

Ohr Kodesh Early Childhood Center

Chevy Chase, MD

From JECEI Accreditation Portfolio 2010

Principle 2

Indicator 5A

2s classroom

Teachers: Molly and Gail

5A. Children take responsibility for themselves and others

Several years ago, our school had a fundraiser. The teacher of the 2 y/o class at the time was the successful bidder on a fledgling colony of red wiggler worms. The teacher who adopted the worms is no longer at our school. She was the beloved mentor for both of the current 2 y/o class teachers and "passed down" the care, nurturing and enjoyment of the worms and symbolically, the children.

In the Klavim and Chatoolim classes there are many ways that children take responsibility for themselves and others. One way that the children have taken responsibility in both classes this year is to care for and respect our environment through taking care of our class pets, red wiggler worms.

For the past three years, the worms have lived in our classroom in a Rubbermaid container that has been adapted for them. When we have snack or cook with the children, they always ask: "Can any of our garbage feed the worms?" The children bring us apple peels, banana peels and shredded paper to add to the bin. We have used the ownership of the worms to learn about Tikkun Olam, or our responsibility to care for and respect the world. We have talked about the good worms do (aerating the soil, fertilizing for growing things, even as food for the birds.)



Our original house for our red wiggler worms- a big blue Rubbermaid container. Here we are feeding and aerating the soil.

Child: "The worms need some water"

When the teacher asked, "What do worms do?" E said, "They make tunnels under the dirt so the rain can go there"

Another child said "The dirt helps things grow"

The children's wish was granted - a worm "condominium" was purchased for our pet by our families. We e-mailed the parents asking for help on moving day. The children built the new condo helping each other with the parts, the

The children feed the worms each week, waiting their turn to give the worms an apple peel, banana chunk or lettuce.

Each time the worms are fed, it has generated a lot of dialoguing and questioning:

“There are a lot of worms in there”

“It’s getting smelly”

“Do they need more room?”

When the parents approached us at Hanukkah for an idea about a class gift, the children thought that the worms needed a bigger house since they were growing, just like them. We connected the worms growth to their growth and changes that the children began to talk about after winter break - new shoes, new jackets, moving to a new house, sleeping in a bed rather than a crib. The children felt it important to give the growing population a bigger home



The parents of our students volunteered to help us assemble and transfer the worms. Here a mom pauses to read the directions with the children offering to help.

filter papers, and using the parents and teachers for extra help. Once the new home was "built" we had to transfer, from the old house to the new. Using shovels, the children carefully dug the worms from their old dirt, and put them in their new home taking turns and not crowding each other for the well being of the worms.



The careful process of moving the worms begins.

"We have to be careful not to hurt the worms"

We had only 2 scoops available and the children had to work out a system of waiting.

The children's wish was granted - a worm "condominium" was purchased for our pet by our families. We e-mailed the parents asking for help on moving day. The children built the new condo helping each other with the parts, the



The dirt was very moist and heavy. E and R use the 2 scoops before sharing them with the other children.

E said, "I scoop one time, then we trade for your scoop"

The children observed that "The worms are smelly." and that digging in the dirt "made my hands dirty." One child said we moved the worms because, "The worms are getting bigger and needed a new place to live." We connected this with asking the children the ways that they are getting bigger.

“Careful not to hurt the worms, they want to go back to the dark (earth) now”



Showing the process of cooperation!

Moving from the old house (blue container) to the new (green).

We continue the task and discussion of care and ownership frequently, now that the worms have settled into their new home. The condo has several levels, and the worms were placed in the bottom level. The children observed that the worms had traveled to the top level—very exciting!



The worms are tiny; maybe using binoculars can help us see them better!

The worm condo is a complex, layered dwelling.

The children commented:

“Look how many are at the top!”

“It needs water”

As we get closer to spring, the plan is to use some of the new worm compost in our school garden. The compost will help the flowers and vegetables grow for the children who attend summer camp. We also will grow herbs for our families Seder tables at Passover, using the “fruit” of the worms as fertilizer.

At Tu B'Shevat, our worm experience helped us with many class discussions, returning again and again to the earth and “our” caring for our environment. Our winter here has been particularly hard on the creatures that live outside and this led to a discussion about the animals that live outside.

Teacher: “Why you think the birds are hungry?”

Child: “Because of the snow”

“We saw a squirrel waiting to eat the birds food”

“Could we feed the birds too?”

This led to the making of bird feeders and hanging them outside.

We asked the children what food the birds needed:

J: “They like seeds”

An earlier fall project had left us with extra pine cones in our classroom and we used shortening as our glue due to peanut allergies. The children were very excited to cover the pinecones with shortening and roll them in the bird seed. They really worked hard to get as much bird seed onto the pinecones as possible, rolling them over and over again.

Teacher: “Where should we hang the feeders?”

C: “We could hang them in the tree”

J: “There is no more room in the tree” (after 6plus feeders had been hung up)

Z: “Let’s hang them from the fence. Maybe a squirrel could eat some too.”

Many days later, the children noticed the well picked over feeders.

“The birds liked the seeds”

And after our big snow storms and our inability to reach the feeders due to the snow:

E: “We should make some more feeders for the hungry birds”

R: “And the squirrels, but the snow has to go away”

Indicator 5 is either 5A for Children (2 - 5 years) OR 5B for Infant/Toddler Classrooms

Indicator 5A Children (2 - 5 years) - Children take responsibility for themselves and others.

Directions for Indicator 5A - Please provide support for at least 6 pieces of evidence.

5A.1 Children help each other.

5A.2 Children carry out classroom routines.

5A.3 Children manage their own behavior

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

5A.5 Children engage in tzedakah (acts of righteous), chesed (acts of kindness), and mitzvot (commandments/deeds) that demonstrate caring for others.

5A.6 Children care for the school environment.

5A.7 Children are involved in helping others in the Jewish community.

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

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