

For three years Orna Wolf-Levi of Kfar Aza has maintained relations between the classroom she teaches and a parallel classroom in San Diego.

"I was on *shlichut* in South Africa where I was a teacher, and when I returned to Sha'ar HaNegev I was approached by Carolina Arem (school vice principal) and Anat Regev (school principal) in regard to a program for classroom connections with San Diego.

After three years, something different has happened between our classrooms this year. Despite having known Dianne Shapp of San Diego Jewish Academy through the relationship we've maintained up to now, last summer our connection deepened and it was clear to both of us that this year we were producing something different."

In the beginning, Orna, a teacher in the 4th grade, had each of her students to write a few words and introduce themselves to the overseas class. The lesson in which the children learned how to present themselves was turned into a digital book with photos. With the help of the digital book, the children in Dianne's classroom were able to get to know our children, pronounce their names and connect their faces with the photos. For her part, Dianne prepared film clips with her class through which Orna's students became familiar with the San Diego classroom. This laid the groundwork for kicking off the relationship.

Later, Orna and Dianne scheduled a virtual meeting between the classrooms. The approaching Hanukah holiday was an excellent occasion to hold a Skype videoconference in which each classroom sang a song in the mother tongue of the twinned classroom followed, naturally, by candle lighting and feasting on holiday food.

After the children got to know each other they were given assignments by their teachers aimed at deepening acquaintanceship between the schools. Fourth graders from Sha'ar HaNegev held lively discussions as to what they should show the children in San Diego. The classroom? Games? The playing field? A mini bomb shelter? A guard? The assignment resulted in a fascinating slide presentation that illustrated the differences between the schools, the similarities, and mainly how the children perceive the common and different aspects between them (for example the slide that presented the playing fields in both locations).

The slide presentation was actually a working tool in preparation for the Passover holiday. To mark Passover, the classrooms decided to play a game of 'Find the *Afikoman*'. The children of each classroom built the game for the other classroom using barcodes on their cell phones. The teacher in the overseas classroom moved to the spots sent to her by the children from the partner classroom. Just prior to beginning the game it was necessary to prepare a fitting prize as reward for finding

the Afikoman: The children from San Diego sent Orna's classroom shirts with a drawing of a girl in Orna's classroom and the names of students from both sides printed on the shirts. Orna sent the American children a book written by a Sha'ar HaNegev author, Hedva Gavriel, called *Shining Moon*. The book was translated into English and given to our children here in order to help improve their English skills. At the same time the Hebrew version of the book was given to the children of Dianne's classroom in order to improve their Hebrew language skills.

To cap off this year of classroom connections, Hedva Gavriel was invited to participate in an additional Skype conference between the two sides. The author told the children about her original idea for the book, the creative process and the actual writing of the book. The children engaged in an activity for creating figures taken from the book as well as other possible figures. To finish off, they all sang songs that the children of both classrooms knew.

Our fourth graders prove to us that connections between communities on both sides of the ocean are possible for any age, and that language is not a barrier and common topics can always be found.

In mid-June a teacher's delegation from San Diego arrived in Sha'ar HaNegev in order to create, prior to the school year, exactly that—yearlong cooperative relationships that bring together children and teens of similar ages from Sha'ar HaNegev and San Diego. Such encounters offer an opportunity to view our differences and similarities; to learn about and discuss various Jewish customs and traditions including how they are interpreted in each home and community; to practice the second language; and, naturally to bring the sides closer together—as a reminder that we are two communities on opposite sides of an ocean, but actually one family!

