



Israel Connect Newsletter

A SPECIAL NOTE FROM SARAH:

Dear Volunteers,

As our world becomes more and more digitally connected, a world of opportunity has opened to us. It is now possible to have a significant impact on the life of a student across the world without leaving our homes, – something generations before us could never have imagined. Yet, at the same time, it is important to be cognizant of the downside that comes with the territory of connecting digitally. While we can all now connect virtually, something is missing as a result of the lack of face to face interaction. It would not be strange for two friends to both be tutoring with Israel Connect while completely unaware of each other's involvement. It has become increasingly difficult to keep everyone informed as to the happenings and growth at Israel Connect. At the same time, it is so very important to us that everyone is informed of the wonderful work that is being done! To this end, the Israel Connect newsletter was born. I felt it so important that we as a community should communicate our gratitude for what you, our volunteers, are accomplishing. There is no doubt in my mind that these accomplishments only happen because of the incredible devotion of our volunteers. It is you who selflessly give of your time, show up day after day, week after week, despite the technical hiccups and other difficulties associated with getting hundreds of teenagers connected online with hundreds of volunteers through multiple time zones.

Most of what we have heard in the media about student testing is not positive. But that is not the case for the very lucky students that participate in Israel Connect. The Israeli Ministry of Education noticed a spike in the English proficiency level in some of its schools. Upon closer investigation, they found the Israel Connect program. Our volunteers have had an unmistakably positive effect on the students they mentor in Israel. There is no doubt that the increase in English proficiency is not due to scheduling or technical support. Rather, it is certainly because day after day, you have given of your time to these students, and done so with love.

Because of these wonderful results, I was recently invited to meet with the Head English Inspector for central Israel, Miriam Kluska. She was so impressed by the students'

improved test results, that the ministry approached the Israel Connect team about working together to widen the scope of the program! At the start of this school year, we had a volunteer present the program at a meeting for all heads of English across Israel. The ministry expects to flag additional schools whose students would benefit from volunteers' "mentorship" and sign them up with Israel Connect.

As the Israel Connect program reaches students from every socio-economic background, it opens doors that would otherwise be closed to many. All this spells better access to post-secondary education for Israeli students. In Israel, the entry exam for University education (called Psychometry), is comprised of three equal parts: math and science, Hebrew, and English. This means that one-third of the exam determining which program a student will qualify to attend after their army service tests English! So, while you have been enjoying a unique exchange with Israeli youth, you have also been having a very marked effect on students' prospects – guaranteeing a brighter future, and by extension, changing the future of Israel!

It is a core belief of mine that no single person can change the world. Only the cumulative effort of people, working in one direction, has ever created change. Together, every person, and every action, slowly adds up, piece by piece, to build something truly magnificent. Thank you so much for all you have done, given, and tolerated to enable us to create, together, meaningful change for the next generation.

Sarah Gordon



SARAH GORDON AND MIRIAM KLUSKA



FROM ONE OF OUR EARLY VOLUNTEERS

I was an elementary teacher for 33 years, and I retired in 2002. Teaching may have changed since then, with technology in the classroom, but kids are still learning and teachers are still teaching.

In my day, we used many teaching methods; children do not all learn in the same way. We taught the child, not the curriculum.

As mentors in the IsraelConnect program, we are helping our students to "improve their English fluency, to deepen comprehension, to gain a more sophisticated and age-appropriate vocabulary, and to increase their confidence". It's a significant responsibility.

You experience weekly smiles and head nods; a light often goes on in the eyes of the student. If there is a query in the eyes, you help make a passage or a word comprehensible to the student. Not only do the students learn more English, the volunteers also learn about history, geography, and culture of the country of Israel.

When you work with your student, you likely see and hear improvement as time goes on. When speaking about daily events, the level of language proficiency will differ from that of the curriculum passages. You will probably find that there are words and phrases that your student may not correctly

pronounce or even understand, even though she or he is reading correctly. Do not hesitate to stop the process and ask for an explanation; if the student is not able to reiterate back to you in different words what has been read, take this opportunity to explain, so that there is understanding.

Do not be concerned if you do not finish the reading. If there is not enough time during your session, ensure that there is understanding of the sections being read. That is more important than completing the reading. Ask questions. Read the lesson ahead of time yourself so that you are able to anticipate where the student might need further explanation. Use synonyms where you see they are needed.

The curriculum is being used with 300 students, of varying ages and English levels. Your student may be at the high end or the low end or somewhere in between. One curriculum does not necessarily 'fit all'. Help your student learn; worry less about the curriculum.

You are spending your own valuable time to make life-long improvements. Thank you for that.

Merle Haltrecht-Matte

*Director of the curriculum committee
Ottawa, CANADA*

FROM ONE OF OUR RECENT VOLUNTEERS

I began with Israel Connect last March, around Purim and it has truly been an amazing and delightful pleasure. I have the fortune to be connected with a young woman, Liraz, whom I speak to on a weekly basis. Unlike other students, we speak from her home, not school, so that the atmosphere was always quiet. She is bright, lovely and a pleasure with whom to communicate.

As it happens, we coincidentally share the same birthday ... although there are a few years in between!

I have met some of her family on Skype and have enjoyed learning about her school, some classmates and level of religion. Her reading level was quite good when we began but has certainly improved.

We started again this Fall but I recognize that it is her last year of high school. Hopefully, we will continue to keep in touch! I have recommended Israel Connect to various friends, some of whom have joined and have their own students.

With warm Regards,
Paula Agulnik
Ottawa, CANADA



ISRAEL CONNECT 2016

It is the second year we have participated in the Israel Connect project. I am very grateful to everyone who participated. Especially those who get up early every Thursday morning to talk to the kids of our small elementary school in Ramla and those who are interested in our students' everyday lives. To those who listen to them patiently in spite of the lack of words and abilities. Special gratitude to Jane and Martin Gordoni who visited our school.

The pupils' motivation has raised enormously since they joined the Skype project. Everyone in this group has improved in their test scores. I would like to let you in on the real achievements of the students that we teach together, not just positive feedback and motivation. Not a single pupil participating in the program has received a score of less than 90%! The teachers and staff at the school are amazed at the changes this program has brought about in the students. You see these students were really struggling to partake in the class, not just academically, but behaviorally they were a real challenge to our teachers. A few of them had been written off as "troublemakers". They simply did not care. Now they are so interested in the sessions that during regular classes they have been putting in a tremendous amount of effort. All their other teachers are jealous and amazed! This behavior is not the same in other classes. One student remarked to me today that once the English tests were a disaster for him because they took too much time. The last test he passed successfully and it took him only 30 min. instead of two

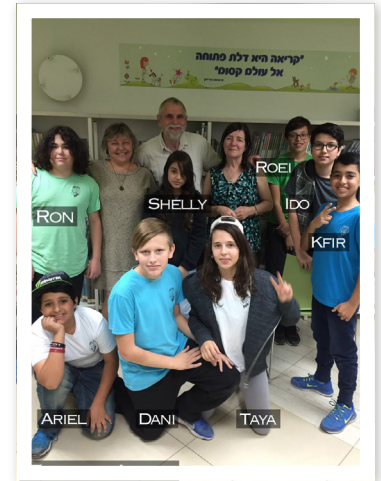
lessons. As a teacher I live for these moments. Through these kids, you have made a great impact on the pupils of our school on their feelings and thoughts. We do know that you care for us and are always ready to help.

Special gratitude to Sarah Gordon and Galia for their tremendous effort and their ability to be persistent and helpful. It is impossible to proceed without your help.

It is a great experience for me as an English teacher.

Thank all of you. Looking forward to seeing all of you repeatedly.

Yours,
Elana, *English teacher*
Ofek School
Ramla, Israel



JANE AND MARTIN GORDON
MEETING THE STUDENTS
AT THE RAMLA SCHOOL



BEVERLY GROSTERN MEETING
HER STUDENT FOR THE FIRST
TIME

All it took was the first call to a young Israeli student and I was hooked. How could it be any other way? She was 14, adorable with sparkling eyes and an immediate desire to learn. And suddenly I was the expert whose task it was to give her more opportunity to read, understand and speak English. Every Sunday morning (for her it was after school hours) we connected via Skype. I would listen to her read in English, then ask questions and most often she would answer me. As the contacts continued I really sensed that our short time together was definitely improving her confidence in chatting in English. She had this hunger to learn more and I was trying in the allotted time to nurture this.

This went on for her entire school year. I listened as she became more confident in using English and I felt myself pulled in to her world. Each time we said shalom, we both promised a return visit in a week.

I wanted to know more about M and my thoughts headed to a special place. She had ignited in me a desire to meet her and visit her in Israel 42 years after my last visit, which I did in October.

But even more exciting is that the Israeli Ministry of Education has recently joined with Israel Connect, acknowledging that the students who have been part of this project showed noticeable improvement in English, compared to the students who had not.

Beverly Grostern



State of Israel
Ministry of Education
Pedagogical Secretariat
Language Department
English Language Education

February 7, 2016

To whom it may concern;

Thank you very much for taking your time and so generously donating it through the Israel Connect program. I can assure you, based on my interaction with the program, that this is a worthy endeavor. In Israel, proficiency in the use, understanding, and application of the English language are of paramount importance for upper secondary education. Language acquisition can be very challenging for those that do not have proper exposure or immersion. Here at the English department of the Ministry of Education, we struggle with this daily. Having seen the Israel Connect program and

the benefit to the students first hand, I can sincerely say that it has opened the door of opportunity for many of our students.

Not only are the students thriving academically, but the entire experience is one which the students enjoy and look forward to. It is engaging, interesting, interactive and very successful academically, something we wish for all our lessons. I truly believe that this is the way of the future and Israel Connect is charting the road for the academia of tomorrow. Thank you, for it is only with generosity like yours that this is possible.

Sincerely,
Dr Tziona Levy
Chief Inspector for English instruction

A MOMENT OF "NACHAS"

The Minister of Education, Nafatali Bennett, is talking about the Israel Connect program taking place in a school in Rishon Letzion.

This year in addition to the regular English classes, the schools have added a period of English enrichment. At the same time the students are going, investigating, and revealing incredible worlds. They are learning, reading and being brought to places and to people through different means. One of the ways is through a program called Israel Connect, in this program the students are speaking in English with retired individuals about Jewish Heroes that have changed the course of the world, and the Jewish nation. The students are also expanding their spoken English and broadening their Horizons. Thank you so much to their teacher Chana on this wonderful program."

The Minister of Education, 2016



THE MINISTER OF EDUCATION - 2016