

נווה שלום Neve Shalom واحة السلام Wahat al-Salam

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

Edited from notes of teachers, by Ety Edlund, 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 also 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 Second Grade Class

This year's second grade had thirteen Arab children and nine Jewish children. Berna was their main teacher, and Calanit her co-teacher.

The composition of the class was a challenge, with three sets of twins, several children with learning disabilities, a few with attention deficit disorders, and some very precocious academically. The children's family backgrounds ranged from affluent to disadvantaged. Some come from single-parent families, some children's parents are separated, and two children live in group settings rather than with their families. Overall, a daunting set of statistics on the first day of school.



It was not easy creating a sense of reciprocal support and cohesion among the parents. Attendance at parent-teacher meetings was spotty, up to and including the final event of the year, and this had an impact on the atmosphere in the classroom.



Teaching centered on individual work with each child. The teachers tried to enable every student to experience a softer, warmer reality. The children learned about being open to and accepting of others. Emphasis was placed on developing a group identity and on the acquisition of good study habits. A lot of effort was expended, for the most part successfully, on creating a good connection between the Jewish children and the Arab children.

For the students, one significant success was the Jewish kids' openness to Arabic. They studied enthusiastically and could be heard practicing their Arabic during recess. This is a real achievement because, thus far, the school has not found a formula for assuring a high level of fluency in Arabic among the Jewish students. The great leap forward that this class achieved in Arabic contributed much to the quality of the bi-national encounter.



The second-graders spent many hours gardening in the schoolyard. When school first opened, they prepared a small plot for themselves, aided by some of the parents. During the year, they enjoyed cultivating it and later eating the fruits of their labors.



The end-of-year event was a pleasant surprise: the children took responsibility and were very creative. The teachers, the parents, and the children themselves felt this to be a significant milestone in their progress.



A lot of work awaits this class of children next year. They will need more guidance in channeling their energy, and their frustrations, into constructive activity. More resources will be required to help these kids deal with their personal and learning-related challenges.

We wish them well and are sure that their achievements in all respects will only grow.

