

JECEI Accreditation Portfolio

Principles of Excellence 1- 2: Indicators 5-7

The Saul and Carole Zabar Nursery School
at the JCC in Manhattan
2009-2010

Age of Children: Three and Four

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Classroom 2

Indicator 5

5A.1 – Children help each other.



In our classroom we believe children are powerful and its part of our job to help them realize what they are capable of. They constantly look to adults for help and/or guidance. When we they approach us we reinstate what it is they need and ask if there are others that can help them accomplish their goal. This spans from everyday kindness to taking on responsibilities of the greater world.

In the above pictures there was a spill during snack time and the whole table pitched in to help the individual child who had the spill.

In the picture below, the children are figuring out an association game and are helping one another understand which two go together and why.



5a.2 Children carry out classroom routines
5a.6 Children care for the school environment



Job Chart

In our classroom we have a job chart and we feel that this gives the children a sense of responsibility and ownership. We asked the children what they thought would be important jobs to have and together we came up with fifteen jobs.

At the beginning of every week each child is given a job to do for that week. Many of the jobs on our chart are about taking care of the classroom and school environment like snail helper, plant helper, library helper etc. These jobs help the children grasp what it is to take responsibility for their environment and the work and upkeep that goes into our community. For example, one child may be the snack helper and they are in charge of setting up snack and wiping the tables off when the children are finished. This helps the children become more invested in the classroom and the sacred space we have created together.



Schedule helper

Another job in the classroom is schedule helper. Every morning at meeting time the child reads aloud our parts of the day. For most of the week the flow of our schedule is consistent, but there are times when we have special activities or events that occur. Both are important because children find comfort in routine, however, it is also important for the children to learn how to be flexible and to be able to cope with change.

5A.4- Children explore relationships through interacting with other children.

We always encourage our students to ask each other before they ask the teachers for help. Throughout their time spent with us we intentionally create opportunities for the children to interact and have a dialogue with one another. One example of this is our class pets:snails. During work time the snails are available for exploration. Two of our students, who rarely work together have a deep rooted interest in these pets. Having the snails has bridged this gap for these two personalities. They often spend lengthy amounts of time investigating, discovering, and caring for our snails. Here is one of the many conversations they've had together:

Max- "I'm gonna name mine."
Abigail- "I'm gonna give mine a name too!"
Max- "Mine is a boy."
Abigail- "Mine is a girl snail."
Max- "And I named it Maxwell."
Abigail- "And mine is named Rebecca and these are girls."
Max- "They have the same name?"
Abigail- "Yeah they're both Rebecca and Rebecca's my cousin. I love that name and I like it. And when I grow up I'm going to name my kids Rebecca and Rebecca if they're girls because that's a girls name. Because I know these snails are girls."
Teacher- "How do you know they are girls?"
Abigail- "I looked at the bottom of their shells and I saw girl stuff."
Max- "Can I see?"
Abigail- "The two snails?"
Max- "The girl stuff."
Abigail- "See look here."
Max- "I don't see it."
Teacher- "Can you show him the girl stuff."
Abigail- "It disappeared, the put their girl stuff away I their shell because they don't want us to see it."
Max- "The boys stuff...them put the boys stuff away in their shells."



We often discuss with the children about the importance of doing things for others. Mitzvahs are something that happen frequently in our classroom. We explain to the children that a Mitzvah is a good deed and it is not only important to help people in our community but also others that live in our world. To see if the children understood what a Mitzvah was we asked "When did you do something kind for others?" some of their replies were: "There was a boy named Jordie and me and my mommy went to the store to buy him clothes and presents. We put it in a box at the JCC and they send it to his house."

"One day we went to the park and we were having a play date with Calypso and Lucy couldn't climb the mountain, so I held her hand and helped her climb."

In our classroom we have engaged in acts of tzedakah, chesed and mizvot by providing help for Haiti after the earthquake collected supplies to a school in Africa. We chose a school in Africa because one of our former teachers volunteered to teach English there this year instead of being paid to work in New York. She emailed us stating that the school was in dire need of basic materials and supplies that we have an abundance of and take for granted.

Our class did different activities to provide help for Haiti. One of the different activities was making "relief bags" which included bandages, towels, wash clothes, toothpaste, toothbrushes and soap. First we collected these supplies in a box over a span of two weeks, then the children worked together in an assembly line to stuff the bags and as a classroom we filled over fifty bags. Another activity that we did was bake cookies to sell at a bake sale to raise money to send the "relief bags" to Haiti. The children were very enthusiastic about helping and took pride in their accomplishments. Recently one of our students wrote a note asking if we were going to help Chile out because they had an earthquake. This was a proud moment for us as teachers because it showed that this concept resonated.

For our Africa Mitzvah we had a conversation with our students about children in other parts of the world. We showed the children Africa on the globe and then discussed with them about how those children don't have school supplies. While we were discussing Africa the children carried on a conversation of their own:

Jackie- "They don't have toys"

Orli- "I saw on Sesame Street that the children in Africa only have chalk"

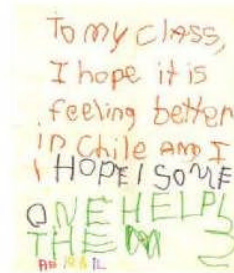
After we met with the children, some of them went with another teacher to gather supplies that were being collected from the other classrooms. All of the children were really excited to collect the donations and were so happy to send it off!

5A.5 Children engage in Tzedakah, chesed, and/or mitzvot that demonstrate caring for others

5A.8 Children are involved in helping others in the general community



Haiti Hygiene kits



Letter about Chile



Showing the children where Africa is.

Indicator 6A. Make visible your approach to integrating Jewish living and learning into your classroom. Include how the lenses are part of your approach.

The JECEI lenses are integrated in our daily classroom life. Tikkun Olam can be seen through the Mitzvahs we have done like hygiene kits for Haiti. Masa is seen when we revisit, reflect, and relate stories from Jewish history to our own journeys in life (our Fear and Bravery book). K'dushah is in the sacred environment we create for the children in the beginning of the year. As the year progresses they take over and form an ownership of their holy space.

The lens that's most prominent in our classroom is the spirit of D'rash. Children's natural curiosity leads to inquiry and by promoting investigations we are allowing them to make meaningful interpretations. In our classroom we pride ourselves on not giving the children answers. We believe that the children learn best through discovering the myriad of possibilities that can come through exploration. One example is when we took on snails as our classroom pets. We introduced this idea to the children and they immediately took to it, and many questions arose creating a prime opportunity for dialogue inquiry, and transmission. We provided the children with multiple books, images, and access to the internet in order to encourage and support their pursuit. Here are some pieces of the conversations we heard, observed, and participated in:

What should we put in our snail habitat?

"A hole! They eat dirt."

"We can put grass in there."

"To make it nice and soft we could use some sand."

Questions:

"Why is their chalk in the habitat?"

"Why do snails poke their eyes?"

"Why are they not sticking out their tongues when they eat?"

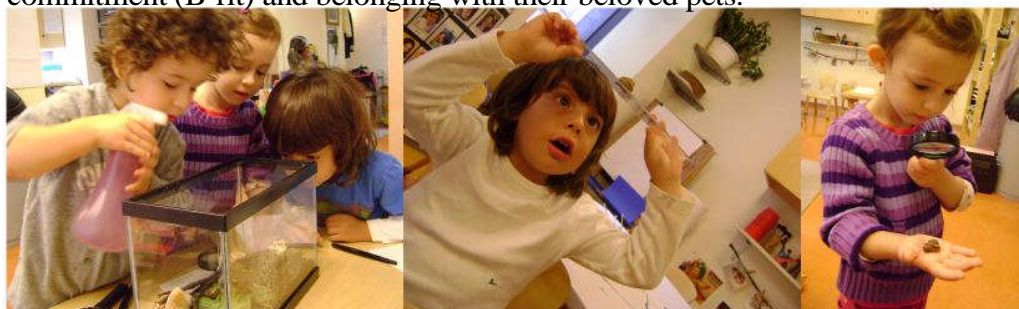
Some answers we have learned:

"They go back in their shell when they are shy or scared."

"Their teeth are on their tongue."

"They have no legs or arms."

The children have continued to investigate and care for the snails throughout the year. They have a sense of ownership and responsibility to these pets and even asked to us to create a job labeled snail helper. It's wonderful to have witnessed the growth of their commitment (B'rit) and belonging with their beloved pets.



Indicator 6

A Fear and Bravery Curriculum with a Relation to Hanukkah

One day during morning meeting several children started mentioning the nightmares they were having. As they told their stories we noticed most children had a comment or story to add to the discussion. We realized being scared was a common feeling among the children.

After the meeting we took a small group aside to discuss: “What is a dream?”

“M- “A dreams most are kinds of skeletons.”

Teacher-“Are there skeletons in a good dream?”

M- “No.”

A-“it’s something like bones in the middle of the night for me.”

O-“Umm... like a big monster came and it’s gooey.”

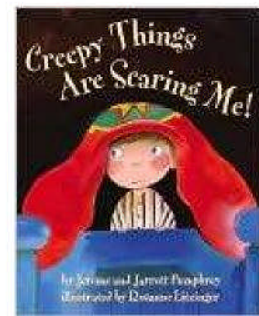
M-“At the Halloween night I saw the flying Dutchman and a robot dream.”

J-“all the nights when its really late I’m in my bed and a dinosaur comes in and I hide under my covers in my bed and I hear footsteps going that way and I peek. I get outta my bed and lock the door so he can never come in again.”

After looking back on these quotes, we thought about the different strategies children used to overcome their fears. Over the next few weeks we continued to encourage children to share their stories, fears, ideas, and feelings. We read books like: *There’s Something There* by Mercer Mayer, *Dreams* by Ezra Jack Keats, and *Only in Dreams: Bedtime Story* by Paul Frank Industries. We also had them dictate stories in the writing center that went along with their drawings, and they began to tell stories with the puppets in the puppet theater.



Children acting out stories in the puppet theater.



Fear and bravery books we read.

With Hanukkah approaching, we realized this was a perfect opportunity to delve deeper into this idea of being scared and overcoming bravery, just like Judah and the Macabees.

As a Hanukkah gift to the families in our class, we had each child tell a story of being scared. Here is the letter in the beginning of the book explaining the initial connection between the story of Hanukkah and the themes and curriculum emerging in our class.

Here is the letter:

December 17, 2009

Dear Families,

Happy Hanukkah! We would like to present this book to you as a gift from the class. We have worked very hard for several weeks on this book.

What does Hanukkah mean to us? Hanukkah is a time to celebrate Jewish uniqueness, family, food, and a celebration of light. It is also a time when we celebrate the Macabee's bravery. In the Hanukkah story, Judah Macabee showed great bravery in the face of adversity. Times were scary for the Jewish people. King Antiochus and his army were forcing the Jews to denounce their religion. We have chosen to make the connection between the Hanukkah story and the children's acts of bravery in this book, which is a gift to you in honor of each child.

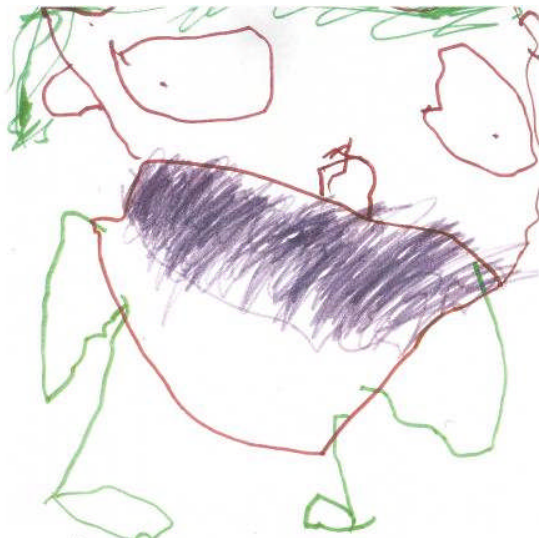
All children naturally have fears. Some of these fears include the dark, monsters, being alone, trying something new, and the unknown. Children need to confront their fears in order to overcome them. The act of talking about their fears helps to get it out in the open, and makes the fear less scary. Children also overcome their fears by acting them out. We see this in the dramatic play area and on the roof. Notice your child playing stranger, monster, and ghosts? This is why!

We hope that this collection of stories helps you better understand your child's fears, as well as appreciate their acts of bravery.

May you have a very happy holiday and a restful vacation. See you all in 2010!

Love,
Lisa, Jen, and ^{Sheri}

Here is an example of a page from the book we created for the families:



*This is a picture of the giant
Buzz Light Year balloon being
blown up outside of Daniela's
window.*

"I was scared when I was at the big parade. I didn't know it was really going to be nice. It was near my window and it was giant."
- Daniela



Parents performing the Hanukkah Story puppet show.

Indicators:

- 6.1 Children share their feelings, ideas, questions, and/or experiences with their peers and/or adults.
- 6.2 Children have access to a variety of materials to explore Jewish life.
- 6.3 Children work on projects in small groups.
- 6.4 Children and teachers both explore and celebrate moments of blessing, transition, and thanks.
- 6.5 Children learn about their identities or uniqueness e.g. developmentally, culturally.
- 6.6 Children explore their ideas and/or feelings through art or nature experiences.
- 6.7 Children and teachers explore the why of Jewish symbols and practices.
- 6.8 Teachers create a culture of inquiry in the classroom; this cycle involves multiple steps such as dialogue, reflection, investigation, and action.
- 6.9 Teachers make Jewish learning foundational by exploring the JECEI lenses such as the ideas, values, symbols, stories, and/or practices embedded in them.
- 6.10 Teachers explore with parents the why of Jewish symbols and practices.
- 6.11 Teachers connect the stories and ideas in torah and/or other Jewish sources to daily experiences.
- 6.12 Teachers utilize a variety of Jewish sources such as stories, materials, artifacts, symbols, food, music, and/or Hebrew to deepen children's learning experiences.
- 6.13 Teachers share with parents evidence of the JECEI lenses in the children's learning experiences.
- 6.14 Teachers get to know children and their families by gathering stories or symbols about their histories, hopes, and/or dreams.

Indicator 7

Puppet Small Group

Puppets have been prominent part of our classroom. They started as a tool for the teachers to express ideas, stories, feelings, and problem solving to the children. As the year progressed, we noticed that puppets were being used in other areas of the classroom, especially with a select group of children.

We did two things to broaden the concept of puppetry and story-telling. One was bringing in the puppet stage to inspire storytelling. The other was creating provocations by going on a field trip to the marionette theater in Central Park. The show was “Three”, which was a combination of The Three Little Pigs, The Three Bears, and The Three Billy Goats Gruff. We read the stories prior to the trip and the children had multiple opportunities to act out and retell these stories. The children used our puppet theater and pre-made puppets to retell these stories as well as others.



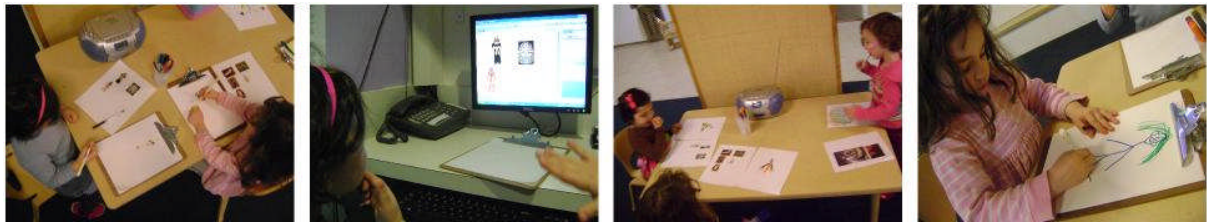
During one work-time, we saw a child go to the puppet area, pick out a puppet, and took it to the writing center. Her goal was to replicate the puppet through drawing. Her attention to detail was astounding. Watching her work inspired us to have a small group of children create puppets to aid us in our next upcoming story: The Passover Story.



Teacher took those three children who showed initiative and interest in puppet making and began a small group investigation. We scheduled this work to take place 3 times a week during our work-time (each session lasting about 30 minutes.)

Teacher took the three children outside to work in a separate space to give them a place to think, create, and collaborate. Here they were able to focus without the distractions of other children and choices. Working outside the classroom made it special for them, and they look forward to it and ask “When are we going to leave the classroom and work on our puppets?” It gave them the sense of pride and ownership over their own project.

First they told the story without any props. They discussed who the different characters were in the Passover story. Then Teacher used technology to aid in this process as well. Teacher took the children to the computer room and printed images from the internet. The children were inspired by the pictures they found and used them as examples of the different ways to create characters. The children referred to these images in combination with their own ideas of what each character should look like. For example, J. said “Pharaoh needs to have a frown face because he was mean.” She then asked, “How do you make a frown?” Another child showed her that you can make a frown like an upside-down smile.



We are in the process of documenting this process using various means, including dictation, taking photographs, filming their puppet work, and taking notes. We will create a bulletin board that features this process and served as a platform to present their final products. Our board will also serve as a means of communication between us teachers and the parents. They are always encouraged to view our boards as a means of celebrating the work and progress the children have done.



Here is an example of our documentation board and a Journey Binder entry for this project:



March thru April 2020

Jackie's work in our Puppet Small Group



Back in February we noticed Jackie taking puppets over to the writing center and drawing them. We figured maybe she would like to take this a little bit further and actually create a puppet of her own. This was the beginning of our puppet small group, which consisted of Jackie, Orli, and Abigail.

With Passover right around the corner we decided to use the Passover story as a character base. We discussed the story and its characters with the girls and which character they would like to make. Jackie chose the Pharaoh. The girls used computers in order to gather images to use while they sketch. One challenge Jackie ran into while sketching was making Pharaoh look mean. She stated "Pharaoh needs to have a frown face because he was mean." She then asked, "How do you make a frown?" Orli showed her that you can make a frown like an upside-down smile. After sketching we labeled the drawings. With the sketches complete the execution began. The girls were able to choose between sock puppets, hand puppets, or stick figure puppets. Jackie chose to work with the stick figure puppet. We discussed what materials were needed and Jackie requested yarn for the Pharaoh's robe, a triangle crown, some string or a long pipe cleaner for his stick and yellow and black paint for his robe and crown.



Indicators:

7.1 Engaging children in constructing the learning process

7.1.1 Children's ideas, interests, and/or feelings inform curricular choices.

7.1.2 Children are given choices of what to do in the classroom

7.1.3 Teachers use provocations to encourage children's exploration

7.1.4 Teachers use their observation of and/or conversations with children to inform learning experiences

7.1.5 Teachers and children map out/brainstorm directions that exploration of a topic can go

7.1.6 Teachers tap into real life experiences/happenings of children, their families, and/or themselves to foster learning

7.1.7 Children's play is a source for learning

7.1.8 Children's interactions with one another are a source for learning

7.2 Using small group project work

7.2.1 Children's learning occurs over multiple sessions.

7.2.2 Children use a variety of media to explore a subject

7.2.3 Children's work is expressive of their individuality and viewpoints

7.2.4 Children learn from one another

7.2.5 Children's discussions and work with one another informs the direction that a project takes

7.2.6 Teachers design strategies to show children how exploration of a topic might continue

7.2.7 Children work in small groups

7.3 Documenting children's learning

7.3.1 Teachers regularly engage in the process of observation and documentation as a way of facilitating learning and growth

7.3.2 Teachers use documentation as a tool for reflecting on and planning the learning experience.

7.3.3 Teachers' documentation of children's learning occurs in multiple forms

7.3.4 Teachers' documentation incorporates multiple perspectives and voices such as that of children, parents, teachers, and others as appropriate.

7.3.5 Teachers document children's exploration of Judaism and Jewish life.

7.3.6 Teacher observation and documentation of children's work are used in assessing children's growth.

7.3.7 Teachers use documentation to help children reflect on their ideas and/or questions.

7.3.8 Teachers use documentation to celebrate accomplishments and growth.

7.3.9 Teachers use documentation as a vehicle for communicating with parents about their child's learning experience.

7.3.10 Teachers use documentation as a way of making visible the child's learning experiences throughout the time that they are in the program.