

# American Friends of Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam

## Primary School Activity Report

The 2010/2011 school year is underway with about 200 children in grades 1 to 6. This was the first recent year that the enrollment did not grow – it even shrank a little. This was not due to a lack of demand but a need to stay in line with the school's funding expectations. Funding levels have continued to suffer from the lingering effects of the global financial crisis.



Structurally, the Primary School (PS) opened the year with one large first grade class (with 29 children, *photo*), rather than two. However, the size of the class does not tell the whole story, since there are two teachers, and for many activities the class is split up into smaller study groups. The same is true for some of the higher grades.

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### **New media and film-editing room**

Media studies have always played a major role in cultural education at the school. In the framework of a weekly one-hour class, children in 4th to 6th grades study all the components of film-making, from script-writing to production, photography to editing. They also learn about the history of cinema and to look with a critical eye on films and movies.

Film editing requires special equipment, so until now the children were able to learn about it only in a theoretical way. This year, the school has been fortunate to receive funding (from the Beracha Foundation) for this equipment. This will make it possible for the children to gain a much better understanding of how films are edited. Another grant, received from a donor in United Kingdom, has enabled the PS to provide the physical space for a film editing room. We are now working to complete the new room and hope to have it set up and running by the end of November. The school's intention is that the film-editing equipment will serve the community as a whole.



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## Cooperation with other schools

The school is developing exchange programs with various schools in the area. One of these is the Jewish Lapid School in the nearby town Modiin. A former teacher of the Primary School who is now at the Modiin school has been instrumental in developing this relationship. Every year, she brings a third or fourth grade class to our school for a day of learning and fun, and our children spend a similar day in the school in Modiin.

A similar project will involve a sixth grade class of a Jewish School in the town of Hod Hasharon, and many other schools seeking cooperation send individual classes to the school for an hour or two. Such meetings take place about once a month.

Besides being fun, the purpose of these projects is for the children to learn about each other's identities and different backgrounds. The activities emphasize mutual respect and equality as a basis for relations with the other people.

One project that especially meets this need will be an exhibition organized by the Inter-Religious Coordinating Council in Jerusalem. Children of a Jewish school, an Arab school and our school will exhibit drawings in the framework of a study day on religion and culture.

As in previous years, the children will compete in sports events arranged by the regional council. Games include soccer and volleyball. Since the competition brings children from all the varied cultural and religious backgrounds that are represented within our regional council, the events often include manifestations of racism, either on the basis of Jewish/ Arab, or between religious and secular, or against immigrants, such as Ethiopian children. Teachers and organizers therefore convene and deliberate how to deal with this phenomena.

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## Commemoration of events and holidays

An important component of education at the Primary School is learning about each other's cultural and religious heritage. This year, the school plans to have a large mutual celebration of Christmas, Hanukkah and Al-Sana Al-Hijriah in December.



Already, since the beginning of the school year, the children have been marking, separately and together, the Eid al-Fitr, Rosh HaShanah, Yom Kippur (*photo*) and the Sukkot holidays. In their school classes, the children learned about the symbols, meanings and history of the holidays and took part in various activities. This is important both to strengthen the children's knowledge and pride in their own holidays, and to bring a better understanding of the traditions of their neighbors. Whereas at other schools the children might learn about the holidays of the other children in a distant and theoretical way, acquaintance is deepened through actually experiencing how these holidays are

celebrated, and the result is greater understanding of and acceptance for the culture of the other people.

### **This fall at the school**

During the current period, the school places an emphasis on learning about democracy. In ordinary Israeli schools, this takes place around the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin in early November. At the Primary school, teachers begin by speaking to the children about the events of early October 2000, and go on to commemorate the Kfar Kassem massacre and the Rabin murder. The children learn about the necessity of protecting minority rights within the framework of democracy and imagine how things might have been if Rabin and Arafat had continued to work towards peace. At the end of this process, the children elect a student council. For the remainder of the school year, the council plays an active role in the life of the school.

Another important committee at the school is the parents committee. Their work begins even before the school year, when they organize parents to paint and clean the school buildings. Besides deliberating with the school administration, the parents committee also arrange extra-curricular subjects for students.

In October, the school commemorated Yitzhak Rabin's assassination. The children were given the assignment of imagining what might have been if Yitzhak Rabin and Yasser Arafat had stayed around and led their peoples towards peace. In twos, the children created mock TV news announcements that proceeded chronologically through the years. Each class is responsible for presenting a certain holiday/festival/event this year at the school. Hezzi Shuster and his 3rd or 4th grade classes were responsible for presenting this one, Hezzi teaches media studies and took this opportunity to include media aspects into the presentation.



### **Special emphases of the school year**

#### **Language teaching**

In Israel, the Ministry of Education tends to promote the emphasis of a certain theme in every given school year. This year, the subject chosen has been the development of Hebrew as a mother language. In order to serve the special needs of our school, we have decided to extend the model to include reinforcement of both Arabic and Hebrew, as both subjects need to be reinforced. The school's Goodwin Language Lab will play a central role in this matter.

In order to improve language instruction and the teaching of other subjects, teachers are required to do inservice training in teachers' colleges, etc. The training is individual by

teacher, though, where possible we also arrange and conduct seminars on specialized subjects such as commemoration of the national days.

### **Agriculture studies**

Agriculture teaching is back in the school curriculum this year. NSWAS resident and teacher will be in charge of both agriculture and zoology (at the school's Zoo Lab). These provide a great opportunity for the children to learn in an informal settings and develop an empathy and understanding for the living world that surrounds them.



### **Mentors project**

The mentors project, in which 6th grade children assist 1st grade children, continues, and is a great success. Assistance can be as simple as alerting a teacher if a child falls, to helping a child with his school work.