

# **Bridging the Gap Program**

## **Final Report for 2018/19**

### **to the German Friends of the Israel Museum**

#### **Structure of the Program**

The “Bridging the Gap” Program, the flagship program of the Youth Wing’s Shared Life programs, is held on the Israel Museum campus twice a week throughout the school year, starting in mid-October. The 21 meetings take place in the well-equipped classrooms of the Ruth Youth Wing for Art Education, as well as in the Museum galleries, combining hands-on artistic workshops with guided gallery tours. A steering committee of Jewish and Arab educators, together with senior professionals from the Youth Wing, supervise the program. Teachers are experienced Jewish and Arab artists on the Youth Wing staff. A group psychologist serves as ongoing consultant for the program. Activities are held in both Hebrew and Arabic.



Every Wednesday, 29 students, aged 10–12 – twelve Jewish children and seventeen Arab children – meet at the Museum from 3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. They come from two Jewish schools located in western Jerusalem neighborhoods, and two elementary schools in eastern Jerusalem neighborhoods. On Thursdays, 23 students – eleven Jewish children, and twelve Arab children – from three additional schools, two in western Jerusalem and one in eastern Jerusalem, meet from 3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. Transportation is provided to and from the Museum, with the escort of an adult counselor, and the participants enjoy light refreshments upon arrival at the Museum.



#### **This Years’ Program (2018/19)**

The first session, which took place with the children accompanied by their parents, served as an orientation meeting in which the participants got to know one another and at which the program was presented. From past experience, we know that including the parents in the initial meeting helps alleviate any anxiety the parents and children may feel upon entering an unfamiliar place and a new program. The Arab parents are often particularly apprehensive, as the Museum is in a part of Jerusalem that they do not frequently visit and is a place with which they are not familiar.

Following the orientation session, the participants received a guided tour of the African Art galleries where the children made drawings of their impressions. The next four meetings were dedicated to strengthening their connections with one another and to the Museum, while establishing a sense of safety and security among their peers. Each meeting began with an icebreaking activity. For example, the children stood in a circle and memorized each other's names. The children then created T-shirts by painting their names in both Hebrew and Arabic. The inspiration for the T-shirt decorations came from the Youth Wing's 2018 annual theme exhibition, *I to Eye*.

In another activity, the children created figurative statues, clothing them in imaginative costumes inspired by the Museum's 2018 exhibition *Fashion Statements: Decoding Israeli Dress*. The children were divided into Arab/Jewish pairs to develop a closer connection between them. The next activity dealt with the topic of photography, the children experimenting with a pinhole camera and learning how to print and develop images in a darkroom. This was their first step in acquiring artistic skills in different mediums, gaining experience in self-expression through the language of art, while deepening relationships with their Arab or Israeli counterparts.

In the third stage of the program, the children created joint mosaic murals in groups of 8–12. Arab and Jewish pairs created separate mosaics, which later become part of a larger group mosaic. Mosaic making requires intense cooperation between the students while acquiring a unique artistic technique, and learning about world history and culture. This process required the children to coordinate and plan each panel accordingly, as well as agreeing as to how each panel would fit into the larger mosaic.

In another activity, the children created an Emoji depicting themselves, combining contemporary images with which they are familiar and use daily, with elements taken from classical mosaics created in ancient times.

In order to prepare and plan the creation of the mosaic, the children were encouraged to learn about the Archaeology galleries and their exhibits, especially those from the Roman and Byzantine eras. This final activity incorporated all of the skills that the children acquired during the year. Each school received a mosaic which was hung in the schools as a reminder of their creative and cultural cooperation.





The culmination of the program was a celebratory end-of-year event to which the children's families and the Israel Museum staff were invited. This took place on April 4, 2019, prior to the religious holidays of Passover and Ramadan. This final event was very successful and we welcomed 60 children and 50 parents who gathered together in the Youth Wing Auditorium for a screening of a presentation that featured everything the children had accomplished during the year. They later took part in activities and guided tours in the Museum's galleries, viewed the exhibition showcasing their artworks, and enjoyed refreshments.

## **Positive Results**

This year, the chosen topic was enthusiastically received by the students who engaged with the subject and cooperated happily. Good interpersonal connections were established and the children enjoyed meeting every week, even saving seats for each other. We currently have a strong group of participants who work together well and are excited about the joint program.

## **Challenges**

This year, we experienced a decrease in the number of participants. During the past three months, 23 children chose not to continue the program, mostly due to a gap between their expectations and the reality of the program. Additionally, we faced some challenges vis-à-vis the behavior of some of the children. We consulted with their educators and principals who thought we should not allow them to continue.

## **Research**

This year, we were fortunate to be able to add a temporary member to our team. Dr. Wiebke Hiemesch from the Institut für Erziehungswissenschaft at the Stiftung Universität Hildesheim joined us for the final six sessions. During her visit, she conducted research about the program, which included observation of the meetings, and interviews with the staff, participants, and head of the Youth Wing. Additionally, she joined the meeting with the psychologist who is supporting the staff. Before her departure, Dr. Hiemesch prepared feedback questionnaires (see below). Her final academic paper will be given to us upon completion. We were delighted to cooperate with Dr. Hiemesch and view this as an excellent opportunity to find ways to improve the work we do, in line with her recommendations.



## **Summary of Qualitative Feedback**

### **Children:**

"It's a unique experience. I got to know other kids, it was fun working with them and finding out they live so close."

"It was a very good experience, learned about another culture, changed the way I thought about things."

"I had fun, I would like to continue another year."

"Most importantly I got to know new children, all the activities we did were good."

"There were children who connected less to the Arab children."

"I would like to maintain contact with Omer in the future, and stay in touch."

"The program is a lot of fun and really worth joining and participating"

### **Parents:**

"Every time my daughter comes back from the Museum, she tells me how much fun it was. This was the first time she met Jewish children, and it was a very good and significant experience for her."

"This is my second child on the program. A few years ago, her older sister also participated and I see how their thinking changed over time thanks to the program."

"Every time she comes to the museum she learns something new, she loves working together with others and I wish you success in the future."

"It's a shame that the children cannot continue for another year. I would like to thank the teachers and to those who enabled the implementation of this important program".

### **Staff:**

Yael: "The fact that they meet regularly once a week is a huge achievement. The fact that so many remained in the program until its end is really impressive."

Nasser: "I was on the program as an Arab student and I know the feeling well, I have to work on strengthening the connection between them, and not necessarily expect to be friends."

Anat: "The games we play at the beginning of the meetings are very helpful in breaking the ice and strengthening the ties between them. However, we must remember that it can be very embarrassing for the kids, some of them are very introverted by nature and it takes them time to open up to others."

Roma: "Language is a great challenge; it is very difficult to communicate without language. The idea of having teenagers who are volunteering as part of their school program curriculum (called Personal Commitment) to translate was a good idea, but not everyone necessarily knew enough Hebrew.

Yael: "The staff worked well as a team, I am really looking forward and want us to continue together next year."

**Psychologist:**

"I have been following the program for over 10 years and have in my mind the image of a water jug that at first has large holes, and over the years we close them and they get smaller and smaller. Now there are almost no more holes and we are still gently sewing the few remaining holes. I have a feeling that we came to a very good place this year. The best proof of this is the wish, expressed by all the staff members, to remain together next year.

