In the case of a greater no. of students, sit

in alternating columns.

Figure 01. Class design

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