

HAARETZ

A worthy response to racist pyromaniacs

The educational model developed by the Jerusalem bilingual school attacked by arsonists screams for greater support. Now is the time to replicate it throughout Israel to help reduce Arab-Jewish polarization.

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People hold posters in support of co-existence during a protest outside Jerusalem's bilingual Hebrew-Arabic school, Nov. 30, 2014. Photo by AP

By Nir Hasson | Dec. 7, 2014 | 5:43 PM | 3

Several public figures visited the Max Rayne Hand in Hand School in Jerusalem on Sunday and condemned its [torching by Jewish terrorists](#), who also scrawled graffiti on the walls of this unique Arab-Jewish educational institution. The widespread condemnation was necessary but it isn't enough, in light of the incitement against Israeli Arabs that for months has been led by Knesset members and the cabinet.

Given the imbecilic efforts to legislate a [Jewish nation-state bill](#), which would further alienate the country's Arab citizens, what's needed is something else. A proper civic response to the arson at the bilingual school would be to encourage joint education for Jews and Arabs – with budgets, not just words.

Israel's educational system is based on separation between different groups, with the division between Jews and Arabs the most obvious. The "other" is someone learned about in school from time to time, but isn't part of one's daily reality. Over the years, the separation becomes taken for granted, until almost no one even questions it.

Bilingual schools are an exception. They stand out on the educational landscape because they try to offer similar attention to both Jewish and Arab history, language and identity. There are other schools – particularly in cities where both Jews and Arabs live – in which Jewish and Arab children study together, but the latter do not get any particular recognition.

Aside from the Jerusalem school, Israel has six other bilingual schools. Over the past two years, bilingual kindergartens have opened in Haifa and Jaffa that are in great demand. But this is a limited educational enterprise that encompasses only 1,600 pupils, supported largely by donations and higher-than-usual tuition payments.

Every class in a bilingual school has two teachers – one Hebrew-speaking, one Arabic-speaking. Funding for additional class hours – one of the options the Education Ministry could utilize to encourage this initiative – would allow for lower tuition and increase the number of pupils in the existing schools, most of which are operated by the Hand in Hand Center for Jewish-Arab Education in Israel, or in new frameworks.

The educational model developed by Hand in Hand screams for much greater support from the Education Ministry. Now is the time to replicate it throughout the country and give it substantial support, to help reduce the polarization between Arabs and Jews. This would convey a clear and determined message regarding the importance of coexistence in Israel. It would also be a meaningful and moral act bearing the signature of Education Minister Shay Piron.

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