

**ISRAELI HOPE – COOPERATION EDUCATION:
FOSTERING RELATIONS AND COOPERATION IN A MALTY ETHNIC STATE.**

The renewal story of Mahmud Dervish Junior High

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Abstract

This article explains the reason for educators' concern with the values, world issues and social views the schools impart to pupils, beside information, knowledge and skills. Educators believing in the need to assimilate a strong sense of commitment, tolerance and accepting the other by caring, sharing and cooperation. It tells the story of one school, Mahmud Dervish Junior High, in the village of Majd-Al-Krum in Northern Israel. The article presents a general description of the designated educational program the school had developed, and focuses on the part of specific external relations: the pupils' exposure to other cultures, ethnic groups and life styles in the country, by participation in national and regional projects, and by meeting and cooperating with schools and associations of different sectors. It describes the meetings of the Arab-Jewish Forum for peace, coexistence and cooperation, and the joining of the district forum of the Bait Ha-Kerem Valley cluster, that yielded an excellent school pairing program which bonded pupils and faculty members of different sectors to cooperate in social and environment related projects. It also mentions the regional coexistence programs offered and facilitated by "Beit Yigal Alon" center. The article describes the pairing of Mahmud Dervish junior high With the Jewish Asif Junior High of Misgav municipality, and their successful

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cooperation in carrying out environment related projects, social coexistence projects, and community related projects.

Key words: coexistence, tolerance, cooperation, sharing, mutual interests, environmental issues.

Introduction

People may not know that the State of Israel is a multi-ethnic multi religious country; most people know that the state's inhabitants comprised of Jews and Arabs but this is a simplification of a much more complex reality, since each of the larger ethnic groups is subdivided into more cohesive sub-groups, characterized by tradition, heritage and life style. In addition, the state is the home for a few smaller ethnic and religious minorities such as: Druze, Cherckes, Greeks, Armenians and smaller communities of diverse devout Cristian sects from various countries in Europe and Africa that chose to live in the country they call The Holy Land.

One of the major tasks of concerned educators is how to ensure that beside knowledge and skills required for the 21st century, their pupils acquire social and humane values, especially tolerance and acceptance of the other, whatever that "other" might be.

Majd-Al-Krum is an Arab village in Northern Israel. This article will tell the story of its Junior High school, specifically, how tenacity and determination had turned a marginal mediocre school of high dropout ratio and no special interest or achievements, into a highly successful and one of the leading schools of its kind in Northern Israel, with negligible dropout ratio.

Mahmud Dervish Junior High is a relatively large school, serving about 1100 pupils taught by faculty of 85 teachers and supportive professionals. About ten years ago, the school that was about to be marked red by the ministry*, received a new dedicated principal who assembled a new management and together they changed the faculty: replaced outdated teachers who were set in their ways, and encouraged others to renew and develop professionally. The school underwent a thorough comprehensive change, in almost every aspect: inner organization,

inter-personal staff cooperation, professionalism, teaching methodology, vision, aims and objectives, ties with the surrounding community and regional the educational community and participation in local, regional and national projects.

This article will describe how the school's leading team incorporated all these seemingly non-academic activities in the school's curricula by emphasizing the general values and academic aspects of these activities, and by creating the opportunity for the pupil to make a difference.

In the last decade, the school, led by its new enthusiastic management, adopted an ambitious visionary working plan; it has initiated and implemented several local projects and reached out to meet others, learn about different culture, tradition, views and life style; find out values they share with others, and learn how to advance tolerance and understanding, and cooperate to achieve mutual and general goals.

* on the brink of dispersion.

The school working plan and its implementation

The school's working plan specifies the following objectives:

- 1) Reemphasizing value education:** build a community social volunteer network, develop young leadership and draw the parents' participation in social and community projects.

Advancement of excellence, innovativeness and initiative: create frameworks for advancement of academic excellence and contribution to the community.

Increase the awareness, responsibility and contribution for sustainability of the environment.

- 2) Establishment of designated school mechanism** – comprised of management and faculty members.

- 3) Faculty training** – the school encourage faculty members to continue their professional development, and organizes in-school lectures and workshops aimed to provide teachers and educators tools that will help them to deal with diverse situations. Organizing teachers-parents’ workshops, and encouraging faculty members to participate in various local and regional education related activities.

In addition to the above the school decided to raise the banner of coexistence and genuine cooperation with the Jewish society by means of joint projects, social and cultural meetings and the establishment of group and personal relations.

- 4) Meeting other sectors and ethnic groups** – the school employs teachers from diverse sectors: local and external, Muslim, Christians and Jewish. Beside teaching their specific subject, [Gym, English, literature, etc.] they will also act as cultural agents of their specific culture/sect, teach the pupils about their heritage and prepare them when they plan to meet [visit or host] and/or cooperate with school of a different sector.

Education for peace, coexistence, cooperation and mutual respect.

Our school decided to raise the banner of coexistence and genuine cooperation with the Jewish society by means of joint projects, contributing to both societies, like environment protection and cleaning operations in the public sector serving both parties, and by social and cultural meetings aimed to learn about the manners, religious and cultural characteristics of the other side, and the establishment of group and personal relations.

In 2009, the principal and other school representatives, joined the Arab-Jewish Citizens Forum an organization that plans and coordinates various projects and initiatives of cooperation and shared interests. One of the means to create inter-sectorial cooperation was pairing institutions and associations of different sectors.

Mahmud dervish Junior High of Majd-Al Krum, was paired with Asif Junior high of the Jewish municipality “Misgav”. The principals and representatives of the Forum and of Elamal association conducted meetings to set up the initial cooperation program. This was

the beginning of a continuing very successful and inter-sectorial relationship, beneficial and rewarding to all involved. The school leaders and representatives joined additional district Arab-Jewish Forums, called: the Beit -Ha-Kerem Cluster: a joint group of seven neighboring municipalities of various sectors, conducting brain storm meets for peaceful constructive coexistence, for planning and organizing various projects and initiatives of shared local interests. The school also take part in the blessed work of "Beit Yigal Alon" a social center in kibbutz Genosar on the shores of lake Kineret [Sea of Galilee] whose activities are dedicated to cultural tolerance and coexistence of all diverse segments of the Israeli Society.

The cooperation with the Jewish junior high of Misgav district began in two opening meetings for the program: "We create together and build together" Pupils of the same grade in from both schools and the organizing teachers met in "Beit Yigal Alon" and worked together on specific art project, while the teachers accompanying them worked on a short educational program that will deal with shared issues. which will be taught simultaneously in both schools. The contents were taken from traditional texts: The Bible, Old and New testaments, the Quran, specifically those telling a similar or parallel story, and short texts [poetry] from modern literature.

The program also included visiting in cultural and religious centers of the other sector, and peers teaching: teachers from one school gave some lectures in the other school and vice versa.

The second program of its kind concentrated on agriculture and nature, the variety of fruit trees growing in the galilee, and the need for balance the needs of Man and nature, share resources [land, water] and prevent harm [littering and wild fires]. The program included workshops in diverse subjects intended to learn about our neighbor other. They focused on: food, music, art, language, and communication – the media and its role in construction of bias and prejudice. This program was concluded with visiting and hosting each other.

Another cooperative project targeted the needs of the environment and the community. Both schools decided to participate in the international beaches cleaning project:

“Cultivating Trash Free Seas” As neither school is in a coastal town, we contacted the education department of the Jewish Town Naharia which is also the site of the regional hospital, serving all Western Galilee communities.

The two combined projects were welcomed, coordinated and logistically organized by Naharia’s educational department. The two schools formed task related mixed teams:

We arrived and had a short opening ceremony near the hospital, after which three teams remained in the premises, one team visited patients in specific wards and brought small gifts and candy. Another team painted mural on one of the hospital walls, under the guidance of a local artist, while a third team planted trees and performed some gardening chores under the guidance of the hospital’s chief gardener. The rest of the pupils went to the beach and participated in the organized cleaning efforts organized by a local environmental association and supported by the Elamal association.



"we all want a clean beach"



"we are all volunteers in hospital"

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

The second program was dedicated to culture: festival and holidays of different ethnic and religious groups. We learned the reasons [history, season, special events] for the given festival, the specific foods and manners, etc. In our school, we use the help of school teachers from different sectors to learn about and commemorate Jewish and Christian festival and holidays.

In recent years, the two schools organize cultural related meetings, conduct dialogs, participate in environment related projects in the district and in local projects in each other's village, building a significant relationship and promising friendships.

The Jewish-Arab forum has also yielded a district educational hi-tech park, where teenagers of all sectors come to learn and develop skills in areas like: electronics, digital media, computers, mechanics and robotics.

We look forward for continuing this very rewarding cooperation, and plan for next year, to “switch” pupils for educational purposes: our pupils will go to Asif junior high to teach Arabic, and pupils from Asif junior high will come to us to teach Hebrew. One of the major achievements of this program is parents’ participation; in recent years, the school works in various tracks to strengthen ties with various interested parties, affecting, affected or involved in school’s events and activities, whom we consider “stakeholders” of the school. The parents of the school pupils participate in several local projects and initiatives of the school, such as various community related activities, affecting the pupils’ sense of belonging and responsibility, like visiting and conducting sport and social activities in a local school for children with special needs, helping the village elderly, cleaning projects, recycling projects, etc.

The strengthening ties with schools and associations of other sectors, and the mutual visits, required parental involvement in hosting external visitors and in organization and logistics of visits in other towns, villages, institutions and target locations. Many parents that got involved randomly or for diverse practical reasons, had joined various forums and associations seeking peace, coexistence, cooperation and tolerance, and became active for the cause.

Summation

The latter, and other positive developments, encourage us to continue participating in extra curricula programs educating our youth to be open minded contributive citizens in a multi-ethnic multi-cultural society.

