

Common Ground Between Three Cultures

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ABSTRACT

The Triwizard program with Israel brought together students from three different communities: an Israeli Arab school, an Israeli Jewish school, and an American public school with few Jews and even fewer Muslims. The two Israeli groups met in Israel to find common ground and overcome their differences through dialogue and understanding. They communicated with the American school via technology such as video-conferencing, Skype, and emails. The program culminated with a visit to the U.S. The goal of the program was to embark upon a process that would bring about intercultural awareness and acceptance at the subjective level, guiding all involved to develop empathy and an insider's view of the other's culture.

It was an attempt to have a group of Israeli high school students and a group of Arab Israeli students who had a fearful, distrustful perception of each other find common ground and become friends.

TriWizard was designed to have participants begin a dialogue about issues, beliefs, and emotions based on the premise that cross-cultural training strategies that are effective in changing knowledge are those that engage the emotions, and actively develop empathy and an insider's views of another culture focused on what they have in common. Participants learned that they could become friends despite their cultural differences.

Keywords: coexistence; cross-cultural; culture; high school; Israel

INTRODUCTION

For two years, Jewish, Christian, and Muslim teenagers from ORT Darsky School in Akko, ORT Hilmi Shafi School in Akko, and Glen Oak School in Canton, Ohio studied about tolerance, human dignity, and living in coexistence in a program entitled TriWizard. TriWizard, in J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter books, is the name given to a tournament that consists of three difficult tasks that included students from three different communities. The Triwizard program with Israel brought together students from three different communities: an Israeli Arab school, an Israeli Jewish school, and an American public school with few Jews and even fewer Muslims. The two Israeli

groups met in Israel to find common ground and overcome their differences through dialogue and understanding. They communicated with the American school via technology such as videoconferencing, Skype, and emails.

To conclude the process, a delegation of ten teens, Jews, Christians and Muslims chosen from the two Israeli groups, accompanied by three teachers visited the communities of Louisville, Canton, and Akron in Ohio. The delegation, hosted in family homes, met with the young people with whom they worked in Canton and presented the idea of coexistence to various forums in educational institutions, synagogues, churches and mosques [13].

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The October 2000 events that resulted in the killing of thirteen Arab citizens by Israeli security forces immediately brought turmoil to Arab-Jewish relations in Israel. The subsequent boycott of the Israeli elections in 2001 by 80% of the Arab voters reflected the depth of the crisis as it was the first time in the history of the Arab-Jewish relations that such a widespread boycott took place. The events also left an indelible mark on the field of coexistence. In addition to disillusionment with Oslo and its peace agreements, the October 2000 events brought dialogue and encounter methods into public debate among Arabs in Israel.

In Israel there are significant historical, cultural, religious and social differences between the ethnic groups that make up the mosaic of Israeli society. Many writers have pointed to the central role of the education system in challenging existing negative stereotypes and advancing perceptions that are more egalitarian, and focus on emotions and attitudes [1; 10; 15; 16]. Some have suggested that the current state of the Israeli education system—necessarily a reflection of state policies—is partially to blame for the negative intergroup perceptions, emotions, and attitudes of Jews and Arab [3; 9; 17].

Numerous educational programs for peace, coexistence and dialogue between Israeli Arabs and Jews have been reported [7; 8; 5; 11; 22]; however, most did not report a meaningful success. Bar and Bargal [4] argue that most of the encounter's effect is lost or forgotten within a few months, prompting encounter program participants to return to their previous negative or stereotypical attitudes. Other critics, however, offer a more positive view, arguing

that graduates of cultural encounters generally retain their newly formed positive outlook, but simply do not have the forum or framework to engage in any meaningful activity to promote political or social change [1].

The goal of the program was to embark upon a process that would bring about intercultural awareness and acceptance at the subjective level, guiding all involved to develop empathy and an insider's view of the other's culture. The question was whether or not a group of Israeli and a group of Arabic high school students who had a fearful, distrustful perception of each other could find common ground and become friends. To answer that question, the researchers, an Israeli man and an Arab-American woman representing the complex diverse participants, conducted the study of a program designed to build friendships and trust between two groups of high school students. One group is comprised of Jewish, the other of Arabic students. The two groups interacted with each other in a structured program, along with a group of American high school students.

"Partnership with Israel" is a program of the Jewish Agency in Israel and the United Jewish Communities in the United States and other western countries established in 1994. Partnership programs exist between Jews in Israel and those in other countries, where each learns about the other's similarities and differences. The Partnership between the Western Galilee and Canton (plus some 14 other communities in the Central Region) has organized twinning programs between classes in various schools in both countries. Until 2005, these included only Jewish schools in the Western Galilee mostly with public schools in Canton.

Beginning in 2002, twinning classes were paired by the Project Director in the Western Galilee and the Education Coordinator for the Canton Jewish Community. With the participation of the principals and teachers of the schools, programs were designed and implemented. The coordinators acted as facilitators for each of the classes. All programs included learning about each other, not only personal and family and school, but also community, holidays, etc.

Resources used included books, art projects, video conferences, planning by the teachers and visits by the Israeli teachers to Canton. Part of the program taught each side about the differences and the similarities between them; thereby fostering understanding and appreciation of other cultures. While minorities were included in Canton's twinning classes, the large minority population of Arabs in the Western Galilee was not. Both Israeli Arabs and Jews live in the Western Galilee. Akko, the largest city in the Twinning area has about 50,000 residents. The balance of the area is the Matteh Asher Regional Council with about 20,000 residents, and 30 kibbutzim, moshavim, and villages of Israeli Arabs and Bedouins. The region is about 50% Jewish and 50% Israeli Arab of which there are relatively equal numbers of Druze, Christians, and Muslims [12]. This multicultural population represents ethnic, social, and economic diversity. The TriWizard Project is one that seeks to bring Israeli Jewish high school students and Israeli Arabic high school students (Muslim, Christian, and Druze) from the ORT High Schools in the Akko area

together with American high school students (Christian, Muslim, African-American, Caucasian, and Hispanic) so that they may learn about each other's cultures and views on major issues, such as the peace process. It is an example of how Jews and Arabs can work toward values such as tolerance, coexistence, and accepting others. The program is funded by multiple organizations including the United Jewish Appeal (UJA) and ultimately the local Jewish Federations in the Western Galilee partnership.

The project is supported by the Centre for Humanistic Education (CHE) at the Ghetto Fighters House (GFH) in Kibbutz Lohamei Hagetaot (Ghetto fighters Kibbutz that was founded by survivors and fighters of the Warsaw ghetto and other concentration camps) in the Western Galilee. The fundamental outlook is that dealing with the subject of the Holocaust leads to an understanding of the importance of humanistic and democratic values, and instills tools for moral judgment and civic responsibility. Indifference to the suffering of another, or to an attack on human rights, endangers the existence of society.

The first attempt to join three groups of students was a complete shambles due to the fact that the coordinating teachers did not manage to build a sound trustful relation between them. In light of that, a new version of the TriWizard program was planned.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

TriWizard Two was designed to have participants begin with dialogue; first about how they lived, what they ate, how they spent their free time, and then about issues, beliefs, and emotions. This coincides with the framework for developing multicultural competencies in the classroom that was developed by Ken Cushner [6]. The framework is built on the belief that cross-cultural training strategies that have proven to be most effective in changing knowledge and behavior are cognitive approaches that effectively engage the emotions, and engage youth in actively developing empathy, and/or insider's views of another culture.

Culture consists of ideals, values, and assumptions about life that are widely shared and that guide specific behaviors. Individuals being socialized into a group that shares knowledge, attitudes, and values of one another maintain culture collectively.

Objective culture consists of the visible, tangible elements of a culture that include artifacts, food, clothing, religion, and language. Subjective culture consists of the values, attitudes, norms of behavior, and roles the group adopts. Most problems different cultural groups experience in cross-cultural communication occur at the level of subjective culture [6]. Effective cross-cultural training should focus on this element of a given culture.

Cross-cultural training strategies that have proven most effective on peoples' knowledge, affect, and behavior appear to be cognitive approaches that effectively engage the emotions, and actively engage students in developing empathy or to have an insider's view of the other culture [6]. Cultural immersion is also an effective method of having participants examine and re-evaluate cultural assumptions about the backgrounds and influences of those

whose cultural backgrounds are not only different from theirs, but also might be viewed with ethnocentrism. Immersion programs promote cross-cultural sensitivity, enhance self-awareness in relation to cultural contexts, focus on commonalities among cultures, and promote the awareness of the subjective level of culture [23].

As implied in its name, TriWizard Two was designed on three levels. There were three groups of participants, representing three variations of cultures. Participants were Jewish, Arabic, and American students and were from Jewish, Christian, and Muslim communities. The teachers were also representatives of these groups, and the researchers were an Israeli Jewish man and an Arab-American Christian woman. An immersion technique was utilized by having the Israeli-Jews and Israeli -Arabs visit the American teachers and students. A Jewish and Arab Israeli student stayed in the home of an American student, attending school with them, traveling to various American cities, visiting synagogues and churches, and engaging in social activities.

John, an American teacher at Glen Oak High School, Canton, Ohio explained the process.

Once we determined the general makeup of the students, and decided on initial timeframes, I began to select students from the sophomore class at Glen Oak High School. I contacted the social studies teachers to solicit their input on those students they felt might be suitable candidates for this group. The intention was to create as diverse a group as feasible. Considering Glen Oak's inherent diverse constituency, I contacted potential candidates via letter, and invited them to an introductory meeting at which general information was presented and discussed. We focused on gathering these students in a meaningful, out of the ordinary kick-off. With the support of the Partnership, we took our entire group of Glen Oak students to the US Holocaust Memorial Museum in DC in July of 2005. Using the Holocaust as our starting point, we started to steer the students towards the idea of our shared humanity, and the fact that we all have lessons to learn, and stories to share. Silva, an Israeli Arab teacher at ORT Chilmi Shafee H.S. in Akko and Yohanna, an Israeli Jewish teacher at ORT Darsky H.S. in Akko joined us in DC in August, 2005. There we drafted the vision and mission of our project. We established the basic groundwork that would enable us to bring the three groups together. Upon their return to Israel, we began monthly conference calls among the three teachers that allowed for planning and scheduling of joint programs. We planned and executed three videoconferences that were both introductory as well as project oriented. We shared our thoughts on the movie "Crash" and the students had opportunity to ask and answer questions from their new friends. We ended the year with the idea that we would reconvene in September and build on our foundation. This was the work process from the U. S. perspective. The work process from the Israeli side was much more complex, much more emotional, and perhaps the most significant aspect of the first year.

The teachers from Israel, Sylva and Yohanna, explained that endeavor.
As members of three distinct and rich cultures, we actively explored our shared humanity as we built bridges through open dialogue and joint activities. We learned, grew, and

most importantly, sought to make a positive difference in our lives, and the lives of those we touch, wherever our journeys lead us. By embracing the values we share, we will strive to be stronger together than we are alone.

METHODOLOGY

Case study was employed as the methodology to gather data to answer the research question as to whether a group of Jewish Israeli high school students and a group of Arab Israeli high school students who had a fearful, distrustful perception of each other could find common ground and become friends. The data is presented in narrative form as a description of a single, revelatory case bounded by a program, TriWizard, over a period of two years, which, according to Merriam [18], is an acceptable format for reporting a case study.

Multiple sources of data were used including interviews, direct observations, participant observations and journals, newspaper articles, and products/artifacts.

FINDINGS

Netzer [19], who studied the work of the Centre for Humanistic Education (CHE), details a remarkable description of a dialogue between Jews and Arabs recorded at an introductory seminar similar to the one the TriWizard students experienced at the CHE.

Mayan, a Jewish girl, tells her story. *My grandmother is a Holocaust survivor. She was a teenager at the time of the war. With her sister, my aunt, they managed to survive the ghetto and the camps. They are the only survivors from their family. In 1946, right after the war, they joined a youth group planning to make Aliyah (Hebrew: Jewish immigration) to Palestine. The British intercepted their illegal ship and held them in a detention camp in Cyprus for another year. They were then allowed to come here. My grandmother joined a Kibbutz not far from here. The Kibbutz was attacked by Arabs in the Independence War in 1948. Some of her friends were killed; she was injured.*

Issam, an Arabic boy from the village Jedaide said this. *My grandfather lived in a village called Birwe. It's not far from here, but even if you pass near it, you won't see it. It no longer exists. In the Nakba (Arabic: disaster: the name commonly used by Palestinians for the 1948 war) it was captured and later wiped out by the Israeli army.*

Its inhabitants are now dispersed in neighboring villages in the Galilee. Many fled across the borders at the time and are still living in refugee camps in Lebanon and Syria. In my family the stories that run are about life in Birwe that is no more. I was born in Jedaide. But when asked where I'm from I always say "I come from Birwe, now I live in Jedaide".' Issam pauses, then takes out from his pocket a rusty iron key: This is a key that my father got from his father – my grandfather who's no longer alive. When he gave it to me he said: when the time comes – you must pass this to your son. This is the key of the house in Birwe. The only thing that remained from the house which they left for what they thought was only for a couple of days.' Issam turns to Mayan, pointing his finger at her: 'This is what you have done to my family and my village!'

The facilitator approaches him: *'Issam, your fingerpointing is not pleasant, can you take it back? And can you tell Mayan what you want, in a way that she can respond? You remember, of course, that she was not in that army; and you did not flee from the village. So, what do you want to say to Mayan herself?'*

Isasam is quite for some time. Then he says, *"Yes, of course it is not Mayan who did it... the only thing I want to tell her and the rest of the Jewish participants here is – you should recognize our painful story. You didn't do it, we didn't do those painful things to you - but it hurts that you don't even know about us."*

With this as a backdrop to the TriWizard project, and with the clashes between Israeli Arabs in the Galilee and the police at which thirteen Arab youngsters were killed, the possibility that TriWizard would be successful was doubtful.

The Western Galilee partnership is a mixed community of Jews and Arabs. Mary, the education coordinator of the Stark County Jewish Federation in Canton, Ohio suggested in September, 2003 that we should encourage a local dialogue between Israeli Arabs and Jews. While minorities were included in Canton's twinning classes, the large minority population of Arabs in the Galilee was not. This was due in part to the tension between the Jewish and Arabs in the Galilee that stemmed from the 2001 riots.

Prior to this, Jews and Arab youth could be brought together, as long as subject matter was approached with caution and care was taken to not discuss hard core issues. But with the additional tension, the young people would not even agree to be together in the same room, thus stifling the chances of having a real, meaningful dialogue.

Through Yehuda's position as the Education Coordinator to the Western Galilee partnership, connections were created between k-12 students from the Western Galilee with k-12 students in the partnership communities. He thought that if he could bring in a third party that could act as a buffer between the Israelis, a reasonable dialogue between the Israelis might occur. As the Jewish community of Canton was interested in connections with Canton's inner city schools, it seemed that if the third party was a classroom of racially mixed students, which obviously has to deal with racial problems, prejudice, etc., then there was a possibility for creating a dialogue through which the Israelis could examine their difficulties and hopefully resolve their conflict in light of the difficulties and conflicts of the mixed racial American classroom, and vice versa.

Yehuda explained the next step. *In October 2002 I was looking for an Arab school within the partnership's area which had some kind of previous relationship with a Jewish school in the region. I approached the principals of the schools who agreed that their teachers would participate. I recruited an Arab teacher who also teaches at the Jewish school. The principal of the Jewish school appointed a teacher from her school. As the two Israeli teachers taught in the same school, they knew each other and respected each other.*

Mary approached one of Canton's inner city schools who agreed to meet and discuss the project. In February 2003, Yehuda traveled to the U.S. where Mary and Yehuda met the principal. They described the program and the benefits they thought may come out of it for all participants. The following day they met with the young teacher that the principal had appointed for the program. They described the Israeli schools to the teacher and explained why it was very important that he should travel to Israel as soon as possible to meet his partners, get to know the region and prepare to develop the program's curriculum. The American teacher refused to go to Israel on the grounds of the State Department warning issued in 2001.

It was agreed that the preparation phase would be started through e-mail, ICQ, and any other technological means available. Yehuda met in Israel with the two Israeli teachers, who agreed to contact the American teacher and work out the outline for the program's curriculum. The Israeli teachers thought that it might be a good idea to use some literature which is found in Hebrew, Arabic and English versions to establish a basis for joint dialogue regarding various issues. Very quickly, tension began building up among the teachers. Looking back, we now know and understand that the initial cause for the tension was lack of understanding each other's teaching environment and various constraints that the school imposed on its teachers. It took about a month for the Israeli and American teachers to become so angry at each other that it was obvious this project would not work.

Yehuda explained the lessons he learned from this. *Because of the failure in getting the teachers to work together, we realized that the differences between them created a gap that needs to be bridged if we want the project to succeed. We understood that bridging the gap will not occur magically because the program coordinators said "let's go, let's start working." There is a cultural difference between people who come from different settings, who live in different environments, speak different languages, and come from different cultures and religions. So we drew guidelines for the TriWizard project.*

The teachers must meet and get to know each other, preferably visit each other's home, stay there, get to know spouse and family; The teachers must spend some time at each other's school, so they will know and understand the specific environment in which the other teachers work within; The teachers must meet the school principal to learn about the school's policy, and how the principal grasps the project's aims and objectives; and, the teachers must draft the projects objectives together. Teachers must build the curriculum outlines together, thus creating the scaffolds for the details that will have to be put in at later stages.

Each of the schools has a different calendar. School years start and end at different dates, and there can be a difference of up to a month. There are also different holidays, (national and religious), and semester breaks that begin at different times and have different lengths. So, the teachers must agree upon a common time line. By completing the above check list, the teachers were as ready as possible to begin the project.

TriWizard Two began in 2005. Once the TriWizard's guidelines were developed, the schools and teachers were chosen. This time it was decided to work in the town of Akko which is one of three Israeli towns with mixed populations. There are two high schools that belong to the ORT educational organization, one is an Arab school and one is a Jewish school. The principals of these schools have previously participated in successful joint activities; they know each other well and respect each other. The principals agreed to join the project and set out to assign the teachers for the project. In late 2005, a joint meeting with all principals and teachers was held to describe the program. Important to the success of the program, the principals view of the program and its importance influenced the teachers' attitude toward the program. It was an important factor in shifting the responsibility for the program from the partnership's educational coordinator to the schools and teachers involved. In August 2005 Sylva, the Israeli Arab teacher at ORT Chilmi Shafee H.S. in Akko and Yohanna, the Israeli Jewish teacher at ORT Darsky H.S. in Akko traveled with their spouses to Washington D.C. to attend a preparatory workshop with John, the American teacher from Glen Oak. The workshop was conducted by the CHE at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The objectives of the workshop were "to explore educational approaches to facilitate the movement from painful conflicts to a humanistic dialogue, as well as to provide the resources and planning time for a joint, year-long project" (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum/GFH Centre for Humanistic Education Workshop for Teachers in the Triwizard Project 8/8/05 – 8/10/05). From Washington, the three teachers traveled together to Canton and spent the rest of the week together, getting to know each other, visiting Glen Oak with whom they will be working, and mainly creating the personal bond between them that can only be created through personal acquaintance.

In December 2005 John, the American teacher from Glen Oak, arrived in Israel. In accordance with the program's outlines, John spent the week with the teachers, stayed at their homes, went to their schools, and toured Israel. The group decided to work with the CHE. As the CHE has been working out of the Ghetto Fighters' Museum since 1995, they offer a unique approach towards Holocaust education. They examine the Holocaust as a historical, Jewish and universal crisis that calls to confront social and human dilemmas and their current manifestation as part of an educational process that leads towards understanding the importance of democratic values; provides tools for moral judgment and civic responsibility; and combats the indifference to the suffering of others or the infringement of human rights that constantly endangers the existence of modern society.

This educational process is a point of departure for dialogue between people from different backgrounds, citizens of the complex twenty-first century Israeli society. The CHE fosters in-depth investigation of the principal issues underlying the central conflicts in Israel between Jews and Arabs, new immigrants and native Israelis, and religious and secular citizens. This facilitated dialogue removes barriers and stereotypes because it takes place in a serious and honest atmosphere of empathy and mutual respect, and is based on an ongoing and deepening familiarization with each other [14; 20].

The CHE specializes in creating successful dialogue between Jews and Arabs. Teachers and students in the TriWizard project went to learn how to listen to each other. The process was effective, but not effective enough. Teachers and students worked in closed groups for five months learning communication skills before meeting with each other. At the same time, a two-way communication channel was opened between the American participants and their Israeli counterparts using computer cams, phone calls and email.

During the first five months of the program, the Jewish and the Arab groups met separately every week at the CHE. The activity included studying selected Holocaust issues and their background, and discussing the ethical dilemmas and current issues they raise. The program was based upon the Ghetto Fighters' Museum's resources – exhibitions, films, survivor testimonies, library materials and archives. The content theme of this part entailed drawing universal lessons from the Holocaust. The program consisted of weekly meetings, each approximately three hours long. The working methods are films; TV reports; text-based discussions; dilemmas; role-playing; and the study of relevant displays in the adjacent museum. Emphasis was put on actualizing historical issues and encouraging personal reactions.

The Holocaust is a charged, problematic issue for many Arabs. It is historically and thematically connected to the forming of the state of Israel, and thus associated with the Palestinian's own catastrophe and the conflict as a whole.

Sylva described the effect the activity at the Ghetto Fighter's House had on the Arabic students.

They got a different point of view about the holocaust. We have learned that the Jewish people were murdered, but there were millions of other people that were murdered or killed. We saw a movie about genocide 'Wasted Life' – that was very emotional. Some of the students were crying. The students were shocked by the knowledge that there are still people all over the world that are being killed just because they belong to that nation or tribe. At our last meeting on the 3rd of November, the students brought up questions about our society and the nature of human beings. We all agreed that the meeting was very emotionally loaded.

The goals particular to the Arabic groups in addition to those shared with the Jewish groups, such as enhancing democratic beliefs, reducing ethnocentrism, and enhancement of humanistic attitudes was enrichment of the knowledge about the Holocaust and about its meaning for the Jews, thus also enhancing empathy to Jews.

The common ground for the two groups that was arrived at in the first part of the program is a deeper understanding of the Holocaust as an unprecedented human event from which lessons should be drawn about democracy, humanism, and human compassion. The Jews are exposed to universalistic dimensions of the Holocaust and to social processes that constitute a threat to any society – including their own. The Arabic students learned to appreciate the Holocaust in itself, separated from the Arab/Israeli conflict; and to appreciate the significance it bears on Jewish existence.

This is the basis for the next section of the program – the first intergroup encounter – “The Seminar”. The objective of the seminar was to create close interpersonal relationships among the mixed groups. Participants confronted questions of identity, the battle against racism and infringement of human rights, majority-minority relations and the Jewish-Arabic conflict in Israel. The seminar lasted three days, and it took place during the spring vacation.

A major part of the seminar was an overnight stay at the museums hostel facilities [19; 14; 18].

In Canton, John started gathering students for the TriWizard project. Students started writing family stories and doing three-way activities between Jews, Arabs, and Americans.

They watched the movie “*Remember the Titans*” and discussed it, identified various issues as reflected through their eyes, and were able to hold a discussion, which was an indication that they had moved from the objective to subjective level of culture. Teachers were constantly coordinating activities. The objective at this point was to join the two Israeli groups into one.

Yehuda stated, *All along, from the beginning, we (the teachers and the coordinators) were contemplating the possibility of sending an Israeli delegation composed of Arabs and Jews alike.*

We knew that this will be an ultimate proof that the project has succeeded. By the end of the second year, we decided that the students are capable of taking such a mission upon themselves. We knew it will not be simple and that we encounter difficulties, but we trusted the students and relied on the preparation they went through, the experience they gained during the past two years. So we decided to send a delegation to America. There were forty five students, but not all could go. The delegation was composed of five Jews and five Arabs. By the time the delegation was compiled, they were like one. There were no longer the Arabs and the Jews. It was the Israeli group.

The Israelis arrived in Canton, Ohio and stayed in the homes of Glen Oak students. A Gen Oak student hosted a Jewish student and an Arabic student. They went to school, shared everyday activities, and spoke at various forums about the TriWizard project. The group traveled to Washington, D.C. for a weekend, and shared a Passover meal at the Temple in Canton. Gloria shared her observations. “Looking at the students interact, one could not tell to which group they belonged. They appeared to just be teenagers who were good friends.”

A Glen Oak student shared the same sentiment. *I realized that we are pretty much all the same. If you took our labels away as Americans or Israelis, you wouldn't be able to pick out who is who. We all live and like similar music. As teenagers we come across the same problems. I think we are all one. I don't think we had any awkward moment. I think that as soon as we all came together, we all meshed. We all became friends very fast. I think that was because we are all very similar. And we are all just a bunch of kids, really.*

Students said they and their friends were skeptical when the program to bring together Jewish and Arab Israeli teens began. “Some of my friends thought the idea was hopeless,” said an Arabic student. “Bringing Jews and Arabs together would never work. I've seen it work.”

Another student shared her thoughts. “I used to see Arabs as people who hated me because I am Jewish. I thought they wanted to kill me. I saw it's not that way. They do want to be friends. And they want to get along in life, like I do.”

The program has brought this group together, and students hope it will spread to others. “We solve problems by talking,” one said. “I am here to make peace.”

Glen Oak students agreed that much of the prejudice they carried before starting the program came from not knowing the real story. Opinions were based on perceptions. And many in the United States have the wrong impression of the Middle East. One student said she expected people from the Middle East to dress differently. She never expected Israeli high-school students would like the same music. She was wrong. “It's been eye-opening,” she said. “We see that everybody's the same.”

Students said they have learned that they can live with their differences. “We don't have to agree about everything, but we can accept each others' opinions,” said an Arabic student.

A Jewish student said she hopes to use what she has learned to change the opinions of others. “I really think that peace will come one day,” she said. “I really hope I live to see it.”

John, the American teacher from Glen Oak, summed up the TriWizard project.

A year and a half ago, we addressed this community as we were beginning our journey. A journey to where? That was only one question we had when we started. Who would join us? What could we seek to accomplish? With those thoughts in mind, we drafted our Mission Statement that reads ...As members of three distinct and rich cultures, we will actively explore our shared humanity as we build bridges through open dialogue and joint activities. We will learn, grow, and most importantly, seek to make a difference in our lives, and the lives of those we touch, wherever our journeys lead us. By embracing the values we share, we will strive to be stronger together than we are alone.

Much of what we wanted to do has been achieved. Much more remains. We have helped build bridges and we've established meaningful relationships. We've experienced the simple joy of a snow-covered schoolyard and we've suffered through another episode of violence. We have shared thoughts on our cultures and families. We have all come to understand each other more clearly and we've come to understand ourselves more deeply.

Our experience will have tangible evidence that documents our time together. A book of family stories, stories that demonstrate the basic values that root each of us. Stories

that illustrate how much we are alike, how much we share. There will be video and photographs that will record our time and journey together. But for each and every one of us, there will be something much more significant. We now are invested in the lives of people from a different place, a different culture, and a different language. We know people that - like us laugh and cry, that struggle and succeed, that want to make a difference.

We will soon be heading off in our own directions. We will continue to pursue our dreams. We will meet obstacles and roadblocks. We will meet many new faces in our journeys. But we will not be the same people we were before our time together. We have a name, and a face, and a voice that we will carry with us on our journeys. Each of us will have the opportunity to make a difference in someone's life, and each of us will rely on these relationships to help guide us along the paths we travel.

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