

## Students from Amal's Jewish and Arab schools are working together to build a stronger society

Amal's Comprehensive High School in Taibeh and Amal's Lady Davis High School in north Tel Aviv are less than 20 miles apart and have much in common. Both boast outstanding educational curricula and award-winning students; both promote creative programs and projects that enrich the learning experience. But until two resourceful teachers put together a unique curriculum, there was little chance that the teens would meet and interact, even less that they would come to understand and appreciate the individual and particular worlds their peers inhabit.

After meeting with Dr. Ronit Ashkenazi, Amal's Pedagogical Director, it took Amos Saban, a history teacher at Lady Davis, and Abba Hajyhia, a civics teacher in Taibeh, almost a year to put together

a syllabus that would fulfill their personal goal of breaking down the barriers between Taibeh's Arab students and Lady Davis' Jewish ones. It was a learning experience for the educators as well. "It was the first time I had the opportunity to build a curriculum together with an Arab woman teacher," Mr. Raban said, voicing his admiration and appreciation of his partner in this undertaking.

Their pilot project involves 30 boys and girls from each school. In the beginning, the two teachers exchanged roles, traveling to the other's classroom, presenting their students with information and knowledge about their two societies – the history and religion; customs and characteristics; norms and values.

In regular classroom sessions, Ms. Hajyhia teaches her students about Israeli Jews and Mr. Raban teaches his about Israeli Arabs. Each of them augments their knowledge with professional input. Mr. Raban has a mentor from Tel Aviv University; Ms. Hajyhia works with a Reform rabbi.

"This is more than a coexistence project," Mr. Raban says. "This is about creating a civic society that encompasses Israeli Arabs and

Israeli Jews, who know and understand each other." He noted that most Jewish schools allocate four hours to explaining Arab society. Their project devotes 20 hours, along with six hours on Islam.

"Amos and I did the right thing," Ms. Hajyhia says. "I believe educators can change perceptions, teach students to become better citizens, more tolerant, more democratic. I know that the moment you meet and understand a person, views change, things become different."

They began the project last September by exchanging videos of New Year greetings in the appropriate language. Since then the two groups have met quite a few times in each other's schools. Like the message the course conveys, their initial interaction was face to face, not electronic. Despite some teenage awkwardness and preconceived concepts, "the kids really connected," the two teachers reported.

Next year they plan to bring the two classrooms together in a different format – with Jewish and Arab students engaged in a joint project, possibly learning how a law comes into being and monitoring how it is enforced.



Fun and games enhance the challenging interactive effort

