

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 Fifth Grade Class

This year's fifth-grade class was the only class in the school with more Jewish children than Arab children – 15 Jewish kids and 12 Arab kids. Last year, these youngsters studied in two separate classes, and this year we consolidated them. The change was not conducive to an atmosphere of calm in the first few weeks of the school year. Kids had to exert themselves for a while to find their place and redefine their influence in the new configuration. There was some stress as a result, but the process is very typical of this age group.



The teachers, Eva and Raani, decided to focus on social concerns and the human dimension rather than mainly the Jewish-Arab encounter. They felt that the children collectively, as a class, had low self-esteem and they set out to create a different group consciousness; this project went on for quite some time.

The teachers avoided lecturing and criticizing, relying instead on reflection, analysis of incidents of conflict between children, and the transformation of each incident into a learning experience. The teachers led the kids toward a stance of listening rather than judging: What is

it like to be the one who feels hurt and insulted?

Thanks to a lot of patience, the level of friction between members of the class was drastically reduced.



Regarding culture and tradition, the kids learned about the three monotheistic faiths, noting what they have in common and how each is nevertheless unique. To round out their research and learning, they took a field trip to Abu Ghosh and Motza, visiting a synagogue, a mosque, and a church. This was a moving experience for the children, as they had a close encounter with the customs and sacred objects of all three religions and met people who do the sacred work of each.



As part of their social studies lessons, the children wrote on topics of their own choosing and lectured to the rest of the class. Yoav, for instance, after the experience of learning about the three religions, chose to work on India from the standpoint of religion.



The children participated in a very successful archeological project. They learned what archeology is all about, related it to their lessons in geography and history, and together with guides from the government's Antiquities Department they dug at an actual site. The high point of this project was a day at the dig, to which their parents were invited, and together they uncovered an ancient mosaic at a location just next door to Neve Shalom / Wahat al-Salam.



The children prepared their own end-of-year event. The impact of all the work they'd done during the year was very evident throughout. They behaved like a group in a positive way, and barriers were breached between Jewish kids and Arab kids.