Many people choose the teaching profession because they want to influence society. But an education system that fails to support innovation and initiative among teachers quickly finds itself with frequent turnover and less motivated educators. A recent article in Ha’aretz reported that one in five Israeli teachers quit within three years.

Darca Schools, with the Matanel Foundation, empowers teachers in underserved communities to become innovative educators. It gives them the freedom and the support to come up with an approach, process, product or strategy that encourages students to think, create and learn in a new or different way.

Over the past ten months, the Innovation for Educators program has given Darca teachers opportunities and incentives to design different learning experiences in science, civics and English. Each project was tailored to the school’s population and pedagogic needs.

The program supported the teachers from the initial phase of proposal submission, through planning and budget development to optimal implementation. Darca’s professional training seminars further enhanced skills, tools and knowledge for engaging students and inspiring different learning experiences.

Six of the ten proposed projects were completed by March. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic in mid-March, and the subsequent opening and closing of schools, Darca has amended the list to include two English Fluency Summer Camp Initiatives; one in Gedera and one in Netivot, as well as two amazing projects in Emek Hama’ayanot in civic education and science.

We express our deep gratitude to the Matanel Foundation for supporting Innovation for Educators. Your generous support has helped to unleash the imagination of both teachers and students across Israel’s geosocial periphery, encouraged them to try new things and given them a springboard to flourish.

Below, please find a detailed description of each project and a table of actual expenses.
1. Intergenerational English Lessons

School: Darca Menachem Begin High School, Gedera

Pedagogical area: Languages (English language proficiency)

The Intergenerational English Lessons project was developed by three Darca Begin teachers. Their goal was to create a project to strengthen community ties and enhance students' English proficiency.

The project turns students into teachers, and seniors into students. This created a fertile ground for the students to enhance their English schools while establishing deeper connections with the town's senior population. This type of intergenerational interaction positively impacted both the students and the senior citizens.

The project was conducted in a form of a weekly English lesson. The lesson was created, written and delivered by Darca Begin English students to senior citizens in their community. Every week, one student was chosen to be the lead teacher and she/he would direct the class. Smaller groups, made of young "teachers" and senior "students", followed the instructions given by the lead teacher and collaborated to complete the tasks. In the days prior to the intergenerational lesson, students were required to prepare their classes and present them to their peers. The teachers, who oversaw the success of the project, guided students in their preparations, providing insight into teaching methods, and supported them in their work with their senior students.

Twenty 11th and 12th grade students from Darca Begin Gedera participated in the Intergenerational English Lessons, alongside 25 senior citizens from the local community.

Local senior citizens, many of who lack social activities and interaction with younger people, have reacted very positively to the initiative. Attending English classes at the school on a weekly basis allowed them to study and communicate in English with eager students, while being part of a young and vibrant atmosphere. Young students have expressed their enthusiasm and commitment throughout the project, as teachers reported a significant improvement in students' English proficiency skills.

2. Global Small Talk Meetings

Schools: Mekif He' Darca in Ashkelon and Darca Shikma High School in the Hof Ashkelon Regional Council

Pedagogical Area: Languages (English language proficiency)

Global Small Talk Meetings promotes inter-school collaboration through the advancement of English proficiency skills. The project was developed by three teachers from Mekif He' and Darca Shikma, who sought to establish a pedagogical platform that could facilitate relations between students from both schools.

The project was conducted in two stages. At first, student groups were assigned a country and were responsible for understanding the basic facts about it: currency, form of government, language, major religions, important minority groups, flags and leaders. Then, after months of preparation, including research, speech writing, practice, and poster creation, the second stage was initiated. Students from both schools met for an annual event, where they presented their countries to all participants. After a round of questions, students were divided into discussion groups where they discussed the cultural and political differences between the countries, elaborating on related topics. The entire process was held entirely in English.

The project enabled students to improve their spoken English through speech delivery and increase their confidence in public speaking. In addition, participants gained knowledge of other cultures, and were able to meet and interact with other students through the eyes of different world views, bridging social differences through complex activities.

Forty students from the two schools took part in the project. During the activities, as well as throughout the preparation process, they demonstrated advanced communication skills in English. Furthermore, the meetings proved to be very meaningful, allowing significant connections to be established.
3. Student English Theater

**Schools:** Darca Lehman, Dimona

**Pedagogical Area:** Languages (English language proficiency)

The Student Theater in English project was created by two Darca Lehman teachers. Their goal was to involve their students in an artistic venture that requires advanced text learning and allows for English skills practice in a performance setting. With the teacher’s different talents in music and choreography, they were able to invite their students to participate in an exciting theater production. Together, they adapted and produced the play Billy Eliot, a musical that nurtures values of inclusiveness and solidarity.

Over the course of six months the students and teachers worked together to mount this large-scale production. They directed intensive rehearsal sessions, designed costumes and stage sets and produced promotional material. Their work culminated in a series of shows attended by hundreds of people including parents, teachers, community leaders and students.

The Student Theater in English project enabled students to enhance their ability to speak in front of a large audience, while nurturing their artistic and creative talent. The entire production, including rehearsals and work routine, was conducted entirely in English.

Forty 7th-9th grade students took part in the production and showed enthusiasm and commitment to the project. The teachers reported significant progress in spoken English demonstrated throughout the year.

4. This is Jerusalem

**School:** Geon HaYarden Darca School, Valley of Springs

**Pedagogical Area:** Civic Education

Five teachers from Geon HaYarden Darca School developed the This is Jerusalem project to provide students with deeper knowledge about Jerusalem, Israel’s capital. They felt that there was a specific need to delve into the political and geographic status of the city.

The project allowed an in-depth and unmediated insight into Jerusalem. In a series of several classes, students learned about the background and circumstances leading up to the Six-Day War and its different implications. The project culminated in a guided tour through important locations in Jerusalem, enabling students to gain firsthand knowledge about the city’s geo-political complexities.

Ninety students participated in the project, reporting significant learning and discussions on one of the core subjects in Israel’s civic education curriculum.
5. Connecting Trend

**School:** Ilan and Asaf Ramon Darca High School, Gedera

**Pedagogical Area:** Civic Education

Connecting Trend was created by seven Ramon Darca teachers. Their goal was to encourage students' involvement in shaping a pluralistic and inclusive society. The teachers felt that there was a specific need to explore the importance and challenges of creating a shared society in Israel.

Throughout the year, students researched intricate issues in the subject of shared society, including dispute resolution, cultural and religious differences, prejudices and global conflicts. Alongside studies conducted in class, students met different personalities from various communities in Israel and learned about their perspectives of life in Israel.

The project allowed for a deeper understanding of Israel's diverse social fabric while encouraging adolescents to work toward, and contribute to, a shared and inclusive society.

Approximately 200 students took part in this project and most expressed interest and enthusiasm to deepen their understanding of this subject.

6. Civics Hackathon

**School:** Shaked Darca Secondary School, Emek Hama'ayanot

**Pedagogical Area:** Civic Education

The Civics Hackathon was created by local Shaked Darca school teachers. Their goal was to involve students in civic discussions, and allow them to meet the people and hear the agendas that shape life in the area.

This unique project, conducted over two days in the form of a hackathon, served as the basis for the students' final Bagrut (matriculation) thesis. The hackathon dealt with dilemmas in civics between different local communities and the authorities. Some of the topics discussed were road safety, access to information regarding day care and regulating public and private properties in local natural springs. After discussions, students chose a subject for research and met with relevant local individuals to gain firsthand knowledge. At the end of the hackathon, students presented their findings and were graded accordingly.

Leading local figures from the regional council, as well as associated community members, participated in the hackathon, alongside Darca's students, educators, and leading staff. A total of 100 students, 40 school staff members and 150 community representatives attended the event.

All participants reported positively on the impressive and thought-provoking event that benefitted both students and local community members.
7. Precision Agriculture at the Eden Farm

School: Shaked Darca Secondary School, Emek Hama'ayanot

Pedagogical Area: Science

The Precision Agriculture project was developed by Shaked Darca's science and tech teacher in collaboration with the agriculture teacher. Their goal was to encourage students to become the next generation of farmers, providing them with knowledge of cutting-edge technology.

The project took place at Eden Farm and allowed for experiential learning and activity-based research for 9th grade students from Shaked High School. Students learned how to cultivate crops using Precision Agriculture: a farming management concept based on observing, measuring and responding to crops' condition. Participants used drones to photograph and document crops. They were able to follow the state of plants and determine the correct treatment to be applied. In the process, they learned how to fly drones, analyze aerial footage and study methods of cultivating local plants.

Fifty students from Shaked Darca High School took part in this innovative program. The teachers were impressed by the students' involvement, enthusiasm and commitment to the project and by their increased agricultural and scientific knowledge.

8. Promoting STEM Subjects through Making

School: Geon HaYarden Darca School, Emek Hama'ayanot

Pedagogical Area: Science

Geon HaYarden science teachers developed the Making project to inspire experiential learning in math. Their goal was to motivate students to study math at high levels and provide them with tools to make learning easier to comprehend.

Gaeon HaYarden students were invited weekly to the Idan Tech Center at the Local Regional council. After studying geometric forms, students designed concrete patterns according to surface and volume calculations as studied in class. At the end of the process, they were able to present well-crafted concrete pottery.

This project enabled students to gain experience in artistic making that is rooted in mathematical calculations, and see how theory is applied to practice through work with actual materials.

A total of 80 students took part in the Making project. They reacted very positively to the project, and manifested better understanding of the subject and motivation to study.
9. English Fluency Summer Camp

School: Darca Menachem Begin High School, Gedera
Pedagogical Area: Languages (English language proficiency)

During the summer break, parents are required to direct tremendous resources to fund their children's summer camps. Often from impoverished backgrounds, Darca Schools' families find themselves in financial difficulties due to such demand and many children find themselves aimless throughout the summer months. This has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the economic devastation it has wrought, especially for low-income families. The English Fluency Summer Camp is offered to students at no cost, and includes breakfast and lunch.

The summer camp in Gedera, developed by English teachers who have been involved in Darca's English language programs throughout the year, is an intensive weeklong program for tenth graders. All of the participants learn in four or five level English programs and have above-average English language skills.

From 8:00 to 14:00, the campers were immersed in English-speaking activities. These included a debating competition, in which an Israeli world champion debater taught them how to make their case and argue for it; research and a presentation on Black Lives Matter, which brought awareness of an issue in the US which has both global and local implications, listening to and preparation of a TED talk and development of skills in English that will contribute to advancing their 21st century skills. This high-quality program raised the confidence and motivation of the students.

Twenty-five students who wanted to improve their English skills took part in this program. They jumped into the activities with curiosity, creativity and enthusiasm. The teachers expressed their hope that the program can be expanded to two weeks in the future.

10. English Fluency Summer Camp

School: Darca Hazvi Religious Boys School, Netivot
Pedagogical Area: Languages (English language proficiency)

This English Fluency Summer Camp was developed for religious boys going into eighth and ninth grade with limited English skills. In addition to learning English, the program encouraged the development of communication skills that are universal to any language. This included conversation building, listening, self-expression and public speaking techniques.

The teacher brought in a program using Alexa that features different learning tools for languages.

Twenty students participated in the program; eager to learn and to be in an environment in which they were able to enhance their English language skills. For some, it gave them an opportunity to express themselves which they may not have in their home or social environment.
Continuing Our Partnership

As Darca Schools prepares for the 2020-21 school year, we are excited to continue igniting the creativity and entrepreneurial spirit of our teachers through the Innovation for Educators program. We would be honored to discuss possibilities for continuing our partnership with the Matanel Foundation. Together, we can advance 21st education readiness. We can empower educators to be independent, innovative pedagogical leaders and encourage them to be further involved in transforming local education systems in underserved communities across Israel for the benefit of tens of thousands of youth and teens.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project</th>
<th>Pedagogical Area</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Details</th>
<th>Actual (in NIS)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intergenerational English Lessons</td>
<td>English Studies</td>
<td>Darca Menachem Begin High School, Gedera</td>
<td>Including teaching hours, accessories, printed materials, food</td>
<td>10,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Global Small Talk Meetings</td>
<td>English Studies</td>
<td>Mekif He’Darca in Ashkelon and Darca Shikma High School in the Hof Ashkelon Regional Council</td>
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<td>10,000</td>
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<td>Student Theater in English</td>
<td>English Studies</td>
<td>Darca Lehman, Dimona</td>
<td>Including teaching hours, materials for costumes and stage set design</td>
<td>17,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>This is Jerusalem</td>
<td>Civic Education</td>
<td>Geon HaYarden Darca School, Valley of Springs</td>
<td>Including teaching hours, guided tour to Jerusalem, food</td>
<td>7,000</td>
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<td>Including teaching hours, summit days, external experts</td>
<td>7,000</td>
</tr>
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<td>Civic Education</td>
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<td>Including transportation, space rental, food</td>
<td>8,000</td>
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<td>Precision Agriculture at the Eden Farm</td>
<td>Science</td>
<td>Shaked Darca Secondary School, Valley of Springs</td>
<td>Including purchase of drones, tech materials, printed materials, transportation</td>
<td>10,000</td>
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<td>English Fluency Summer Camps</td>
<td>English Studies</td>
<td>Two Darca Schools – Gedera and Netivot</td>
<td>Including project leaders’ salary, external experts, curriculum materials, creation of 21st century study spaces, meals</td>
<td>25,000</td>
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