

واحة السلام Neve Shalom Wahat al-Salam

Class Reports to Friends and Sponsors of the NSWAS Primary School, 2005-2006

*Edited by Ety Edlund from notes of teachers,
translated by Deb Reich – 19 July 2006*



This was the year that was...

In the last few years, each class has had two teachers, an Arab and a Jew.

The idea was to best serve the needs of children from both peoples. Having both an Arab and a Jewish teacher in the classroom allows every child to express herself or himself in their mother tongue and to receive encouragement and support appropriate to their own culture.

This model also had downsides. Things sometimes tended to “fall between the cracks” and often it wasn't clear who is supposed to take responsibility for what, and when.

During this past school year, we went back to using a model from several years ago: One main teacher, and a co-teacher from the other people who works with her. In this model, the main teacher has the main responsibility and is the address for everyone in the school community who has contact with that class: children, parents, and administration.

The co-teacher is also an important figure in the classroom. She provides support and is there to help the children with the culture, language, and traditions not their own.

This model demands cooperation, good listening

and good teamwork. When the two teachers work well and comfortably together, and are open and listen well to one another, the children quickly pick up on the value of the bi-national encounter.

Evidently the teaching staff was up to the task...

The First Grade Class

The first grade this past year had eight Jewish students and ten Arab students. Yasmin was the main teacher and Ety was her co-teacher.

The spacious new building, the garden full of flowers, and the abundance of light coming in through all those windows in the classroom -- all lent a warm, homey feeling. The children very quickly felt at home.

The year began quietly enough. The children reconnoitered, they were hesitant, they began getting accustomed to the way things work at the school. They were quickly drawn to the green grounds outside, but were also the first to run back to class when the bell rang.



For first-graders, it's all new. The classroom; the daily routine; reading in two languages, one of which may be completely foreign to them. Workbooks, assignments, homework, sitting facing a blackboard – it's not always an easy adjustment. Still, we very quickly found that the children were avid consumers of learning: curious, searching, creative, and eager to work and be challenged.

A lot took place outdoors. The garden we tended with the children gave them a learning experience close to nature: planting seeds, watching them sprout, watering the plants and watching them grow, and finally picking the vegetables and cooking them!



The central topic in first grade is “me and my family.” This topic permits an in-depth acquaintance with the body, with feelings, and with the family. There were three successful meetings with parents, who closely followed the children's school-day experiences via detailed documentation of what goes on in the classroom and the schoolyard. Much emphasis was placed on the class's social life. We celebrated the children's birthdays each month. Parents of the birthday boys and girls coordinated among themselves on what games to organize for the children and what to bring to the classroom. This arrangement gave parents an opportunity for more personal contact with other parents.



It would seem that the almost perfect balance between Jewish and Arab students in the class, and the splendid synergy between the two teachers, created a very successful bi-national encounter.

The children wanted to visit one another at home, and some very nice friendships between Arab and Jewish youngsters developed. “The most fun was getting to know Sa'id...” said Raz at the closing assembly. And when Ella's brother was hospitalized and her parents were continually at his bedside, she slept over with Bisaan and wore Bisaan's clothes to school the next day... Those are only two examples among many.

One of our burning issues at the school is our inability to bring our Jewish students to a really

functional level of bilingual achievement. In this first-grade class, the Jewish children were clearly having fun learning Arabic, and they made very marked progress.



The connection with parents was ongoing. The parents could come at their convenience and sit in the classroom. We felt their support throughout the year.

Sometimes there were missteps. In May, on Israel's Memorial Day, the day before Israeli Independence Day when Palestinians mark the Naqba (Catastrophe), the tension was palpable, and there was disagreement and misunderstanding, at times quite vocal.



Sometimes it's not easy to keep a lid on our frustrations with the tough political realities. We're not always in complete agreement as to how to teach the children about these days. We're on a long journey, and we are still learning.

This was certainly a good start for us all...

