



NEWSLETTER

A Message from Dr. Tziona Levi



Dr. Levi, Director - English Language Education

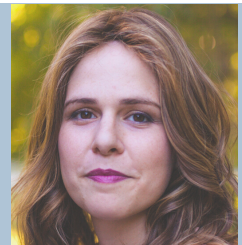
I am very happy to have the opportunity to write to you on behalf of Israel's Ministry of Education. It is important to me to have "Hakarat Hatov" and thank the mentors who have given so much for our students and for our country as a whole. As we are near the Holiday of Hanukah, it brings to mind the message of light. Hanukah is the only holiday when part of the celebration is to share the light of your candles with others. The holiday gives a message that when it is dark outside, it is not enough to make sure that we have light, but we should share that light with others.

Here in Israel, during the entire eight days, you can see candles being lit across the country. It takes special people who care about the welfare of others to think of everyone when things are dark. When something is wrong there are those that work to put it right. Those are the leaders, the ones who make a difference in their lifetime. I would like to thank you for spreading your light, not just to those around you, but literally across the world. Thank you for being a leader and caring about the welfare of our students here in Israel. Thank you for giving of your time to "put it right". Your leadership is having a big impact on students across Israel. On behalf of Israel's Ministry of Education, Thank you.

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A Message from Sarah Gordon



**Sarah Gordon
Director,
Israel Connect**

As it is the holiday of Hanukah, I think to the miracle of what Israel accomplished many years ago. A small untrained military, with G-d's help, took down the mightiest empire and army in the world. While this is an extraordinary miracle, we say in our prayers for the day "in those days and in our time", because truly this is not only a miracle of the past, this is a miracle we witness every day. In Israel, we are not just fighting military battles for our nation, we are also fighting on many fronts to ensure that our small country and its citizens continue to thrive. We are fighting to ensure to build an economy in which everyone can participate and thrive, a country which affords a wonderful quality of life that is accessible to all, and a country in which people from all walks of life and religions can feel welcome and can prosper.

The battles we are fighting are no less great than those in the days of the Maccabees. These battles are happening every day in our places of work, in our schools, and, unfortunately for us, on the battlefield as well. To quote Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sachs, "True freedom is not won on the battlefield, but in the home and the classroom. Teach your children the history of freedom if you want them to never lose it." Israel Connect, and every single mentor who volunteers their time, are truly heroes fighting on the front line enabling all to participate in a prosperous society. Thank you to the mentors for your time and energy devoted to this noble task. Thank you for taking up the calls just like the Maccabees did - they "in those day", and you "in our time".

Our Featured School, Beit Jann Public School



My name is Nahi Halabe; I am the Vice Principal of the Middle School and High School in Beit Jann. We are a Druze school serving the Druze population, with approximately 1,200 students.

Druze is an ancient civilization that is found mostly in Syria, Lebanon, and Israel. We are a minority with a population of approximately 140,000 Druze living in Israel. Over the years, the Druze communities have been the subject of much persecution, and as a result, the Druze have fled to the hilly regions, where we live today. Our village is located in the far North, near the border with Lebanon. We live near both Mt Meron and the Carmel.

Our village is entirely Druze, yet many villages are a mix of cultures and religions.

As Druze, we strongly support the State of Israel, I would go so far as to say that as Druze living in Israel today we feel like we won the lottery. We walk the delicate balance of preserving our ancient culture, history, language, and art, and at the same time we are taking part in all aspects of Israeli society. Our students go on to serve in the army, attend university, and pay taxes in the State of Israel. During the war of independence, the Druze fought shoulder to shoulder with the Jews for a Jewish state. In Israel our relationship is referred to as "blood brothers". Our shared history goes back way farther than the war of independence. Our greatest prophet is believed to be Yitro, Moses's father-in-law, and he is the one who encouraged Moses to free the Jews and bring them to Israel. We have been supportive of Jews in Israel since Biblical times!

When we first joined the Israel Connect program, there was talk that the curriculum was very focused on Jewish history in Israel and may not be suitable for our students. We strongly felt this was not the case, as it is important for our students to hear about the history of the society they live in, even if it is not their own. Exposure to Jewish culture can be hard to find in our village and is, therefore, a big bonus of this program.

Our students speak an Arabic dialect as a first language, and they begin to learn Hebrew in second grade. English is a third language for most, so our students are at a natural disadvantage. Our students will need a strong English first to go to university and more importantly to work in Israel. Recently, an interesting phenomenon has occurred: our students are more fluent in English than Hebrew due to the fact that they are self-taught through pop culture. They are living a large portion of their lives

online, among worlds that are conducted mostly in English. It can be projected that many of our students may choose to use English to communicate with their Israeli peers.

We hold our school to the highest standards. We have an incredible principal who is very devoted to our students' learning and our students are very lucky to have top teachers who give their all. As proof, our school has been number one in scoring on the University entry exam in all of Israel over the last 6 years.

We are grateful for the opportunity to be part of the Israel Connect program. There is no possibility for true English immersion in our Druze village. As a school, we need to be creative and find ways to provide our students with opportunities that fit into our limited budget. This program appealed to us as it is not theory, but it is practical everyday English. We find it very touching that so many people would give of their time to tutor our students. As a community that values giving back to our society, we wish for our students to be inspired by the mentors and pay it forward in their lives. In addition to learning English, it opens a doorway for our students to learn new experiences, things beyond our small village.

Thank you for what is truly holy work.



From one our teachers , Areen Faleh



My name is Areen Falah, and I am an English teacher in the Druze village of Beit Jann. Beit Jann is an entirely Druze village, although the Druze village I was raised in is mixed consisting of Druze, Christians, and Muslims. Teaching English in our environment comes with its challenges. For most of our students, English is a third, even a fourth language. We have two dialects of Arabic that are very different; the spoken and written Arabic, Hebrew and English. Despite the fact that English is taught from 3rd grade, our students come in with a strong love and desire to learn English. The world they engage with online is almost entirely in English. The TV they watch, the music they listen to,

the people they are playing with online - all speak English. English has become the universal language, not just of business, but also for the media and entertainment.

In Israel particularly, you cannot get any degree without passing English. For our students, it can often feel like they have to earn two degrees, one Academic and one in English proficiency. For us, the real struggle is to give each student the opportunity to use their English in writing and speaking.

In junior high school, this is our main focus. Students come with strong basics in English but they rarely use it. My focus as an English teacher is to give students the equal opportunity to engage in the English lesson through enriching their vocabulary, writing, reading, speaking, presenting, expressing themselves, thinking beyond common classroom tasks and awaken their desire to excel in English. Immersion is my main focus. However, it is challenging to achieve these goals in large groups and to give everyone a chance to speak. This is why we really stretch ourselves and our resources to give students these opportunities in dividing into smaller groups, so they each can have a turn expressing themselves.

We are so fortunate to participate in Israel Connect. If I'm being candidly honest, I envy the students who participate in Israel Connect. I wish I had been offered such an opportunity when I was a student. It does not only broaden students' English language skills, but it broadens their world beyond Beit Jann. They get to meet new people, experience different cultures and especially enhance their English language skills. Despite the short amount of time, it is quite remarkable to see the change in the students and their confidence in the classroom.

One of my students created a small talking game in English; she then went into other classes to explain the program and to play the game with them. This is something that rarely happened before in our school and took all the staff by surprise. We have always had presentations twice a year where students present a work they prepared, but this is the first time that a student felt confident and offered to create, teach, and play a game in a foreign language, almost like a native speaker!

This student then went on to explain how confident she felt after the lesson. She felt strongly attached to the program, and we as teachers were amazed and encouraged her. We helped her to create a presentation which she presented in English to all the other classes, This is what teachers' dreams are made of! Finally, I would like to add that we are really delighted to have such a program in our school where we provide learning in active learner-centered opportunities. This is where they can acknowledge the importance of the English language universally, enrich their lexical terms and increase their confidence and self-esteem. This is our first year working with Israel Connect and we look forward to being able to stimulate more students to be involved in the program in the future.

From one our Israeli Students, Rawaa Zwiهد

My name is Rawaa Zwiهد I am 14 years old and I live in Beit Ja'an. My name means Queen of Perfection. I really love living in Beit Ja'an, my whole life is here, my friends, my family, my grandparents and cousins. It is a special life. I love swimming and playing basketball in my spare time. I have still not decided what I would like to be when I grow up, maybe I will be a doctor or an English teacher. I like to travel, I have travelled all around Israel with my family. I have travelled abroad as well, mainly to Europe. When I travel I use my English to communicate. I have a lot of fun talking and sharing with someone from Canada. I never thought I would have this opportunity. When the teacher asked me to join I was very happy. I learn a lot of English from my mentor. We do not have a chance to speak English outside school here, so during the sessions is really when I get to use my English. I am not afraid any more to speak English. I have more self confidence and I want to share what I am experiencing with other students. It feels so great to be able to present in English. Recently, I gave a presentation to other classes about the program, all my teachers supported me and I was so so proud. I highly recommend others to try it.

My mentor is such a beautiful woman, inside and out, with such a big heart. I am so lucky to be speaking with her. When I do not know something she asked me and helps so much. When we were speaking and I do not know the meaning of a word, she helps me and I do not give up. She explained it so many ways until I understood. It was so sweet of her. Thank you all so much!



From one our Mentors, Corinne Taylor

This year mentoring in the Israel Connect program will provide me with a very different opportunity. My student is a Druze teenager from Beit Jaan. We have had only a few sessions so far and have focused on informal conversation and reading the curriculum. She is a very accomplished student since the language of

her family and school is Arabic; she speaks fluent Hebrew and is working on improving her English skills. She is very motivated and determined; she fully realizes how instrumental English will be in her life. It is a real pleasure to work with such a motivated student.

I have been with the Israel Connect program for a few years now, and this is my first time involved with a Druze student. I am interested in learning about her background and culture and have watched some very informative videos about the Druze in Israel. Yet, so far there has really been no difference at all between the various students I have had. The only thing that stands out to me is that I do not understand the background chatter of the family. In the past, this chatter was in Hebrew, and with my minimal Hebrew I could pick out a few words. This year, because the family speaks Arabic, I understand nothing. My student's father once got on the call and was welcoming and appreciative. He has invited me to visit Beit Jaan next time I am in Israel which I think would be very interesting! Despite having been to Israel a number of times, I have never been to any of the Druze villages. I am anticipating an interesting year ahead spending time with this student and watching her gain confidence in her English speaking and reading skills.