

National Jewish Early Childhood Network



Spring 2006 Newsletter

From the Presidents

Dear Colleagues,

When we joined each other in Washington, D.C. for our 2005 National Jewish Early Childhood Network Conference, there was such a high level of excitement and anticipation in the air, that an early Tuesday morning snow storm could not deter our energetic and motivated Network family. Tuesday's school tour day, which highlighted classrooms using the Ma'alah Hebrew Immersion Program and "Israel in our Minds, Souls, Hearts," was a very worthwhile experience. Wednesday's Conference Day was outstanding, and our speakers were informative and inspiring. Our focus this year was centered on building awareness and strengthening understanding of children with special needs. Our gifted presenters, Dr. Stanley Greenspan, Dr. Serena Wieder, Christina Adams, and Rabbi Joel Tessler did a remarkable job in helping us to understand the social and emotional development of these children and the ways in which we can help them in our classrooms. The topic seemed to be critical to many, as 800 early childhood educators filled one very large conference room this year! It was a record-setting event for the Network, and the excitement in the air was magical. Thank you to Paula Sayag, Leslie Slan, and Tammie Roth for an exceptional program.

The week of learning and sharing together provided us with many opportunities to create stronger relationships with new colleagues as well as reconnect with old friends. The "Night in Jaffa" was a wonderful celebration. The University of Maryland's Jewish *a cappella* choir, Kol Sasson, was an absolute joy to hear and the evening gave us an opportunity to catch up with colleagues, enjoy good food, and honor the richness of our organization. We are grateful to the entire Washington community for being gracious hosts to all of us during this week. From the bottom of our hearts we want to thank Avi West, Education Officer for the Partnership for Jewish Life and Learning (PJLL), Mara Bier, our much loved Past President and Early Childhood Department Director of the PJLL, Orly Kenneth, Israeli Sh'lichah who is working with the PJLL, Kol Sasson, and all of our enthusiastic and talented early childhood directors and teachers. You made us feel at home, and we are very appreciative of the time you spent to insure the success of this year's Conference.

We are looking forward to seeing everyone again in Atlanta. The Program Chairs have been working hard to make sure that next year's program is educational and stimulating for all of us.

B'Shalom,

Vicki Perler & Nina Chaitin, Co-Presidents

Margie Zeskind, Immediate Past President

Thank You

There are so many people to whom we are grateful for their contribution in making Conference 2005 in Washington so successful...

Thank you to Programming VP's Tammie Roth, Paula Sayag, and Leslie Slan for your endless hours of hard work and dedication to provide us with a week of outstanding and enlightening programming.

Thank you to Fran Miller and Rita Frydman for planning our Tuesday evening reception, "A Night in Jaffa".

Thank you to Jo Sohinki and Aileen Friedman for inviting us into your schools to observe your outstanding programs, and to Orly Kenneth and Frieda Robins for sharing your expertise with us.

Thank you to Aileen Friedman and Pam Gorin for planning our beautiful Shabbat experience and to Shelly Goldin, Peter and Ellen Allard, and so many others for enhancing our Shabbat.

Thank you to our terrific speakers, Christina Adams, Stanley Greenspan, Serena Wieder and Rabbi Joel Tessler.

Thank you to Avi West for your inspiring D'var Torah.

Thank you to all the volunteers who were so helpful on our pre-conference day, fulfilling any task asked of them.

Thank you to our vendors for providing items for raffle at our pre-conference day.

Thank you to those who provided program summaries for the newsletter so that all our members can benefit from our programming, even if they were not able to be present.



Wednesday, December 7th

Keynote Speaker Summaries

Dr. Stanley Greenspan is widely known for his work with children with special needs and their families. Through commentary and visual presentations he demonstrated how his techniques and approach help one get beyond the label that identifies the problem to observe and identify the specific unique strengths and issues of children with all kinds of special needs, including autism.

Dr. Greenspan talked about the central role of emotions in development. He said emotion (affect) organizes the motor system and nervous system, and without affect, sensation and motor responses are not connected. He identified six emotional milestones that each child needs to develop as a cornerstone for growth. He has created a "floor-time" plan for families that uses interactive play to help children actually move up the developmental ladder. This plan involves following the child's lead at play, and watching for the cues he's sending so you know when to engage him in a more meaningful way.

Dr. Greenspan said that human babies come preprogrammed for growth, but that this growth can be disrupted by many challenges. He's optimistic that with appropriate interventions that include a variety of approaches, one can change the prognosis for these children. All children can benefit, but the degree of success will vary depending on the depth of the neurological problems.

Submitted by Selma Brown, Assistant Director, BJE Early Childhood Centers of Metropolitan Chicago

Dr. Serena Wieder gave an informative presentation about play. What she wanted to tell us was that play, for typically developing children, is a natural part of growing up. Play is a skill that begins, for most children, in infancy and becomes increasingly more complex and sophisticated with time, experience, language and practice. Most young children come to school knowing the rudiments of how to play. In fact, most children fit into the category of natural born players. Although play requires language skills, flexibility, the ability to 'read cues,' imagination, the ability to stay focused, the inclination to wait and share, and a host of other skills and traits, we expect that children will have a facility for play.

In play, most children find a wealth of learning opportunities, time to explore the world, and circumstances that introduce them to new friends and new social skills. They experiment with personality, and a range of creative and imaginary scenarios. Through play, they transcend time, diminish fears, stretch their capabilities and experiment with feelings. The average and expectable play that we see in our schools helps children develop self-control, understand the world and master the art of living. Play helps children establish social and emotional well-being. Children who are good at playing go on to become good learners in many areas.

Children who have special needs have many hurdles to overcome, and an additional obstacle when it comes to play. For a variety of reasons, the skills that are necessary for play do not come naturally to many children with special needs. There are reasons for this that are individual to each child, but some that may affect many children with special needs. These include difficulty engaging in creative thinking, what Dr. Wieder called 'magical thinking.' Special children may not have the internal language or the communication skills necessary for play, and they may be preoccupied with thinking that others do not understand. Part of remediation and therapy for these children is teaching them how to play.

When we look at children who have difficulty with play, and all the nuances, traits, skills, and understandings that are necessary for play to be successful, we can begin to recognize the value of play and the crucial role it plays in child development.

Submitted by Fern Fisher, Board of Jewish Education of New York

Thank you....
to the following individuals, schools, synagogues, agencies
and companies for continued support of NJECN

Helaine Groeger in memory of Vicki Perler's father
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If you wish to have your name removed from
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check your membership status,
please contact Helaine Groeger
at laineYG@aol.com

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Mark Your calendars for
Conference 2006
Atlanta, Georgia
November 7-11



Tuesday School Tours



Wednesday Pre-Conference Session

"Variations on Play: How Many Ways Can
Children Make Sense of Their World?"

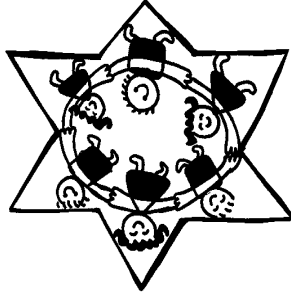
featuring Diane Levin, Ph.D.,
Wheelock College, Boston, MA



Friday Evening Shabbat Dinner at the
Omni Hotel

Watch for more details!

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