

YOUTH ENCOUNTER WORKSHOP

December 8-10, 2013

General Details

This workshop took place with the Jewish Givat Brenner – Makif High School and the Arab Galilee School in Nazareth.

Workshop Coordinator: Nava Sonnenschein

Facilitators: Samer Swaid, Hadas Zur, Keren Dahan, Mai Sader, Harb Amara and Keren Segal.

Number of Participants: 62

Jewish School: 30: 12 boys, 18 girls

Arab School: 32: 12 boys, 20 girls

Background

Jewish Group – Givat Brenner School:

The Givat Brenner School has worked with the School for Peace for many years and is familiar with the structure of our meetings. The school sees the workshops as an important part of its educational program and the school prepares the students for the meeting. Due to the policy and focus of the Jewish educational curriculum, the students do not have an understanding of Arab society and history. This group consisted of pupils from a number of classes who chose to participate in the workshop.

The Galilee School Nazareth

This is also a school which regularly participates in the Neve Shalom encounter program. The school and students are very proud of being part of the encounter program and look forward to it all year. The Galilee School's history teacher accompanies the youth and has been part of the program for many years. He thoroughly prepares the students, focusing on issues of identity, history, Israeli society etc. The students come to the meeting very

prepared and are anxious to raise different political issues and make their voices heard.

Main Processes and Subjects in the Workshop:

Open Dialogue

The first day was devoted to getting to know one another in the three small groups. The students discovered things they have in common as well as differences between them. The atmosphere in this part is mainly of positive curiosity. For the youth it is the first encounter with the "other" and everything is new. In the third session of the workshop a political dialogue began with individuals from each group sharing personal stories. It was the first time that the Jewish group became familiar with the discrimination that the Arab population faces and what it is like to be an Arab minority in a Jewish State. The realization that there is inequality is painful for the Jewish group and one way to deal with it is denial.

In the evening the youth met together socially, presenting different aspects of their culture to each other, and they were able to dance and sing together with a lot of joy!

On the second day the participants got into the political discussion. The Palestinian group brought up the discrimination about land confiscation and limitation of development in Arab cities like Nazareth. The Jewish students brought up the issue of loyalty to the state of Israel. They felt that the Arabs are not loyal. The Palestinians said the state should be loyal to all of its citizens. The Palestinians spoke about citizenship and rights they should get as citizens. They spoke about the complex situation for them as Palestinians in a Jewish state. The Palestinian group also brought up the Praver plan about relocating Bedouins from their land in the south of Israel and concentrating them in several townships. For the Jewish group it was all new. The Jews also brought up the issue of service in the Army.

The Arab students raised issues around immoral acts of the army and questions of the role of the army as an “occupier”. Acts of terrorism and the actions of the army are not seen as different by the Palestinian students. The Jewish students felt that it is not fair that the Arabs are not serving in the Army and they have to do that. This created a great deal of turbulence in the discussions. It brought up issues of morality and humanity, with the group seeking to find who is ‘right’. The Jewish group suggested that the Arabs will do national service instead of going to the army. These were some of the issues that were discussed. The discussion was intense but very honest. Both sides took very seriously the discussions even when there was disagreement between them.

Following these discussions the groups met in **uni-national forums** to discuss and understand the knowledge they gained about the other through their meetings.

For the Palestinians, some of them were very surprised by the lack of knowledge on the Jewish side. They also had to deal with the issue of the language. They felt that they succeeded to express their opinions and it was an empowering experience for them. For most of them it was the first opportunity to talk about those political issues with Jews.

The Jewish group had to deal with the gap between their self image and group image as liberal and democratic and what they heard from the Palestinian group. This dissonance is painful and they spoke about it. They were also surprised by the knowledge and strength of the Palestinian group. They didn't expect to meet such a powerful group.

The second part of the workshop was a simulation game where the group addressed three subjects:

1. Nature of the State
2. Education
3. Symbols and Ceremonies

In the afternoon they participated in a simulation of negotiation about the future relations between Israel and its Palestinian citizens. In the end of the simulation there was a ceremony to present the results of the negotiation.

The group that discussed the **education system** was creative and suggested the following ideas: They suggested that there will be 3 types of schools Jewish schools, Arab schools and bi-national schools and students will choose between them. They agreed that the financial support for the Arab schools should increase. They suggested that all students will have to learn both languages. They also suggested establishing Arab Universities. They agreed that the students should learn history from both perspectives, both narratives. They suggested that students will have to learn about human rights and equality in citizenship classes.

The group that discussed **symbols and ceremonies** succeeded to reach an agreement on the following issues: Arabs should have an opportunity to be president and ambassadors. Regarding the anthem, they suggested that the state will have 3 anthems, a Jewish one (Hatikva), a Palestinian one, and a third common anthem about equality. Which type of anthem will be played depends on the type of event. There was an agreement that something should change in the flag but not everything. About national holidays each national group will mention its national days and there will be another joint holiday that will mention the "agreement of equality".

The third group that negotiated the **nature of the state** didn't reach an agreement. The Jewish participants wanted to keep the definition of Israel as a Jewish state and the Palestinians wanted to change the nature of the state as a state for its all citizens. They also discussed the refugees problem.

Central Issues for the Facilitators

A main dilemma of the Jewish facilitators was how to deal with the racism of some of the Jewish participants. The facilitators said that they needed to contain a lot to include the Jewish group although some of them expressed

racist opinions. What helps is to understand that it is all connected to the new knowledge the Jewish participants got. Mainly the realization that what they thought of their state and their people as democratic and liberal is not the whole picture.

Another dilemma is how much knowledge to add to the group. At some points the facilitators felt they should add knowledge to the students, at other points they decided not to do so in order to not be perceived as one sided by one group or the other.

In summary

The groups worked very impressively throughout the whole workshop. From their letters we can see how much the workshop opened their eyes, how much they have learned about each other, and how much the issues between the two peoples became more complex and more central in their minds.

Quotes from Letters of the Students

Jewish Students:

To tell you the truth I had fears about the seminar. Now after 3 days with you we learned together one about the other and I can tell you honestly that you are amazing people each of you. I am sure that if people like you will continue to represent the Arab population the future in this country will be better for all of us. Each of you brought something different to the seminar and because of that I go out with more knowledge, more than I expected. I hope that you feel the same and see that. In spite of the disagreements and the stormy discussions we actually have a lot in common and together we can bring a real change. I hope we will meet again in the future and thank you for a wonderful enjoyable learning experience.

I wanted to tell you that I have learned a lot about you, your personal life, your social life. I learned that it is not easy for you in our state. You showed it to us in many examples and it created mixed feelings. I wanted to add we are all human beings each of us should get all the rights.

I had an amazing experience that I will not forget. I came with a certain opinion and wanting peace. The dialogue with you caused me to understand that the situation is not simple at all, but I understood much better your situation and the difficulty in which you exist. There were some discussions that were difficult for me and we had disagreements between us sometimes, but I think that both groups spoke to the point. It was very interesting for me to hear what you have to say. I enjoyed very much these 3 days and I can say that I acknowledge your problem and I hope a day will come when coexistence will be possible and we will reach a compromise and peace.

Arab Students:

In this encounter I felt how much the dialogue is important. I know how difficult the political situation is. I do not deny that the dialogue was difficult and part of us was angry about it. We tried to reach solutions even in our imagination but I think it is impossible. The subjects I really loved to talk about are the racist laws that are in the state towards Arabs. I was surprised to see that the Jewish group expressed understanding and awareness towards this.

I understood that the Jewish group does not know about our stress and difficulties that their people are causing us and our brothers outside.

I hope we can reach a fair agreement between the two sides.

First I want to say to you that it was an honor for me to know you and new issues I didn't know before. Without this amazing opportunity to come to sit with you face to face it would not have happened. It was fun for me in spite that it was too short to know you and convince you and the other way around. In the second day we entered deeply the political issues. The discussion on the character of the state was sensitive and difficult and we had a conflict about it between us.

What I am trying to understand is that your answers didn't answer our demands in part of the issues. There were also issues I didn't get answers

from you. It disturbed me a lot. On the other hand you were polite and tried to understand me. You heard my voice without interrupting. You accepted and understood the reason for the tension between us. Thanks you for everything. The discussions in the group gave me a lot. Our group kept its opinion its identity and its nationality. Part of the Jewish group admitted that Israel is a state without democracy and there is racism. The encounter was important to both sides they listened to us and we listened to them. We had arguments but it is natural. All we said in the group will stay in the head of each person that was in the group. The encounter was a wonderful idea we learned a lot. We want peace independence and equality.