



WABASH CENTER

For Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion



Now That You've Flipped Biblical Hebrew...

G. Brooke Lester, *Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary*

Blog Series: 12 Surprises When Lecturing Less

October 29, 2013

Tags: engaged teaching | teaching methods | teaching with the arts

Time was, my Biblical Hebrew students and I sweated grimly in a thrice-weekly race against time. But now, with the lecture (narrated Keynote/PowerPoint presentations) and moved outside of the classroom as homework, Biblical Hebrew has become the least predictable three hours of our week...because we *have time* to make of it what we will.

Our in-class activities are of five kinds, built daily around a framework that I designed one summer and have revised annually since. These are:



- **Awkward Cocktail Party:** Dialogues involving basic pleasantries: "Hello", "My name is...", "What's your/her name?", "How are you?", "I am well/not bad/poorly", "See you later!"
- **Walking Around the Room:** Based on a "Total Physical Response" approach developed by Randall Buth and others at the Biblical Language Center. Learners first respond to commands, then narrate actions, revolving around a core set of verbs (stand, sit, go, return, touch, walk) and objects (tables, chairs, doors, windows, walls).
- **What's This?** A rapid back-and-forth between instructor and students, building Q&A from demonstratives and articles, and a pair of nouns ("books & beasts") and a pair of adjectives ("large & small").
- **Children's Songs:** "Head, Shoulders", "The Wise Man Built", "If You're Happy & You Know It", even "30 Bottles of Beer": Translated into Hebrew, they make children again of us all!
- **Walking Field Trip:** There is a sun (or clouds) in the sky, trees on the grass, stones in the path, a sea (we're lucky there)...you tell me what you find.

For use between sessions, besides the core lectures, I made a resource kit that comprises “A Foundation for Biblical Hebrew”: a set of YouTube Playlists, incl



cluding an Aleph-Bet series in which students learn by pronouncing Hebrew syllables; the Children’s Songs series; and a vocabulary series teaching Hebrew words and phrases according to their settings in life (Greetings & Pleasantries; Coping Phrases; Dining; In the Classroom; etc). On Flickr, we have a series of slideshows, including frequently-attested or ready-to-hand nouns; common pairs of opposing adjectives; numbers; and colors.

I admit there was a high front-end cost in preparation (mostly me taking long walks with index cards, conversing with people who weren’t there). But being thrown back on my heels as a co-learner among my students has set a fun tone, and produces *much* more fluent readers than I have ever seen before.

<https://wabash.center/2013/10/now-that-youve-flipped-biblical-hebrew/>