

ONE PROJECT OF MANY: THE SCHOOL AS CHANGE AGENT

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ABSTRACT

This article tells about the initiatives of concerned educators and community leaders in Israel in environmental issues in general, and in the Western Galilee region in particular depicting certain organizational aspects and cooperation of both official and civilian factors in fostering initiatives aimed to integrate environmental issues in the regular educational program. After a general view of the situation, with reference to specific regional factors, the article describes the concept and framework of the “green school” initiative and describes the aims and objectives set up by the principal and school management of Mahmud Dervish Junior High, in Majd-Al-Krum, an Arab village, situated in the valley of Beit Ha-Kerem, a long shallow valley in northern Israel, separating the Upper Galilee from the Lower Galilee.

The project described in this paper is an annual project of the school, which acts as a change agent for the community. The article specifies the aims and objectives of the entire program, the operative measures including the project described and the contribution of the project to all beneficiaries: the village, the community, the neighborhood this project focused upon, the school, the pupils and other schools who learn from the success of this project and follow suit.

Key words: educational program, initiative, project, community, environmental issues, recycling

INTRODUCTION

In the previous century, global ecology was not on every one's agenda; many people considered those who were trying to make the issue a public interest, eccentric "tree huggers" or "Wale lovers". But since the dawn of the century, global ecology concerns almost everyone who cares about the future of planet earth, and most informed people are worried about the harms we do, whether intentionally or unintentionally, to our environment.

The state of Israel is situated in semi-arid region, water in this area is scarce and expensive commodity and the winds blow away the earth and leave barren rocky landscape. Therefore, the state water sector is closely monitored, and trees and soil keeping shrubs are constantly planted in the wild as part of the efforts to prevent the desert from spreading, and reclaim areas that once had been cultivated. However, like everywhere else in the world, development of infrastructure, urbanization and industry and the rapid change of life style, brought pollution. The Israeli government was one of the first governments worldwide, to establish a ministry for Environment Quality and appointed a minister to study and deal with diverse ecological issues.

The first step was to change people's attitude towards ecological and environmental issues; the idea is that awareness and good will are not enough, if you care, you should do something about it. Regular citizens can do very little to prevent air pollution, but everyone can behave more responsibly and avoid littering and garbage dumping.

We believe that education can be an important vessel for social change, therefore, a school can become a change agent for the community it serves. This article will describe one of the local projects designed, organized and carried out recently, by the management, faculty and pupils of Mahmud Dervish Junior High School of Majd-Al-Krum.

On September 2009, the Junior High School Mahmud Dervish in Majd-Al-Krum, a town located in the western Galilee, Israel, joined the newly established Arab Jewish Citizens Environmental Forum sponsored by the Ministry of education, municipal authorities, and civil associations of diverse Israeli sectors. The Forum, comprised of ministerial official and civil associations' representatives, leading educators and prominent community leaders [mayors, heads of municipalities], is meeting annually to suggest, discuss and decide the nature of the projects that will be carried out during the academic year. Its members cooperate, design and carry out both

local and joined projects and initiatives. In 2011, our school was recognized by the ministry of education as “Green School”, a title confirming the school’s commitment to environmental issues. Since then the school had participated in several “green” projects in the region, and initiated “green” projects in its premises and in the village and its adjacent vicinity.

This article, will describe one project carried out by pupils and faculty of Mahmud Dervish Junior High School as part of a larger, more comprehensive environmental project that emerged from meetings of the Thought and Rational forum, “Encode Alshajure”; a civil Jewish Arab urban corporation of neighboring municipalities in Bait Ha-Kerem Valley Cluster, providing a platform for regional cooperation between seven neighboring towns and municipalities. The regular meetings of the cluster’s fostered a line of local and regional development initiatives in various areas, including education related projects in the view that “education builds community and community leads education”, meaning, local initiatives lead by a school or number of schools that incorporates and activates other bodies and segments of the local community. One of the major and most successful environmental projects we carried out this year, is an annual environmental happening called: “Greener than before”, which is the peak of the pupils’ connection to nature and environmental responsibility.

The “Greener than ever the before” project in Mahmud Dervish Junior High School in the academic year of 2016-2017

This is the 8th consecutive year that the school is actively involved in local and regional environmental program that got on its way in the academic year of 2009-2010. The principal and the leading team believe that environment education will promote the pupils’ connection to nature and encourage their involvement in environmental issues. During the year, the pupils are exposed to the subject by integration of environment related subjects into the curricula in both spiral and integrative manner, aimed to enable the pupils to acquire values and social norms, shape their perception and behavior towards environment issues and encourage personal responsibility, awareness and will to keep and maintain environmental quality.

The school initiates and organizes several environment related activities, sometimes on small scale, such as class or a layer project, and sometimes relatively ambitious projects of the entire

school, in cooperation with other local schools, and projects involving parents and other stakeholders within the community.

During the year, the school principal and the leading team, with the aid pupils' representatives and representatives of other interested parties, designed and started to execute a comprehensive "green" program.

The aims of the program are to:

- 1). Development the awareness of various aspects of the local and surrounding environment.
- 2). Develop awareness of the mutual bi-lateral relations between Man and his environment.
- 3). Develop values, stance and a sense of personal responsibility regarding environment quality.
- 4). Develop initiative and active involvement to keep and nurture the immediate environment.
- 5). Develop the awareness of basic human rights related and affected by environment quality.
- 6). Develop "green" behavioral patterns within the school and beyond.

In hope that a successful implementation of this program will enable pupils to assimilate the educational, social and academic values we thrive to impart them.

Operative aims and objectives:

- 1). Community project – to nurture the eastern entrance to the village. [from the medical center to the village square].
- 2). Change the schools' appearance by aesthetic wall painting and murals.
- 3). Maintain, enlarge and continue to work in the green agricultural patch of the school.
- 4). Set and organize the tires recycling corner, keep and safeguard nature and landscape.
- 5). Set up an environment quality corner in each class, supervised by the home-teacher and representatives of the project team and pupils' "green" council.

- 6). Collect papers throughout the village for recycling -in cooperation with Amnir Ltd Company.
- 7). Collect bottles for recycling and batteries for burying.
- 8). Signposting.
- 9). Set up electronic bulletin board.
- 10). Weekly cleaning committee.
- 11). A concentrated week of Peak Days aimed to activate pupils in environmental projects.
- 12). Dividing the school premises into numbered lots. Each class will be assigned to adopt a specific lot and submit a work plan designed to clean, nurture and beautify their assigned lot.
- 13). Day trips and visits in places designated for environmental learning.
- 14). Training workshops for pupils, parents and teaches.

Annual Community Project.

The Green Neighborhoods project of Mahmud Dervish Junior High in Majd-Al-Krum

As part of its comprehensive environment program, the school decided to adopt specific locations in the village to clean, plant and nurture; not just once, but to make a preliminary study of the designated area, identify problematic areas, think of possible solutions or at least significant contribution, and harness the participation of the residents and other interested parties. To execute a concentrated organized effort, and set up a continuing sustainable maintenance program.

This is the second year the school carried out a very successful project, so much so, that it had attracted attention of the supervising bodies and the media. and encouraged other schools in the village to follow suit.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Xt1eb2cvok&t=1s>

The actual project included:

- 1) Clothes collection and separation of improper textile for recycling.

- 2) A cleaning day – a comprehensive clean up performed with the cooperation of members of the Civil Forum, members of El-Amal Association, pupils, parents and residents.
- 3) Project team and other qualified personnel conduct environmental workshops in the neighborhood.
- 4) Tree planting and gardening.
- 5) A conclusive neighborhood naming ceremony for residents and guests.

After the preliminary survey, school agents told the appropriate office of the municipality how many additional garbage containers are needed in the target neighborhood and where to place them, where to place separate recycling containers for papers and for plastics, and where to establish a temporary cloth collecting posts.

On the pre-set date, the entire school and many recruits and volunteers practically “covered” the target area. Soon after we started cleaning, residents joined in, while others welcomed us and offered drinks and light refreshments.

Neighborhoods that had benefitted from the project are sustained by their residents; littering in the streets is a habit of the past. Today, the proud residents of the clean and green “hoods” make sure they stay clean and green.’ Containers for garbage separation and special containers for disposal of old clothes are placed now in every “hood” in the village, contributing to culture of sustainability and protecting the environment.

Every year our school adopts another school, train it and guide it to follow our example and become a green school. This way we insure a educational continuity in all age groups, from primary school to High School. Today our village is cleaner, and vandalism practically ceased. The children learned to make good use of resources by recycling and monitoring the use of water and electricity, to respect nature and other living things and to keep and maintain clean, green environment.

Our pupils became significant change agents in the village and the community and they also affect schools in neighboring villages by giving them lectures and presentations regarding diverse environmental issues. This late development gladdens us, making us proud and helps us to carry on and motivate us to continue to invest efforts and find ways to introduce positive changes to our society.

