

Rivy Poupko Kletenik

Director, Seattle Hebrew Academy, Seattle, Washington

Teaching Our Biggest Ideas to Our Littlest Children

Rivy Poupko Kletenik led a lively Torah study of parsha *Le Lecha*. She spoke about what it means to believe and where our faith comes from. In a discussion of why God chose Abraham, she emphasized the fact that Abraham was to leave his home not for just himself and his family, but for the "great nation". We cannot be just for ourselves, but are deeply committed to the rest of the world. Imbedded in the three verses we looked at, Rivy had us find the big ideas that are relevant to the children and families that are in our schools: Reciprocal nature of relationships; trust and faith in each other; community; risk taking; mission or commitment to others; journey; transition; individuality- the potential of each child to be a great human being; the land of Israel; the power of language. "Even if the name of God was erased from the earth and expunged from all books - still every pure new soul born into the world uncorrupted would sense and notice God everywhere."

Submitted by :Leslie Slan, Ohr Kodesh Early Childhood Center, Chevy Chase, MD

Mimi Brodsky Chenfeld

Early childhood educator and author, Columbus, Oh

"L'Chayim and Other Basics"

In her inimitable way, Mimi Brodsky Chenfeld reminded us to "Sing our Lives, Play our Lives, Celebrate our Lives", and to never forget that play is FUNdamental. One never sits for long in Mimi's workshops. Everyone was up and moving - reinforcing the connection between learning and movement. As Mimi stated in an article she wrote on creativity, "the most effective way for many people to learn is through music, movement and kinesthetic experiences.

The most important message to take back to teachers was "DYOT - do your own thing". Children do not care if you sing well or dance beautifully. They just want to sing and dance. The arts are part of everything.

Mimi always bring us back to the basics: Children learn best through play and active participation. Her enthusiasm is fresh and remarkable. Yasher koach, Mimi!

Submitted by Karen Juncker Albert, Director, Temple Bat Yam, Newport, CA

Temple Emanu-El Pre-School Visit Shelley Sender, Director

We were privileged to tour Temple Emanuel, the largest reform congregation in the country. After an elaborate breakfast and a touching d'var torah by the senior Rabbi affirming the power of early childhood education, we toured the Temple building, the garden, and the preschool. The school director, Shelly Sender, and her staff were so welcoming and informative.

The highlight was the garden. The teacher passionately explained the intentionality behind the design of the garden, the functionality of the space, and the visible outcomes of the children's work. It was a brilliant demonstration of hands-on environmentalism integrated with meaningful Judaism. It would be transformative if every school could create a sustainable garden and implement a truly emergent Judaic curriculum.

This was a very worthwhile tour which was not only interesting, but also provided an excellent foundation for the second school tour of the day.

Akiba Academy Visit Jordana Bernstein, Director

We spent an inspiring afternoon at Akiba Academy, learning about the preschool's journey as a member of JECEI (Jewish Early Childhood Education Initiative) and the staff's efforts to incorporate the philosophy of the schools of Reggio Emilia. Following presentations by key members of the Akiba Academy touting the successes of the school's impact on the community's families, we were divided into groups for tours of the preschool and the rest of the campus. It was unique to see how the preschool is integrated within an entire Jewish day school setting, and the intentionality with which the day school was designed. Certainly the most awesome experience was observing the preschool itself, and how the staff has translated their image of the child into every aspect of the building and the curriculum. We will never forget the unique way the hallways emitted the core values of the school community and how each classroom reflected the personality of the teachers and students who live and work there.

Submitted by Paula Sayag, Partnership for Jewish Life and Learning, Rockville, MD

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