

واحة السلام Neve Shalom 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 demands cooperation, good listening

and good teamwork. When the two teachers work well and comfortable 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 Fourth Grade Class

We had ten Jewish fourth-graders and twenty Arab fourth-graders this year. Reem was the main teacher, and Lira her co-teacher.



The fourth grade was reputed to be a “problem class” – with discipline problems, poor study habits, arguments between the kids, and a not very deep connection between the Jewish children and the Arab children.



The teachers decided that the class was going to shed this stigma; and they worked with the children around the theme of “social organization”: reinforcing the social cohesion of the group, stressing teamwork, and buttressing the image and self-image of each member of the group.

As a first step in this process, they guided the children toward more self-awareness about their experiences at school. At the end of every week, someone brought refreshments from home, and the children each helped themselves to a snack and then related what had happened to them that week at school. The kids began to keep track of their experiences so they could bring them to this weekly talk circle.



The teachers divided the children into smaller groups, assigning both Jewish kids and Arab kids to each one. The children resisted very vocally at first. They wanted to stay with their buddies, but the teachers persevered. Each small group had to choose a name, to plan activities approved by all its members, to document its activities and to create something to present to the class as a whole. This group work required some cooperation from the parents - a willingness to host their child's group and to assist the kids with their tasks.



Initially, it was tough going. The children argued, fought, got angry. But gradually the barriers began to fall, and each group created activities that were later presented to the class: work with clay; work with beads; photography and painting they did together; and cooking.

Each group created a documentary slide show that was shown to parents at the final event of the year, dealing with the values they had learned about through their activities. Here are some of them:

1. Playing together
2. Respecting one another
3. Getting closer and getting to know one another
4. Getting to know the family
5. Organizing and planning something together
6. Carrying on a dialogue
7. Helping each other
8. Learning to compromise
9. We learned about the culture of both our peoples



Children and parents ended the year with a rare feeling of victory and empowerment, and expressed a strong desire to go on working in small groups during the coming year.

