



Trees Don't Grow in Workbooks

Extracting Knowledge and Action Principles
from the Educational School Gardens Program

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Reports and English summaries can be downloaded free of charge from the Institute website: brookdale.jdc.org.il

Abstract

The Green Learning Space program is designed to create a green lung in schools and allow the students and teachers experiential, out-of-the-classroom learning. Currently a pre-pilot, the program was made possible by an earmarked donation from the Asper Foundation, JNF Australia and JNF UK. The educational staff at the schools where the program is implemented were given training and guidance by the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel (SPNI) on how to use the green spaces for teaching a variety of school subjects, and today the students and teachers at these schools enjoy a unique and thrilling learning experience. Instead of sitting in the classroom in front of the teacher and the blackboard, they have created a green space, and go outside to study there. In view of its success, the program has been expanded and in the 2017/18 school year, nine additional schools joined the program. As part of the expansion, the program directors at JDC-Ashalim commissioned MJB's Unit for Learning from Success and Ongoing Learning in Human

Services to conduct a process of learning, and not a study, about the assimilation of the program in the schools. The information was gathered using the Retrospective Method through in-depth interviews with school principals and teachers as well as facilitators from the SPNI, observations of the classes and recesses, and a perusal of relevant written materials.

Eight schools participated in the pre-pilot stage. The team found that the staff at all the schools reported a favorable change in the learning process. This was particularly noticeable in three of the schools, where the program had been running longer, i.e., more than three years. The principals of these schools reported a considerable improvement in the school climate – less violence, greater tolerance among the students, and an evident improvement in the students' grades. Furthermore, the principals reported that the garden is a special place where the students can relax and enjoy rewarding and interesting study. The principals of other schools in the pilot,



where the program has been implemented for less time, reported they felt a positive influence on the school climate and atmosphere.

We identified several principles through which the program is being maintained in the schools:

- ⇒ The school principal is enthusiastic about the program and committed to its success.
- ⇒ The lessons in the green learning space are incorporated into the school curriculum.
- ⇒ The teachers leading the program in the schools are those who love the idea of out-of-classroom learning and are prepared to lead the process with infectious enthusiasm and help to recruit and involve the entire school staff.
- ⇒ The teachers, students and parents all participate in deliberations about the garden – planning, creating and looking after it throughout the year.
- ⇒ Program implementation and maintenance are supported by in-

service training for the teachers, with an emphasis on providing practical tools and incorporating one-on-one and group support as well as peer learning.

- ⇒ The program directors recognize the difficulty – for teachers and students – in studying outside of the classroom and do their best to help them get used to the program gradually.
- ⇒ The students are also involved in looking after the garden.

We hope that the information in this document will serve as a resource for learning and professional development of pedagogical staff in schools and the education system and contribute to further flourishing of green learning spaces in other schools throughout Israel.