



“Collaborate Together”

A New Way for Arab and Jewish Youth Collaboration in
Mixed Cities throughout Israel
Research Report for the US Embassy

Nehaya Awida Haj Yehia & Ariela Bairey Ben Ishay

Beit Berl Academic College

Shira Roth -Research Assistant – BGU

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Executive Summary:

In May 2021, Israel's social fabric was shaken by several consecutive, difficult, and violent events, which began as a response to events on Jerusalem Day and Eid al Fitr. The violence in Jerusalem spread and escalated into a military operation in Gaza, given the name "Guardian of the Walls." At the same time, intense tensions and outbursts of violence took place between Arab and Jewish citizens of Israel, especially in the mixed cities. The events of May 2021, and the riots in the mixed cities in particular, were not only civil acts – they significantly impacted the national level, defined in legal terms as subversive acts against the state. Following these traumatic events, "A New Way" developed, with the support of the US Embassy in Israel, a new project entitled "Collaborate Together". The program aimed to establish joint Arab/Jewish youth leadership groups in mixed cities which would jointly engage together in social actions in their communities. This work would form the basis for reconciliation, mutual understanding, and significant cooperation.

The Program's Rationale:

The idea of the program was to help Jewish and Arab students in the ninth and tenth grades to move from a perception of the "other" which was focused on threat and alienation, to a perception of partnership and cooperation. The challenging and deep process of change touched the open wounds of the mixed cities. The program focused on encouraging Jewish and Arab students to engage together in social action and volunteering in their local communities. **The goal of the project was to make it possible for students to work together for joint goals and to contribute to their community, via social involvement.** The pilot of the program was undertaken in the mixed city of Akko, in four schools: two Arab and two Jewish.

Research Methodology:

The study included semi-structured interviews with two teachers – one Jewish and one Arab, two focus group interviews with students – Arabs and Jews – and a questionnaire that measured change from the beginning to the end of the

process in all the 100 students participants, alongside a control group of 50 nonparticipants from other classes at the same age group and same school.

The Study's Results:

Most of the students asserted that the encounters they had experienced at this age were more successful in terms of gaining awareness and knowledge about the other than ones they had experienced when they were younger. The students noted that they felt more mature and had a better understanding of the context around them. This is an important insight, demonstrating that it is worthwhile prioritizing programs for this age group, when students are more mature and have better social-political awareness. Both the Jewish and Arab students entered the process with apprehensions born of existing prejudice. The direct and interactive encounters helped lower the fears and challenged the stereotypes, helping the students to see each other's' positive aspects.

The Arab students noted that the program helped them feel more comfortable with Hebrew, which was the dominant language in the encounters. Nevertheless, there was disagreement among the Arab students, with some preferring to use Hebrew, since it helped them practice the language, while others felt uncomfortable using it as a primary means of communication.

The Arab students were surprised by the positive reaction to the "Palestinian issue" that some of the Jewish students exhibited or developed through the process. On one occasion, Jewish students even admonished another Jewish student who became angry when Arab students identified as Palestinians. This event was also noted by the Jewish students as a foundational event. They said that understanding that some Arab students identified as Palestinians was very daunting at the beginning. They also reflected, however, that it was very educational. Some of the Jewish students felt that talking about this issue and being able to stand up for their Arab peers' right to identify as Palestinians was an event that brought them together and strengthened their connection.

Throughout the process, the students became more curious about each other and better able to engage in the multi-cultural processes which were at the heart of the project. The quantitative results show a change in attitudes across all the measured parameters, showing that the program was very successful. The perspectives and opinions of the students who participated in the program, as compared to the control group, were much more positive towards each other. Given that there was a great deal of tension within the wider social and political context during the year, including violence in April and May, close to the time that the second questionnaire was administered, these increases are even more noteworthy. It can be assumed that, without the program, the perceptions and opinions of the students would have deteriorated during this period.

It is important to note that the participating classes in the ninth grade were organic class groups. That is, the students did not make an individual choice to participate in the project; indeed, many of them were initially opposed to the process. By the end of the program, however, both the students and the teachers, from all sides, expressed satisfaction at their participation and recommended ways to improve the program going forward, as detailed in the full report, below.

In conclusion, it appears that the process was extremely successful, that the choice of age group was the correct one, and that the nature of the process, which emphasized joint multi-cultural social action in the mixed cities, was very effective. Despite the expressed desire that homeroom teachers' role be expanded, that uni-cultural activities be re-evaluated, and that the use of the Arabic and Hebrew languages be more balanced, the research findings verify the importance of expanding the existing program activities, increasing the number of participants and continuing to strengthen the involvement of local educational teams in the process.

Background:

Israeli society is a multi-cultural society, one full of schisms. The society is characterized by sectionalism and polarization that have been increasing between different social groups (Epstein, 2016; Etzioni-Halevy, 2016). Solidarity between the different sectors of Israeli society has been waning, as has mutual tolerance. This was reflected, for example, in the events of May 2021 (presented in detail below). The weakening of feelings of solidarity between the peoples and the groups that comprise Israeli society is reflected, among other things, in the weakening of the obligation of the country toward its citizens and toward the disadvantaged and marginalized groups. These phenomena are reflected in the weakening of welfare policy, which has been accompanied by significant weakening of the solidarity between people and groups in this society (Swirski, 2016; Yonah, 2016) and was expressed in a sweeping manner in the events of May 2021.

The Events of May 2021 – Specifically in the Ethnically-Mixed Cities

In May 2021, the country of Israel shook, due to the number of ongoing, difficult and violent events that began as a response to Jerusalem Day and Id el Fitr. The violent and tense events in Jerusalem spread and escalated to war and to a military operation with the Gaza Strip, named “Guardian of the Walls.” At the same time, the tension within the country increased and violence between Jewish and Arab citizens of the country erupted, especially in the ethnically-mixed cities. The violent events and shedding of blood appeared to lead the country’s citizens to the threshold of the abyss of a civil war (Mordechai & Bernstein, 2021). The “events of May” 2021, and the riots in the mixed cities, were not solely a citizen event; they were also a significant national event, with legal aspects, as they were acts of undermining of the state. Just as the fighting between the Hamas and Israel in the Gaza Strip in May 2021 was not just another routine “round,” the violent events that took place, mainly in the ethnically-mixed cities close to the time of the fighting with the Gaza Strip, was not just another expression of tension between Jews and Arabs in the never ending story of the ethnic-national conflict within Israel’s borders (Matza, 2021).

As noted above, the events of May 2021 exploded due to the situation and the tense atmosphere in Jerusalem, against the background of the legal dispute over residential rights in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood. The outbursts in Arab society in 2021 were similar to previous outbursts that had occurred in Arab society (1976 – Land Day, 2000 – the October events – al Aqsa). However, the events of 2021 were different from the previous ones, because the violence exploded in the mixed-cities throughout the country, and strayed from the semi-autonomous borders of the communities in the Galilee and Triangle. The outbursts occurred in the Arab periphery, in the places where the population suffers from poverty, and is on the margins of the economic welfare margins of the cities.

Since the riots were in the periphery, Israeli response time was slow. Moreover, it was mainly the security mechanisms that responded to these events, which was derived from the lack of deep understanding about the quality of the unruliness. Many Israelis perceived the events of May 2021 as “another clash” between Jews and Arabs, a kind of small strike to civil society’s wing of co-existence between the two populations. Many people did not understand that these events were part of a larger process, and even if it was not formally planned, it was perceived as much more serious than the routine and spontaneous response of the Arab citizens to the security reality (Matza, 2021).

Arabs and Jews in the “Ethnically-Mixed Cities”

Since the establishment of the state, five cities have been formally defined as mixed cities: Haifa, Jaffa, Lod, Akko and Ramle. Reches (2007) avers that the term, “mixed cities,” is inappropriate, if its goal is to note integration. All of the “mixed” cities are divided cities, and the different communities live in different areas. Reches asserts that the alternative term, “bi-national cities,” more accurately describes the Jewish-Arab relationships in these cities. This reality includes separation between Jews and Arabs in most fields, including housing (as a rule) in different neighborhoods, studying (as a rule) in different schools, and gaps between Jews and Arabs in terms of infrastructure, economics, and education. Most of the Arabs in the mixed cities live in poor and neglected areas (Be’eri-Sulitzianu & Gofer, 2009). Moreover, the Arab populations in the mixed cities have usually experienced neglect

on the part of the national and local governments in education, planning and building, political representation, culture, and responses in the field of welfare (Haj-Yehi et al., 2021).

This evaluation report examined the program in the city of Akko – which was randomly chosen from the cities.

Background to the Uniqueness of Akko

Akko – From a Historical Aspect

In May 1948, the city surrendered to the IDF. After the War of Independence, Jewish immigrants, many of whom were refugees from the Holocaust, were settled in the city in empty apartments in the old city. The judicial area has 17,494.78 dunam and the length of the Mediterranean shore is seven kilometers. The main economic branches are industry, tourism, commerce and services, and Akko has a ranking on the socio-economic cluster of 4. The city has 56,000 residents: 70% are Jewish and 30% are Arab residents (The Akko Municipality website, 2022, akko.muni.il).

Kastan (1993) noted that Akko was the main city of all of *Eretz Yisrael* and had international importance. Due to its geographical location, and since it was a port city, Akko was a target for occupation throughout history. As a result, the changing of populations is one of the historical characteristics of the city.

In May 2021, the city was one of the severe violent centers in Israel during Guardian of the Walls. Hundreds of young people burned cars, businesses and public property. Many Jewish businesses in the old city of Akko were set on fire, including the Jewish-Arab Theater that was a sign of co-existence in the heart of the old city. The information center was destroyed due to these reasons. The sense of ongoing deprivation of the Arab residents, the lack of a horizon that respects the lives of the youth, and a deep sense of despair that they feel, the need for professional training, and for empowering encounters, drugs, delinquency and incitement led the youth to engage in these violent behaviors, who also lack significant educational frameworks. It was reported that in one of the mosques, a cry went out that Jews were burning a mosque, a piece of news that turned out to be false. However, due to this

information, hundreds of people went out to the streets in an uncontrollable violent manner (Hershko, 2021).

The Role of the Educational System in Israel

The educational system is one system that can contribute to the advancement and shaping of social solidarity, tolerance and acceptance of the other. However, there are researchers who aver that the Israeli educational system does not achieve this objective, because it is a mainly public system that is divided into four streams. Three of the educational streams speak Hebrew (secular, religious, and ultra-Orthodox) and one Arabic (Krakowski, 2008). Most of the Arab students who are in the Arab stream will not meet a Jewish student or a Jewish teacher in school, and vice versa (Hager & Jabareen, 2016).

The separation between ethnic groups for the first 18 years of the students' lives distances them from members of the other groups and reinforces stereotypes (Allport, 1954). Nevertheless, it does not appear that there will be a structural change in the Israeli educational system in the near future, such as this, and will require numerous resources and a deep change in thinking. Paul-Binyamin and Reingold (2014) characterized the Israeli educational system as a system that encourages particularistic multi-culturalism: each sector focuses on gaining knowledge of its own culture and is barely exposed to other cultures. In contrast, pluralistic, multi-culturalism is designed for all students and has the goal of exposing them to different cultures. As a result, it aims to raise their level of tolerance for other, different groups.

Programs have been developed for the advancement of shared life. These programs are a result of the awareness of the potential of the contribution from the field of education, in general, and from the educational system, in specific, to further this aim. Via educational means, programs such as these are advanced by the Ministry of Education and by civil and local initiatives. A central component in all of these programs is the perception that the following characteristics are important:

Acquaintance with the culture, the society, the history, the art, the legacy, and the language of the other side, changing attitudes and prejudices, the

importance and the development of cooperation, nurturance of the principle of togetherness...

These can bring Jews and Arabs closer to one another and advance a shared life in Israeli society (Forum for Education for Shared Life, 2016; Israeli Comptroller, 2016; Solomon & Isawi, 2009). This stance is also conspicuous in educational initiatives that work toward the advancement of shared life, such as “A New Way,” in public schools, in general, and in the mixed cities, in specific. This report presents this program.

One of the accepted models of action is based on Contact Theory (Allport, 1954). According to this model, the best way to decrease inter-group hostility is by having members of the groups meet with one another. The argument is that direct contact between these enemy groups will lead to a decrease in stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination (Friedman et al., 2017). According to this approach, contact between groups can be an effective way to improve inter-group relations if it fulfills four main conditions: (a) there is ongoing interpersonal contact; (b) the participants have equal status (symmetry) when their groups meet; (c) the cooperation between members of the two groups works toward a common goal; and (d) there is institutional support and legitimation of the goals of the meeting. There are people who categorize the Contact Hypothesis Model as a model that aspires to maintain the status quo concerning Jewish-Arab relationships. Therefore, it is uninterested in bringing about social-political structural change or changing the character of present-day relations.

The main advantages of the model are the following: the model stresses the shared/common ideas held by members of the two groups and the human level (“we are all people”). As a result, the model contributes to the improvement in the mutual perceptions and the inter-group relationships. It is also possible to reach target audiences that usually avoid participating in encounter projects (for example, due to political views). The main disadvantages of the model are the following: the tendency to ignore aspects of conflict and power relations that are essential to inter-group relations and the opposite. Often, it does not meet the needs of the

group members who want to discuss these aspects concerning Jewish-Arab relations in Israel (Maoz, 2009).

Many studies discuss the importance of encounters between children, adolescents, and grown-ups, who belong to different ethnic and national groups and the positive impact of the encounter (Ministry of Education, 2020). Some of the studies focus on and analyze the encounter between Jews and Arabs in Israel, using Contact Hypothesis and the contribution of the contact as a means for transforming and improving inter-group relationships between ethnic, culture and national groups (Bar & Bar-Gal, 1995; Merushak-Klarmen, 1995). Most of the research that deals with multi-cultural encounters does not discuss the effectiveness and the importance of the contact between groups embroiled in a violent and ongoing conflict and the situation of inequality between groups (Grinberger & Bairey Ben Ishay, 2020).

The current study was undertaken at the request of “A New Way,” as part of a study undertaken by researchers from the “Incubator” at Beit Berl College. The goal was to undertake an external evaluation of a pilot program entitled “Collaborate Together.” The project was carried out with the support of the US Embassy in Israel and aimed to create a strong basis for multi-cultural cooperation between Jewish and Arab youth who live in mixed cities in Israel.

In the project, ninth graders undergo a joint educational process for the advancement of cooperation. At the end of the year, for the first time in Israel, the students can voluntarily choose to continue to work together, to volunteer together, and to shape their local community, where they live, by working 60 hours in a program from the Ministry of Education, “Personal Development and Social Involvement.” This research focused on Jewish and Arab students from four classes in Akko. The classes were randomly chosen from the groups that participated in the program during the 2021-2022 school year.

Research Methodology:

This report is mainly based on the analyses of in-depth, semi-open interviews (Shkedi, 2012) undertaken with the homeroom teachers that accompanied the project and participated in the encounters. We also analyzed the results from focus groups undertaken with students from the classrooms from the Jewish and Arab schools in Akko that represented the participants in the encounters. The study, furthermore, combined quantitative data that were collected by the organization via an anonymous internet questionnaire, created on Google Forms. The questionnaire was sent to the students on their phones. The pre- questionnaire was sent before the first meeting and the post- questionnaire was sent after the last one.

The Research Field and Population:

The Arab School "Alshafi"

The Alshafi School was established 40 years ago. The school, which has six grades, has 1200 students and approximately 120 teachers. Before the school was founded, the students studied in buildings of poor quality and without resources. Today, the school has resources and runs educational and social projects, which have become a routine part of the school. In 2008-2009, the school was awarded "the school of excellence" award in the Ort network. Moreover, for two years, the principal was awarded the prize for the excellent principal.

The Jewish School Kiryat Ort "Rose"

This school has 480 students. The school's vision aspires to provide equal opportunities to all its partners in action/work. The school has declared that it works for an organizational culture based on mutual respect, cooperation, education for respect, and dedication and commitment to this goal. The school works for the advancement of ties with the community by emphasizing inclusion of the other and education for multi-cultural education.

Research Population:

There were 128 students who participated in the program from four classes and four schools. Ninety-eight students chose to answer the internet pre-program

questionnaire and 99 answered the post-program questionnaire. Thirty-six students from the control group also chose to answer a questionnaire. The students from the control group were students in the same schools and the same grades, but from other classrooms, who did not participate in the program. The results from the control group added additional validity to the results from the participants, due to the fact that the months of April-May were very difficult and challenging months in Jewish-Arab relations. It was during this period that there were numerous political, nationalistic-civil events.

The Researchers

The study was a joint project of two researchers, who are Israeli citizens. One is Arab-Palestinian and the other Jewish. Both have years of experience in the field of encounters between the two cultures, with students, in teaching and in shared society life. In addition, a researcher from Ben-Gurion University of the Negev collected the quantitative data.

Findings:

The five core measurements that “A New Way” quantitatively measured via the internet questionnaires, noted above, were:

1. Change in emotional perception – a decrease in negative emotions (anger, fear, hatred) and improvement in positive emotions (concern and appreciation)
2. Improvement in the willingness to meet and in trust-building
3. Capability for engaging in collaboration, or trust in the ability of the Jews and Arabs to work together
4. New knowledge that was attained – knowledge of the culture and interpersonal acquaintances
5. Satisfaction and continuation

This report also addresses three main, relevant measurements – themes – for the current year, both in terms of the quality of the program and its achievement of the goals, and in terms of the change of attitudes and prejudices, satisfaction, and the desire for collaboration and continuation.

1. Changes in prejudice and emotional perception:

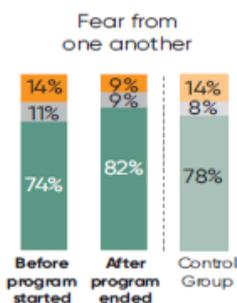
The first result concerns the feeling of anger – in the beginning of the year, 63% replied that they were neither angry nor had a low level of anger. At the end of the year, 66% of the participants noted this. At the end of the year, only 44% in the control answered that they did not feel angry or only felt a low level of anger. We can understand from these results that despite the violent events in Akko, the participants retained their feelings of lack of anger, while in the control group, there was an increase of 20%, who experienced anger. It is possible that the intervention helped the students process the events. Furthermore, their personal acquaintances helped moderate the anger and their direct contact with the other side made direct and open discussion possible.

The second result addresses the emotion of hatred-At the beginning of the year, 40% of the participants answered that they did not have any feelings of hatred

(the first measurement) toward the other side. At the end of the year, 51% gave this response. We can conclude from this result that there was an increase of 10% among the participants in the project concerning lack of hatred for the other side. In the control group, 25% reported that they did not feel hatred at all (the first measurement) toward the other side. In other words, due to the group encounters, the feeling of hatred decreased. However, among the students who did not participate in the project, the decrease in students who felt anger was larger than those who did participate. In other words, there was an increase in the feeling of hatred among the members of the control group.

The third measurement examined the feeling of fear- It was found that at

the beginning of the year, 74% reported that either they did not feel fear at all, or felt so, only to a low degree. At the end of the year, 82% expressed this opinion. In the control group, at the end of the year, 78% reported that they did not feel fear. Furthermore, 14% of the participants reported that they felt fear to a great or to a very great degree at the beginning of the year and 14% from the control group reported this feeling at the end of the year. However, at the end of the year, 9% of the participants gave this response. In other words, the participants experienced less fear at the end of the project. The control group expressed fear at the end; however, there was not a major change in their views from the beginning of the year.



We see that in all of the measurements, there was an improvement from the beginning of the year until the end, even if, at times, the differences were small. The fact that there was an improvement in all the measurements demonstrates that a significant transformation occurred among the participants. They related differently to the events that unfolded, in comparison to the control group, and their responses colored some of the responses to the measurement in a more significant manner. The participants engaged in work in pairs and this work focused on different aspects of school life

The qualitative results

One very important finding concerned the success of the program. The participants experienced a breaking of ice and release from feelings of fear and threat. During an exchange visit between the classes, participants noted that they sat together and felt comfortable. One student noted how important the encounters were and remembered what the participants did on the informal level with members of the other group:

I remember that in all of the encounters, they would usually agree to come and sit with us and talk together... and we took them for a tour of our school and we showed them the classrooms... it's good and nice that we became friends...

Most of the students asserted that from their experiences, the meeting at this age is more successful and effective, in terms of awareness and getting to know the other. This is because they are more mature and better understand Hebrew and Israeli politics. One Arab student said:

I was in an encounter with Jews twice in the past... once in the fourth grade and once in the sixth grade and this time in the ninth grade ... and there's a difference between the meetings in the past and the meeting today [...] because this time we are "bigger" and aware, and we talk more. When we were in the fourth grade, we didn't know how to talk to one another, our Hebrew wasn't good and we didn't know how to relate/ behave with them [...] today we are more cognitively "developed." For example, I mean, when we were in the fourth grade, we would say Palestine and fight with them ... now, it's different... we don't talk about the story because we know that it will make problems for us and therefore we "distance/avoid" talking about political issues so there won't be a problem and therefore we don't talk about these topics.

From the student's words, the wisdom concerning age, maturity, political awareness and knowledge of the Hebrew language were noticeable. He noted how they played a role in the ability to derive something good from the encounter and to contribute to it as well. The meetings taking place during the project were perceived as being more successful than the ones that had taken place in the past, due to the participants' maturity and age.

The results also showed that both groups came to the encounter with fears and thoughts concerning expectations, prejudices and fears, but their content was different. One Arab student said that she thought that all the Jews did not like/were afraid of Arabs and do not want to get close to them:

Once when I was at the mall with my mother and we sat down next to Jews and they immediately got up ... I thought that all the Jews don't like Arabs, but after the meetings with the Jews and they sat with us, I knew that not all the Jews are the same and that's like it is with the "bad" Arabs; there are also bad Jews... not everyone is the same.

To the student's surprise, due to the meetings, she shared that her impression had changed, and she understood that not all Jews hate Arabs: "there are those who are good and like and know Arabs."

One of the most interesting results concerned the change in prejudice. One of the Arab students noted that he always thought that the religious Jews hate Arabs. In the encounters, his previous images were shattered. He changed his attitudes concerning religious people and was surprised to learn that in the group, there was a religious boy who wore a *kipa* (Jewish make skullcap). The Arab student was surprised to discover that the religious boy cooperated and played with them. The student said: "There was a religious Jew among them and I thought that the religious hate us, but he would participate with us and do the same activities." Many students came with many expectations and prejudices; the project, and the direct and interactive encounters changed many stigmas for the better.

In a parallel fashion, the Jewish children said that before they went to the meeting, they were afraid there would be violence. They were afraid there would be

“fights” between the children and even attacks or instigated beatings: “We were afraid that they would hit us, that they would attack us, like the violence that there was in the city this year.” A student continued: “to our surprise, it was completely different. They were nice, they were very interested in us and they were very polite. All of our fears were proven false.”

There was willingness and a sense of security to invite children to one’s home or to accept an invitation to visit the other. For both groups, the encounter succeeded “in breaking the ice” and decreasing the feelings of fear and threat. The students even demonstrated their willingness to invite the others to their homes and to be guests in the others’ homes: “Yes. I would go visit a Jewish home.” Another student said that he had no problem visiting, but that he needed to arrange the issue of food beforehand: “Yes [...] and it depends on the kind of food that will be served. I’m not used to all kinds of food.”

To summarize, all the Arab students responded positively concerning their willingness to visit a Jewish home.

In their answer to the question if they would invite children from the other side to visit their homes, most of the students answered that they would be glad to:

Yes... why not? Our home is like their home ... all of the homes are the same... and all of the families are the same ... there’s no difference, but they need to accept certain things that we don’t accept ... there are different opinions...

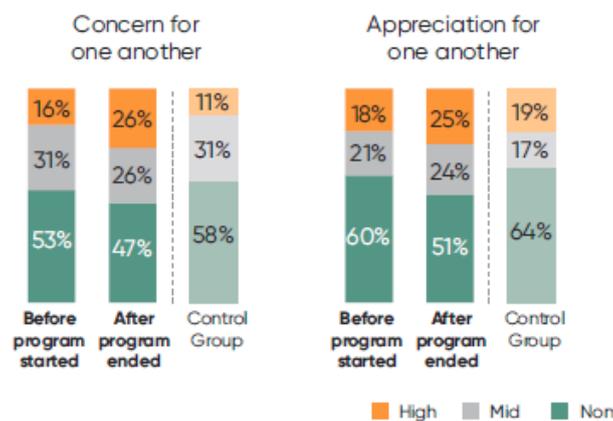
This answer was accompanied by many signs of a change of attitude and opinion. The student asserted that all the houses, whether they are Arab or Jewish, are the same and that Arabs and Jews are similar, except for differences in some norms and values.

The fourth result examined the “positive feelings.” The organization examined the change in the level of care and respect for the other side. It was found that, in the beginning, the level of care (to a great degree or to a very great degree)

was only 16%. At the end of the year, this percentage rose to 26%. Only 11% of the control group reported agreement with this stance!!

In contrast, at the beginning of the year, 53% reported that they did not feel concern for the other side (measurement number 1&2). At the end of the year 47% reported this stance. The control group reported a significant lack of concern: 58%. In light of the events of April and May, we can assume that if there had not been a program, even the students who did participate in the project would have demonstrated lack of concern when, in effect, the exact opposite occurred. Moreover, it was found that at the beginning of the year, 18% of the participants reported a high or very high level of respect and appreciation for members of the other group, while at the end of the year, 25% of this group reported this.

A significant result in the control group was that 64% reported that they did not feel respect and appreciation for members of the other group (measurement number 1&2). 51% of the students in the program reported this feeling, 9% lower of the result at the beginning of the year (60%). In general, there was an improvement in the positive feelings: at the beginning of the year, the mean was 2.383, at the end of the year, it was 2.631, while in the control group, it was 2.069 (out of 5)



The students, as well as the teachers, stressed the effectiveness of the activities that were undertaken in small groups, in which they played games and there was a high level of interaction. The Arab educators noted that the uniqueness of the program was that it was practical and that this was the secret of its success. The activities were more effective when they connected different students:

The uniqueness of this program was the practical part of the program ... it was a lot of fun, and the students really enjoyed it ... I felt that the practical part was more effective when it connected [the students] more so that when they sat together in a circle and talked ... the activities had a bigger effect than the talk ... because the practical causes them to connect to one another and to mix more together and in my opinion, it helps them get closer to one another ...

According to the students and the teachers, the guided activities in small groups made it possible to get to know one another and to create closeness. Another result that was shared by members of the two cultures was the satisfaction from participation in certain activities. Both groups remembered and especially liked the practical activities: they especially liked the Escape Room activity, an activity outside of the school that required involvement and cooperation, and the feeling of joint success excited the students, making them very happy. The participants asserted that the activities and the games had a stronger effect on the connection and cooperation between the Arab and Jewish students. One Arab participant said:

We remember when we went to the encounter and there was an Escape Room; that was a lot of fun and we had a really good time and there wasn't discrimination/a difference between Arabs and Jews. We were really together and we helped one another as Arabs and as Jews ... and all of the groups that were there, the Arabs and the Jews were helping one another ... I was one Arab girl with three Jewish boys ... and I had a really good time, and they really helped me and we connected.

2. Improvement in the willingness to meet and in trust-building:

In contrast to the Jewish students, who had not met children from the other group before, most of the Arab students had been in contact with Jewish students and/or participated in bi-national encounters. This is not a surprising finding, mainly since they live together in the same city:

The first time that I was in a meeting with Jews was when I was in the sixth grade [...] they brought us into a room, at their school, for art and we began to draw ... and there's a difference between the encounter today and the encounter in the past ... I felt that we got to know each other better in our meeting in the ninth grade...

In a parallel fashion, some of the Jews surprised the Arab students, in a positive manner. One such response occurred after some of the Jewish students condemned a Jewish student who became angry that the Arab students identified with the Palestinian people. An Arab student shared that she was always curious about getting to know Jews and, therefore, was happy to meet Jewish students. To her surprise, she discovered that there are Jews who are in favor of the "Palestinian issue."

I didn't have too much curiosity about meeting them and what they are like, I knew. But when I met them, I learned new things and I became more curious. For example, because there are Jews who are in favor of the "Palestinian topic."

This event was also noted by Jewish students as a foundational event in the project. The beginning was scary, but it was also very instructional and, for some of the participants, it made closeness possible and strengthened them. On the one hand, one student noted that:

We were in shock; how is this connected now to Palestinians? It raised grievances and there was a fight and we got angry, and it pretty much ruined the atmosphere and there was tension and we were, like, from both sides of the barricade and it wasn't pleasant.

As an answer, one of the student's group members said to her:

We also sometimes fight and don't think the same on everything, when we fight, we even don't speak to one another for a few days, but then we talk and we clarify things, understand each other and make up. That's how it is between people and it's natural and it didn't ruin it for me that we talked about politics. We also need to talk about politics. The most important thing is the basis of the connection and that's the basis of the conflict between us. I mean, as people. Otherwise, it's inauthentic. But, it's a shame that it happened during the break and none of the adults were with us in order to help us communicate with one another. A few guys got angry and lost their patience and didn't return to the encounters. That's a shame.

Acquiring New Things:

When we enquired about the goals of the program, the participants raised different and diverse directions. However, their words were clear and there was consensus: the goals of getting to know the other, respecting the other, and advancing co-existence were successfully transmitted to the students. An Arab student said: "The goal, in my opinion, was co-existence with the Jews." Another student added that the goal was acceptance of the other: "We should accept the other." The students clearly summarized the encounter as successful and enjoyable. The essence of the positive experience that remained with them was the following:

At the last meeting, we were in the Escape Room. We were mixed, Arabs and Jews and we were fine together [...] we were friends during the game [...] and each one received help from the other during the game, we were friends, like, friends for a long time.

Another student added that there was real mutual understanding between the students: "there was understanding between us [...] for example, in the past, I wasn't ready to eat at a Jew's house and they were the same, they wouldn't agree. But in this project, when they brought food, we ate together." One of the Jewish students said:

It seems to me that the goal was to have the cultures become closer to one another, to accept the different, to help us integrate into a mixed society.

Look, in Akko's old city, where the Arab sector lives and we are divided and don't know one another. Most of our acquaintance is in school, and at our school there are no Arabs.

Another student said:

Perhaps the goal was to shatter stigmas, to show other sides that they don't know about us and that we don't know about them. We came with stigmas; for example, I always thought that it was they who did not want to get close to us or they were violent toward us, or they didn't want to connect to us. We discovered that a lot in this project wanted to get close to us and get to know us.

Yet another student explained further:

They have a different culture. There are things that we are used to, but not for them. We wrote questions and so did they. They asked us if it was acceptable for there to be couples at this age. They were surprised to learn that we could. They asked about food and about the family, about our holidays. We even talked about politics.

In the end, what the children remembered were the relations, which were not defined as a goal, but which left the impression that appeared to be taken into the soul of the participants who dedicated themselves to the process. Toward the end of the project, an Arab student made a side comment in a clear and touching voice: "When we visited the Jewish school [...] everything was okay [...] they respected us [...] they treated us very nicely [...] and it was really good, and we didn't feel alienation." What else could we ask for as a basis for a human encounter, against the background of tension and an ongoing conflict that cannot be controlled by the ordinary citizen?

The development of understanding, awareness, and multi-cultural empathy:

Some of the students noted that they succeeded in developing understanding, awareness, and multi-cultural empathy to a high degree. One student said:

The way that adults think is different than young people... each person thinks something else ... for example older people are more aware/developed than we are when they see an Arab; not everyone moves away and not everyone comes closer ... what I mean is that their intelligence is more developed, and they know that not all of the Arabs are enemies.

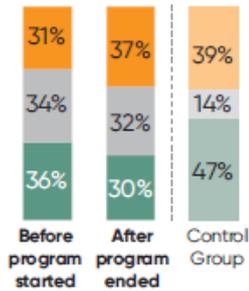
Another student noted an important and interesting finding about the importance of the program: the previous generation, the people who are older than them, were educated and raised on hatred of the other, seeing them as enemies. She stated: "The adults, their intelligence/awareness is different from that of young people ... because the young people were educated about this 'racism'." In the end, as a result of the project, the students reached the conclusion that not all Jews hate Arabs and understood the importance of the encounter and co-existence.

+20%
(compared with non-participants peers)
Willingness for future
encounters

It was also found that at the end of the project, over 75% of the participants expressed willingness to meet with members of the other group and expressed trust in them. In the beginning of the year, 41% were willing to meet and at the end of the year, 42% were willing, as compared to 23% from the control group. Moreover, at the beginning of the year, 23% were willing to host members of the other group in their homes and at the end of the year, this number had risen slightly to 25%. In the control group, 17% were willing to host. The results showed that the students, who were not willing at all to host, demonstrated a bigger change: at the beginning of the year, 44% were not at all willing to be hosts, while at the end of the year, this number decreased to 38%. In the control group, 44% continued to express their unwillingness to host members of the other group in their home.

3. Capability for engaging in collaboration, or trust in the ability of the Jews and Arabs to work together

Cooperation & Ability to Collaborate



The question that examined the willingness to engage in collaboration or trust in the ability of the Jews and Arabs to cooperate with one another garnered 31% support at the beginning of the year and 37% at the end. On the other end of the equation, while, at the beginning of the year, 36% of the participants stated that they did not believe – or believed to a very small extent – that Jews and Arabs can cooperate with one

another, at the end of the year, 30% reported these opinions. In the control group, 47% noted this.

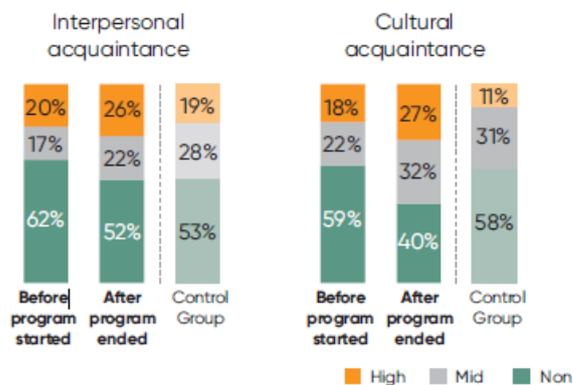
Students from both groups agreed that the joint activities were the most successful and the most interesting:

The multi-cultural meetings were very interesting, especially the ones where we played and worked together with one another, when there was a need to do things and to participate together, to compete or to solve a task. The nicest was to participate together as a one mix group in the ODT competition outside. We laughed so much, and the nicest thing was that we succeeded and won as one group.

Another very successful activity that was noted by members of the two groups was the Escape Room.

It was challenging, it forced us to work as a team, and even if we couldn't always understand one another because of the language, the joint task connected us and we found a way to communicate – with hands, eyes, everything!

4. New knowledge that was attained – knowledge of the culture and interpersonal acquaintances



Most of the students from the two ethnic-religious groups noted that the encounter contributed to the enrichment of their knowledge about the other group – both in terms of norms and in terms of their holidays. One Arab student said: “When we had the meeting about their culture and holidays ... they would tell us about a holiday, and it was new for us.” The students also saw that the

other side was interested and learned about the Arab culture and boys- girls' relations: “They asked us if it is acceptable that boys and girls will be boy/girlfriends and be together in public alongside everyone, we answered them that this is not acceptable in our culture.”

The teens also talked about surprises that arose in the meetings. One Arab student added that they surprised them when they answered that, in their society, it is a social custom to bring the boyfriend/girlfriend home to meet the family: “In their culture it is acceptable that the girl bring the boyfriend to her parents’ home. In our culture, it’s not. That was strange for them.” Another student said that the Jews were interested to know if there is a separation in the schools between the boys and the girls, like in the Jewish religious schools. They answered: “They asked us if in our schools, girls are separate from the boys ... because in their religious [schools], there’s a separation. ... we don’t have a separation.”

The two groups remembered the names of many children from the other group. They remembered specific experiences that they had together, and they felt that friendship or a basis for friendship was established.

5. Satisfaction and continuation:

We will begin with the words of the students that opened the discussion with the unequivocal statement: “it was definitely worth it – we will recommend to our friends to participate in the activities.”

There is no doubt that the project was important and effective, and the students felt that it was good to participate

All the Arab and Jewish students and teachers reported – either in the interviews, in the focus groups, or via our observations – that they recommend continuing the activities. Moreover, they would recommend the project to their friends, and some were even interested in continuing in the project in the next year. In the focus group, one Jewish student said:

The meetings are really important, from close up, when we play and talk. Even someone who didn’t want to attend, in the end, got something out of it. It was worthwhile and it’s very important. It’s important that all the classes participate and that it won’t be voluntary. It’s important for everyone. At least, to begin in the project, to try, to give it a chance.

When asked if they would agree to go into the classrooms of the younger grades and tell them about the experience, before the coming year, the students said that they would be happy to do so and would recommend to their friends to participate in the project.

We examined the level of satisfaction and continuation. At the end of the program, 74% of the participants expressed satisfaction from taking part in the multicultural program – 49% expressed high and very high satisfaction, and 25% reported a medium level of satisfaction, for a total of 74%.

Looking toward the nearer and more distant future:

Thirty-seven percent (31 students) expressed a very strong or strong desire to continue to another year in the program.

The Arab students said: “The meeting opened up in us curiosity about the Jews and some of us have the desire to continue to get to know them.” One student said that he wanted to continue: “Yes ... I signed up to continue in the program

37%
(Target rate: 25%)
Desire for 2nd year
participation

next year [...].” Another student said that most of his class was interested in continuing the next year: “Most of us want to continue next year.” There were only two girls who came to very few meetings with the Jewish students. “Yes, there were two girls; perhaps they came once to a meeting.” The students tried to explain why these girls avoided the meeting and refused to register for the coming year. They said that it was because they wore the hijab. One student said:

They were both religious with a veil ... we don't know what the reason is for their objection to the meeting, perhaps fear or fear because they wore a veil. Fear of the Jews or worry that they would be afraid of them [...] we tried to convince them, and they refused. They didn't say what the reason was.

When we asked them about how they thought the experience of participating in the encounter would influence them in the future, the students appeared to be very interested in answering. “It depends when.” One student said:

I am certain that the meeting will accompany me in the future. I'll have a more open mind and will feel more comfortable in future situations. The meeting gave me security to initiate discussions, and not to be separate. This experience will follow us. No doubt. I don't know what it will be like for me in the army, or if it will influence me.

Another student said:

I don't know. I think that if we will be on a trip somewhere or at the university and there will be Arabs with us, the encounter has given me the confidence to go over to them and to ask what's your name and where are you from. I still have many questions that I didn't have time to ask, or I was afraid. I hope that I will have more courage to ask questions like that in the future.

To summarize, for members of both groups, the encounter between the Arabs and the Jews, with all its complexities, was perceived by the participants as a positive experience and one that led to a number of changes in past prejudices. Even if the teacher thought that the change was small, because of the short

duration, these small signs point to a chance and hope for a bigger change in the future, if the program will continue.

Summary, conclusions and recommendations

During the research, several points were raised that demonstrated that the program succeeded from the students' and teachers' perspective. To a great extent, and on a number of levels, the program created a meaningful experience. There were also some difficulties that need to be addressed. In this section, we summarize the positive points of the project (based on the students' and teachers' responses), we discuss the difficulties that we recommend examining and offer thoughts about ways to deal with them in a more successful manner.

In our assessment, the results showed that, overall, the pilot program was successful. However, it is important that the organization improve its coping with some of the challenges noted in this report. It is interesting that three out of the four necessary components for improving inter-group relations – having a common goal, engaging in interpersonal interaction and intensive involvement in small groups, and having the schools encourage the encounter and the continuation of the project – as noted by Allport (1954) – were mentioned in the participants' narrative, as strong points of the project. However, the fourth condition - symmetry between the groups – was not expressed by the participants.

Now More than Ever:

The two teachers agreed that during the period of violence, the project was needed more than ever before. There was awareness of the importance of the program and its goals during such a sensitive period in Israel, in general, and in the ethnically mixed cities, in specific, especially after the events of May 2021, in which Arabs and Jews attacked one another and the security situation in the country was very precarious. The Arab teacher said: "There is no doubt that this program is very important ... because sometimes there is a "maintaining/caution," for example, this program came/began during a very difficult period, when there were "events" and

attacks of Palestinians in a Jewish city.” A Jewish teacher emphasized the fears and suspicion that arose because of the attacks on restaurants and businesses:

It’s very important for the students to know the difference between the mobs that lose control and go wild, who let their instincts ignite and get carried away, and the person who chooses dialogue. I want our students to know from close up, who will know that there are students from the other side who want peace and will act with restraint if there will be more riots. They should have independent thinking and not be carried away to violence.

Development of Responsibility for Getting to Know the Other, to Communicate with the Other and to Develop Cooperation and Co-existence

As a result of the encounter, most of the students reached the conclusion that acquaintance and co-existence between Arabs and Jews is important and vital, especially in the mixed cities, since the two groups live in the same urban space. One student emphasized: “Yes [...] we need to, because we live in a shared country, we need to know one another.” Another student discussed the civil importance of getting to know one another: “Yes ... especially due to the situation in which we live [...] if we continue this way, we won’t be able to live here.” Another student summarized and asserted that there was importance to try to communicate with one another, in order to live together: “We need to try to communicate with one another and to know one another so that we can live together.”

Recommendations:

It is important to maintain the following:

1. To continue holding active activities, that are game-like, challenging, and that encourage cooperation that are undertaken outside the school, and in small groups (such as ODT, Escape Room and games). These activities were positively rated. It is recommended to expand this component and to decrease the open discussions held in a circle, in which many participants were passive.

2. Maintaining and expanding the component of sharing (that is, the meeting between the two groups). Without a doubt, this was experienced as the most meaningful and experiential. It is recommended to expand this component of the program, in more meetings and for longer periods of time.
3. The importance of the project in a mixed city. During the entire study, the importance of the project was emphasized, especially during the tense and conflictual period. It is recommended to continue the activities and even expand them.
4. The timing, age, and maturity of the students were appropriate for both groups. Moreover, the teachers proposed continuing with a project for students who are mature enough to cope in a mature way with the challenges and the complex topics.
5. The importance of the principals' and the teachers' belief in the project as a key factor for the project's success. It is important to recruit schools and teachers for the project who will encourage participation and who are aware of the importance of encounters between Arabs and Jews and of the importance of co-existence for the continuation and survival of Israel, in general, and the mixed cities, in specific.
6. Success in developing civil "responsibility – it is worthwhile to further develop this, and to create many more connections between the personal experience and the civil reality and activism for the advancement of civil equality.

It is important to deepen the thought about the following:

1. The languages of the encounters: It is worthwhile considering the place of the Hebrew and Arabic languages, and perhaps, English, as well, in the group meetings. The participants noted that Hebrew was the dominant language in the meetings, and they raised different issues connected to this. There is a need to further discuss language use and to make a decision about the concrete and symbolic significance of Hebrew and Arabic in activities. How much emphasis is placed on communication, understanding, and the symbolic message of both languages? How should the project use the languages to advance its values, such as the value of equality?

2. The nationality of the teacher in the project and the significance of this group affiliation in uni-national activities. This issue requires deep thinking about the goals of the uni-cultural meetings and the desired discourse in them, including the identity of the mentor.
3. The ways in which the counselors in the project relate to what happens spontaneously in the encounter and turning this into material for the workshops: the participants noted latent behaviors of which they were aware, but were not related to in an open manner. For example, the counselors did not relate to the fears of the Jewish children in Hebrew or the speaking of Arabic of the Arab children. It is important to think about how to openly deal with these feelings and interpretations, to help and to increase the feeling of authenticity. It is important to directly clarify the relevant issues with the participants.
4. The ability to deal with events in the field: the people who ran the program were able to deal with the sensitive problems/events, on the national, identity and political levels. "In my opinion, it is important to deal with this in a deep and timely manner before the situation escalates. This is especially important in this present-day period. Because of the situation, we need more programs such as these" (the Arab teacher). It is important to note and to think about developing a multi-cultural, respectful dialogue and to accept the other from a place of equal respect and acknowledgment.
5. To learn more about the sensitivities of adolescents and processes that are characteristic of this age. It is important that formal and informal education for adolescents provides balance. It is important that the teachers/principals believe in the goals of the program and that there be awareness of the consequences of the conflict, in terms of the psychological-social-economic effects on the students. There is importance in arousing awareness and the expression of empathy and emotional understanding of the youth, given the developmental stage, in which they are also developing their own identity. It is necessary to be sensitive to these factors and to think about how to deal with the issues in a deeper way and to provide students with tools for coping with exclusion of the other. This is a vital topic in education, one that can deal

with the phenomena of social boycotts and shaming that often characterizes youth of these ages.

It is important to change and improve the following:

1. Initiating dealing with questions of identity and the political reality. Most of the students and the two teachers noted that students themselves raised the Palestinian question and the component of Palestinian nationality; that is, the program organizers did not initiate discussion of these issues despite the fact the youth were preoccupied about them. These issues must be addressed as a planned and intentional part of the curriculum, and it is important to think about how to deal with them in an initiated manner, and not just after there is a “blow-up” or a crisis.
2. The need to examine the contents and processes in the activities, separately with each group (uni-cultural activities). The uni-cultural activities are perceived by the participants as long, relatively boring, and less effective or necessary. It is recommended to consider shortening them and to transform them into more experiential activities or to let their own homeroom teacher run the activity so that it will be more "authentic" and "effective". It is also worthwhile considering strengthening the ties between the counselors of the program and the group, so that the process will be experienced as more significant by the students themselves.
3. A permanent counselor who does not change during the process. It is important to create trust and connection, to improve the group work and to create a deep and meaningful process. We recommend having the facilitators be a constant presence and have less turnover of group leaders.
4. It is recommended to add some more practical parts to the program.

There should be more practical activities ... in a more intensive way [...] that is, for example, to provide more possibilities to exchange telephone numbers because if there are those who want to call one another and will do it as a group ... maybe half of the group will leave the group ... but at least we will try to give them the opportunity to acquire more new friends and that will have a positive impact ... that

is, we won't only bring them together ... but, rather give them the chance/opportunity to continue on alone together, without us (Homeroom teacher).

5. The role of the teacher: How can we strengthen the teachers, recruit them for more, perhaps invest in training or in a deeper process, so that they will be more significant figures in the project, since they are central figures for the students and significantly influence their lives. It is important to find the way to help them become more active participants in the project, beyond undertaking the technical administration, especially in the uni-cultural activities and, especially, when there is turn-over of the counselors in the organization.
6. To pay attention to the gender and nationality basis when dividing the participants into small groups. It is important when dividing the participants into groups to take note of the heterogeneity and create mixed and balanced groups – in terms of nationality and gender and in terms of equality between the cultures.
7. Awareness of the asymmetrical relations between Jews and Arabs in Israel: for example, the country is characterized by relations between the minority and the majority, fear of the police and from surveillance by the General Security Services. Perhaps, there is room to discuss these issues in the uni-national groups, since it was raised in the focus groups. The Arab participants noted that they are more suspicious and are more fearful of the police and the security services in Israel.
8. If possible, it is important to learn about the diversity of populations within each sub-sector of society (religious people, *Mizrahim*, *Ashkenazim*, *Felahim*, *Bedouin*). This can help raise awareness about the heterogeneity in identities and dress and to understand meanings, such as traditional dress (e.g., the *hijab*).

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