



The Bethlehem Preschools Forum

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BETHLEHEM (Ma'an) -- The Forum between seven preschools in the Bethlehem districts was introduced by its schools partners to the local community in April 2019, through an exhibition of educational experiences entitled "My city in my eyes" at the Mary Doty Children's Park in Bethlehem City.

For the link of educational experiences click [here](#).

The preschools Forum involves seven public and private kindergartens from the Bethlehem district which have been involved in the Alliance for Inclusive and Qualitative Early Childhood Education project (AEPIC) implemented by the Italian NGO RTM in Palestine between 2015 and 2018, and which are currently an integral part of the new RTM project entitled Partnership for a New Approach to Early Childhood Education (PACE), both projects are funded by the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS).

More specifically, the Forum involves the public and private preschools of the Latin Patriarchate in Beit Jala, of the Greek Catholic and the Greek Orthodox Patriarchates in Beit Sahour, as well as the kindergarten of the Bethlehem's public school, the Tal al-Rabee public school in Husan, the Al-Tawafaq public school in Jab'a and the Ibdaa Cultural Center's preschool in Dheisheh refugee camp.

After the project AEPIC ended in 2018, proving to be engaging for both for the local community and the school directors and teachers of the above mentioned institutions, the seven schools decided to keep up the path started with the support of RTM and launched the Forum with the very aim of promoting and stimulating the dialogue and the exchange of educational experiences and best practices about the Early Childhood services among the schools in the Bethlehem district.

Therefore, the preschools of the Forum signed an official partnership agreement in April 2018 and prepared a clear work plan according to which partners should decide on one topic to work on every year. Eventually, after one year and a series of meetings, dialogues, and exchanges, the Forum preschools selected the "city" to be their topic for the Forum's first year of activity and the documentation on that topic has been displayed at "My city in my eyes" exhibition.

Furthermore, the inauguration of the Forum in April 2018 was also welcomed and supported by the Palestinian Ministry of Education. In fact, as stated by Iman Abdul Karim, the supervisor of kindergartens in the Palestinian Ministry of Education in Bethlehem, "The launch of the Forum turned to be aligned with the ministry's plan to develop and improve

the system of early childhood education in Palestine.”

Following is the full interview with Abdul Karim:

Q- Iman, could you please tell us about the role of the Ministry of Education in the Bethlehem Preschools Forum?

The Ministry has attached great importance to the creation of the Bethlehem Preschools Forum a year ago. The Forum was the outcome of dialogue and exchange of views among seven different preschools and all the Forum's partner schools are aware of the importance of children's rights and exchange of experiences among schools. They also attach great importance to the effective participation of families and society and their commitment to the advancement of qualitative early childhood educational services.

Q- Could you please tell us about your own experience with Preschools Forum?

When the project "AEPIC" was implemented, I joined a group of kindergarten teachers for a study visit to Italy, in order to participate in workshops and exchanges of experiences on early childhood education. After that participation, each beneficiary got closer to the Reggio Emilia Approach to education and gained several new skills for early childhood. Then, when we launched the Forum, we created enough space and opportunity to exchange experiences and discuss the new skills and approach which teachers learned through their experience in Italy. The Forum has overcome many differences and obstacles between private and public kindergartens. We learned at the Forum how to draw inspiration from children and discuss their ideas with their teachers, then how to share these ideas among other teachers who will also discuss them with other groups of children.

Q- How do you see the Forum's work in its first year?

The distinguished part of the Forum's work in its first year is the selection of a single topic for all schools to work on separately. The topic for the first year was the city and how children viewed their city. As we know, each Palestinian city is unique and different from other cities in our homeland. The Forum organized an exhibition at Bethlehem's Mary Doty Children Park to display children's productions for the first year. The exhibition was entitled "My city in my eyes", and each partner school displayed the works of their children. The new feature regarding this Forum is the involvement of parents. They have been given the chance to learn about their children's ideas and works, and they noticed that their children have methods, skills, and ideas much more than what they expected. Thus, the Forum managed to provide enough space for children, teachers, principals, and parents to come together in a new and interesting way.

Q- What are the Forum's future plans?

We hope the Forum's works and activities will continue, and we will exert great efforts to make it continue and to give the opportunity to as many kindergartens as possible in Palestine to benefit from the experiences of partner schools.



