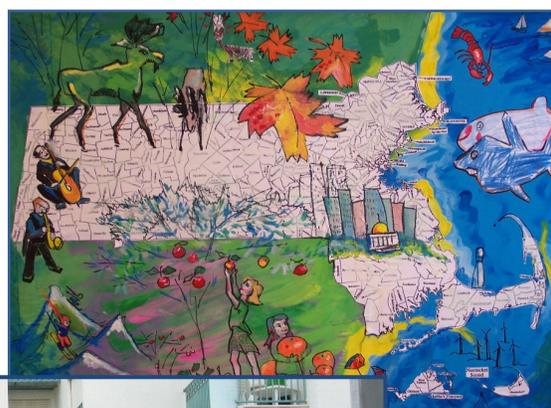
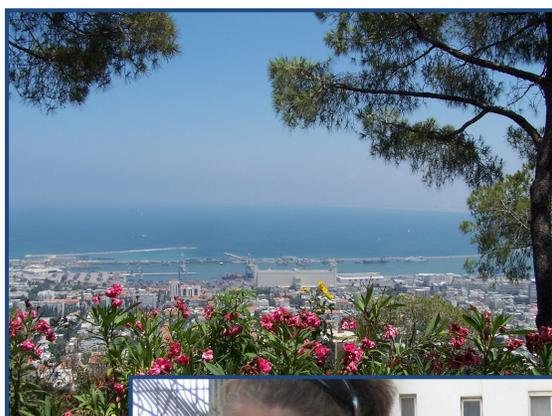


Boston-Haifa Early Childhood Connection

Reflections 2001-2011





We are pleased to present a compilation of personal reflections submitted by participants in the Boston-Haifa Early Childhood Connection program. They detail the tremendous impact this program has had on them, their schools and communities.

This program, over the past eleven years, has created long lasting friendships, strengthened Jewish identity, and profoundly transformed relationships to Israel.

We are delighted to share these testimonials with appreciation to CJP Boston-Haifa Connection for its ongoing support. We look forward to building upon the success of the program, deepening the personal connections and involving many more early childhood educators in this successful and powerful program.

Ina Regosin

Acting Dean, Shoolman Graduate School of Jewish Education
Director, Early Childhood Institute
Hebrew College

Rachel Raz

Associate Director, Early Childhood Institute
Hebrew College

Naomi Chernin

Coordinator
Boston-Haifa Early Childhood Connection, Ambassadors' Initiative

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The Boston-Haifa Early Childhood Connection

Introduction and Background

1	Ina Regosin	Acting Dean, Shoolman Graduate School of Jewish Education; Director, Early Childhood Institute, Hebrew College	Newton, MA
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“In the beginning, there was the study group....and it was good.”

In the beginning (1997), in my role as Director of the Early Childhood Institute at Hebrew College and Director of Professional Development at the BJE, I convened a group of early childhood directors to study text together.

The goals were:

- To increase familiarity with a broad range of Jewish texts.
- To understand, analyze and interpret the great ideas of Judaism as presented in Jewish texts.
- To discuss how the themes presented could be applied to the lives of the educators themselves and in their teaching and directing roles.
- To develop a collegial and professional cohort of leaders engaged in Jewish learning.

The curriculum was initially based on the Chumash, with the goal of studying one book each year over a five year period. The courses were organized around the concept of the great ideas of Judaism. Upon completion, the students received a “Certificate in Early Childhood Jewish Leadership.” The program continues today with many new directors and some of the original participants now together for their 14th year of continuous study.

“In the beginning, there was a trip to Israel....and it was very good.”

As we approached the five year mark, the group, having bonded around their commitment and passion for learning Torah, began to discuss the possibility of going to

Israel to study at the Pardes Institute in Jerusalem. One of the directors, Shelley Rossman, of the Billy Dalwin Preschool in Lexington, actively sought funding for the trip. One of the vehicles for funding was the Boston-Haifa Connection at CJP. The group was able to access some additional funding by extending the study group/touring trip by a few days with a trip to Haifa. This initial exploratory visit to Haifa (where they were joined by Naomi Chernin, Early Childhood Education Director, BJE) planted the seeds for the Boston-Haifa Early Childhood Connection, which has flourished over the past 12 years, growing in size, scope, and impact on its participants.

2	Naomi Chernin	Former Early Childhood Director, BJE, Coordinator, Ambassadors' Initiative	Boston, MA
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What is the Boston-Haifa Early Childhood Connection?

"Klal Yisrael" comes to life with the highly successful Boston-Haifa Early Childhood Exchange. Its roots go back 12 years to the Bureau of Jewish Education of Greater Boston. Dr. Danny Margolis, BJE Director, was instrumental in designing the joint CJP-BJE initiative. Ina Regosin, Director of the Early Childhood Institute at Hebrew College, had just completed five years of intensive Torah learning with a group of seven dedicated, enthusiastic early childhood directors who were determined to go to Israel for a week to study together at the Pardes Institute in Jerusalem. At the same time, CJP's Boston-Haifa program was expanding into the education arena.

So, as the Early Childhood Director at the BJE, I organized our discussions with early childhood educators in Haifa. We contacted Oranim and the Gordon School in Haifa to help facilitate our initial meeting and were delighted to discover that we had much in common. I worked directly with Shifra Anteby, Early Childhood Coordinator for the Municipality of Haifa, and together with Danny Margolis, Shelley Rossman, Helen Cohen, Gail Karp, Randy Bergel, Lisa Kritz, and Sherry Grossman, we embarked on an unforgettable experience that has revolutionized how Israel is incorporated into the preschool environment.

At that time, Shifra selected a few of her supervisors and preschool directors to partner with us. Over the years, the program expanded greatly both in Haifa and in Boston. Locally, 26 Jewish preschools and their staff have been involved in the Connection,

participating in the Israel Exchange, the local network, or in seminars when the Haifaiim come to Boston.

We developed joint themes on family education, water, nature, greening the environment, and special education; visited and taught in each other's preschools; explored nature; visited early childhood music, art, and science enrichment centers; interacted with Arab children, teachers, and supervisors; visited preschools with Ethiopian and Russian immigrant children in low socio-economic sections of Haifa; and visited the Haifa Center for Blind and Deaf Children. We have conducted many videoconferences over the years, sharing curriculum ideas and teaching strategies for the holidays that incorporate math, science, art, and language activities. The Haifaiim, in turn, formed their first local network of preschool educators, experienced the Jewish community outside of Israel, explored Jewish identity, values, and themes. They have learned from our family education programming, our teacher-made materials, and special education resources. Hundreds of families have felt the impact of the Connection as teaching strategies and curriculum ideas have been integrated into the preschools. There has been a strong personal and professional connection among the educators.

Last year, when the BJE closed, the Boston-Haifa Connection came under the auspices of Hebrew College. Ina Regosin, Acting Dean of the Shoolman Graduate School of Education at Hebrew College, Rachel Raz, Associate Director of the Early Childhood Institute; and Ami Blaszkowsky, Program Manager, have all been instrumental in working with me and a subcommittee of early childhood directors to continue the growth and shape the vision for the Boston-Haifa Early Childhood Connection going forward.

3 Shelley Rossman Director, Billy Dalwin Preschool of Temple Lexington, MA
Emunah

Reminiscences: Boston-Haifa Early Childhood Educators Exchange Ten Years & Counting

Ten years ago, I traveled to Israel with seven colleagues. We were study partners for five years in the Early Childhood Directors Institute, a series of classes co-sponsored by the Bureau of Jewish Education and Hebrew College. We were also directors of temple-based and JCC Early Childhood programs in the Greater Boston area. The primary

focus for the trip was to pursue our Torah study at the Pardes Institute and to explore the sites contained in our studies. However, our itinerary did include a brief stop in Haifa to meet early childhood educators who were interested in establishing a professional partnership through the Boston-Haifa Steering Committee of Combined Jewish Philanthropies. Although we only spent 36 hours together in Haifa, our connection was both immediate and powerful, and it paved the way for one of the most successful professional partnerships in the history of the Boston-Haifa Connection.

As a founding member of the Boston-Haifa Early Childhood Educators Exchange, the Billy Dalwin Preschool of Temple Emunah has been involved every step along the way and at every level. Our preschool parent community and board of directors embraced the partnership and supported its growth and development in concrete ways. On each ECE Exchange to Boston, our preschool has hosted a major event with parents welcoming our guests and hosting a dinner. The board of the Billy Dalwin Preschool has allocated funds each year to enable staff members to participate in the Israel missions and local Boston-Haifa ECE activities. In fact, in the 2009 Boston-Haifa ECE Exchange to Israel, eight out of fourteen Billy Dalwin Preschool teachers participated thanks to board funding and the generosity of a private grant.

I have often been asked to speak about the benefits of the Exchange for our Preschool or to discuss the highlights of the past ten years, and I suppose that the two are inextricably intertwined. The exchanges with our partners make us more complete teachers and more committed Jews. Because our partners have taught in our classrooms and we have taught in theirs, we have a real understanding of the challenges that we all face and the successes that we all share. Together, we work on curricular themes that engage the whole child, as we develop and share techniques to include children with a broad range of abilities and learning needs. The personal and professional connections with our Haifa colleagues enable us to create meaningful Israel experiences for our students and families that make the land and the people come alive. And those same connections allow our Haifa partners in non-religious programs to infuse their daily curriculum with Jewish values and to use this to enhance their family education programs.

The biggest highlight of the last ten years happened during our last Exchange visit to Haifa which coincided with a Temple Emunah trip to Israel led by Rabbi Lerner. We didn't have much time together, but for one magical hour, eight members of our staff joined a group of more than forty Temple members that included several current and alumni families of our preschool. We were welcomed by Anat Lion, her assistant Liraz, and their wonderful students to Gan Hamaniya, our partner class. Anat's students took ours by the hand and led them to the various activity centers, demonstrating that the power of the connection superseded the differences between our primary languages. Our time together ended with a jazzy rendition of Haveinu Shalom Aleichem that still rings in my ears. In that moment, my dream for bringing Billy Dalwin families to our partner class was transformed into a reality that exceeded my expectations.

So what was the outcome of this most recent exchange? Warm lasting memories and a commitment to build upon this success, bringing more of our preschool families to Israel and home to Haifa.

4 Randy Bergel	Director, Yaakov Spellman Early Childhood Center, Striar Hebrew Academy	Sharon, MA
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In 2000, program directors in the Boston Jewish early childhood community believed we were onto something big regarding initiatives in our field, but we really had no idea just how innovative we would become. What started as a Directors Council group, soon took adult learning to new heights by working in conjunction with Hebrew College to support and participate in a successful Torah study track for early childhood directors, a separate track for teachers, and many onsite professional development training options for our schools. Members of this early childhood directors group were also instrumental in developing and initiating a Jewish accreditation program, called *Magen HaGan* for the Boston area, which combined good developmental practice with good Jewish education and gave our schools a Jewish standard to strive to achieve.

Running our schools now included our own studying and practicing integrating Judaism and all its components: Hebrew, chagim, Torah, values, prayer, and Israel into our programs. However, our notion of how to truly incorporate these elements into teaching young children was about to be challenged and expanded in a big way.

The turning point came as an addendum, a side bar to a very different agenda. The group of early childhood directors that had now been studying Torah together for over five years as part of the Early Childhood Directors Institute, decided to enhance their learning by studying together in Israel. Instead of just learning *about Israel* in the Torah, they would learn *about Torah* in Israel. We started planning out the details -- what and where we would study, how long we would be in Israel, what types of hands-on experiences could we come up with to match the text study we would be doing and how would we raise enough money for all of us to go. One of the financial institutions we approached was Boston's Jewish Federation, the Combined Jewish Philanthropies (CJP). CJP, as the lead agency supporting Jewish learning at all levels throughout the Boston area, has always been instrumental in endorsing new ventures and helping to sponsor their development. When we approached them to assist us in our program, they wisely saw the potential for our early childhood group to become part of an existing Boston-Israel collaboration -- The Boston-Haifa Connection. If we would add a visit to Haifa to our itinerary, then CJP would greatly subsidize the overall program for us. We immediately and appreciatively accepted their generous offer, even though, truth be told, going to Haifa had never been on our original agenda and we couldn't understand how it would strengthen our program aside from being a nice place to visit. We couldn't have been more wrong. Our day and ½ trip to Haifa was not only the highlight of the trip but the beginning of an amazing professional and personal journey for most of us.

We could never have imagined what an everlasting impact that eight early childhood directors from Boston meeting over 40 Haifa teachers, managers, and directors from Haifa's Ministry of Education and Municipalities would have on these and many more Jewish early childhood educators both in Boston and Israel. Without a plan, but totally driven from all of our collective desires to stay connected with one another to share educational philosophies and practice and to develop personal working relationships with newfound colleagues, the Boston-Haifa Early Childhood Exchange (BHECE) was born. As the eight of us forced ourselves to leave Haifa the only thing on our minds was how quickly can we get back and how can we share this amazing connection with our staffs and the other early childhood educators in Boston. That first trip was in February and by the following November, a small group of us were back in Haifa planning for our first official Boston-Haifa Early Childhood Exchange.

In Haifa, the notion of a cross-continent connection was the farthest thing on the radar for the educators there as well. In fact, where Boston educators had a pre-existing forum for collaboration among its schools and directors, the Haifa educators worked solo. They had directives from the Ministry of Education to follow and were supported and managed by their municipalities, but joint collaboration from school to school was not heard of. Upon one of our first Exchange visits to the Haifa *ganim*, we were amazed to discover that teachers who literally worked next to each other, or even shared a fence connecting one *gan* to another, had never gotten together for collegial sharing. The managers from the different agencies had interacted with each other professionally but the teachers had not. In some cases, we met *gannennot* from different schools who were friends socially but had never been formally brought together as colleagues. Our group visit was the impetus to gather the Haifa *gannennot* from various schools together for the first time. They were so impacted by this event that not only did they continue on their own with this type of collaboration, but they included studying together during the year as a component of their newly formed group.

The BHECE has continued year after year to grow in strength and numbers. We started by opening our classrooms to each other and sharing favorite curriculum to developing conferences on specific early childhood topics that include study sessions, site visits, curriculum sharing, video conferencing and more. The original group of eight EC directors from Boston now includes over 15 schools and dozens of teachers in the Boston area and almost double the number of schools and educators in Haifa. Naomi Chernin, initially as the Early Childhood Consultant from the BJE, began working on the Boston-Haifa Early Childhood Exchange program when it started and has continued to be the stability behind the program, putting every detail in place both here and in Israel, and maintaining and growing the school partnerships.

On a personal note, I can't even put into words how much I have benefited from my association with the BHECE. As one of the eight educators on that original trip, our visit to Haifa forever cemented my connection to Israel and strengthened my teaching about Israel. I developed lifelong friendships from my visits to Haifa and theirs here. Our schools too have benefited beyond measure from participating in the BHECE. When I first started, we paired one classroom with a *gannenot* from Haifa. When they came for the visit, they brought enough materials to go into many more than one

classroom. As we would soon discover, their generosity is uncontainable. Each time they come to Boston, they bring classroom curriculum and materials, run staff workshops, and bring individual presents for the teachers they meet. Each time they come, more teachers want to be a part of the exchange, to meet, learn from, and be a part of this overall experience. As a director, I have seen firsthand, the value that this exchange has brought to the school as we have had the opportunity to send teachers to Israel for the first time. When they come back, not only do they bring with them a contagious love for Israel but also the newly acquired skills for teaching about a multi-faceted Israel.

The more we can cultivate these “Israeli Ambassadors” the more enriched our programs will be and the easier it will be for us to get there. Their love for Haifa and appreciation of our eagerness to learn and teach about Israel motivate them to do more and more both here and in Haifa. They are floored by all we do to have a “Jewish” preschool. In a system where religion is *not* taught in most of the schools, they are amazed at how much we integrate into our Jewish teaching. They can see why the religious is included in order to explain the historical or the cultural or how the geography of the land, species, and seasonal fruits impact the *chagim* differently for us than it does for them. They appreciate how difficult it is to teach about Judaism and a love of Israel in communities that are mixed both religiously and educationally. When we are there, they teach us how Israel extends beyond our traditional “Jewish/religious” thinking into the arts, math, and sciences. They utilize both creative and modern pedagogy in their schools and centers.

The educators from Boston used to feel that we learned so much more when we visited Israel than when they come here but I’m not so sure anymore. Together, both in Haifa and Boston, we have visited Tufts Eliot Pearson School of Education, the Hula Valley, the Boston Children’s Museum, the Haifa Art Center, the Lexington School for Special Needs, the Rami Katz Center, and Haifa University. We have brought snow to Israel, explored the *sheva haminim*, bongoed, belly-danced, laughed and cried together. Over the years, we have mourned and celebrated life cycle events together as we have grown from colleagues to friends to family. These bonds have strengthened our commitment to Israel, to each other as colleagues both here and in Haifa, and our professionalism as Jewish early childhood educators.

I am the Founding Director of the Frances Jacobson Early Childhood Center at Temple Israel Boston. Prior to establishing this center in 1994, I served as a director of another synagogue preschool and as coordinator of the primary grades in a religious school. Despite my commitment to the education of Jewish children and the work done on their behalf, I had never had the opportunity to visit Israel until many years later into my career and work with young families.

The integration of Judaica into our curriculum is a very high priority for me, so much so that we have a Judaic coordinator on our staff. Approximately sixteen or so years ago, I responded to an invitation from Ina Regosin at Hebrew College to join other directors to study Torah at that institution. Despite my initial protestations because of my busy schedule, I agreed to enroll. At the end of our fifth year together, we decided that we should enhance our education by studying in Israel.

A few of us were assigned the task of planning the trip where we would continue with our studies as well as spend some time touring. We had arranged to study at the Pardes Institute and were trying to determine where else we should go and how we would pay for this learning experience. It was at that time that we first learned of the Boston-Haifa Connection.

Up until approximately twelve years ago, there was no connection between Boston and Haifa for early childhood educators, despite the fact that this program existed for many other Jewish educators. The BJE with Naomi Chernin at the helm of the Early Childhood division played a pivotal role in helping to plan and orchestrate subsequent trips to Israel.

I must admit that at first I was somewhat reluctant to go to Haifa as I felt that we would best be served by staying in Jerusalem and learning more about its history and historical sites. It was therefore with this skeptical attitude that I first arrived in Haifa. I vividly recall our first meeting with the Israeli educators who were so excited to see us, welcome us and embrace us. What an extraordinary experience awaited the Boston

educators! We visited a wide variety of classrooms in Haifa and began to share educational philosophies, curriculum and methodology. In addition to the invaluable information and rich learning opportunities we collectively gleaned from one another, what stood out above all, was the extraordinary friendships that were forged that still exist until today.

I feel so privileged to have been partnered with Hila Glanz who is a supervisor of many directors in Haifa. Her vast experience in the field of early education which mirrored mine as well, afforded both of us the opportunity to exchange ideas on many different levels. Both Hila and I are also educators at teacher training colleges providing us with a great deal of mutual understanding. Osnat Horev was another outstanding educator whose classroom we visited. The work that she did to develop an aesthetically pleasing environment, not unlike the classrooms in Reggio Emilia in Italy, and her use of recycled materials has provided important models for us to emulate. It is difficult for me to highlight just a few of the educators in Haifa as there were many superb teachers who had so much to teach and share with us. Visiting with Arab educators in their schools and conversely welcoming them to our schools was also a wonderful collective learning experience.

Trying to distill all my emotions into this brief description, and attempting to relate just how powerful my experience in Israel was, is truly challenging! Whether I had the pleasure of observing Ethiopian immigrants in their classrooms, visiting kibbutz schools or watching teachers patiently working with highly involved students with special needs, I came away with a healthy respect for the work carried on in the educational system in Haifa. Likewise I feel that when the Israeli educators visited our diverse schools here in Boston, they too derived a great deal of benefit from these mutual interactions. The learning opportunity for both groups, Israelis and Bostonians alike, was, and is, immense.

The impact upon me from this exceptional exchange was felt almost immediately. My trips to Israel both on my own initiative and through the Boston-Haifa Connection motivated me to continue to study and learn even more about Eretz Israel, its educational system and what I could bring to my staff and students. It never ceases to amaze me how much I derive from each visit and how many new and exciting

pedagogical ideas I am able to bring back with me. There appears to be no end to the learning opportunities available.

I was so fortunate to be able to meet and learn from an amazing Israeli educator, Rami Katz. He has devoted most of his professional career to helping students with special needs. Clearly, spending a few days with Rami and visiting classrooms where his philosophy is applied has only served to whet my appetite in wanting more. After returning to Boston, I organized several materials making workshops where parents and staff helped to create materials directly influenced by Rami Katz. We put together a power point presentation based on Rami's philosophy and invited the families in our school to attend. The parents were so impressed and grateful to understand the reasoning behind many of the materials and activities that were being utilized by our students. To this day, the influence of Rami Katz is felt in classrooms at our center. Many educators from surrounding schools, both public and private, have favorably commented on the various activities we have implemented to help students with special needs.

Additionally, I had the opportunity to visit Gan Milo and learn from a number of excellent Creative Arts educators. For example, the impact that Ronit Offer and Rachel Solomon have had on me is keenly felt in the work that is now being carried out at our school. The many photos I took and subsequently made into a PowerPoint presentation served to inspire my staff to apply much of what I saw and learned while in Israel. My enthusiasm for working with the Israeli educators was and is contagious. The many workshops that I held for my staff upon my return from Haifa have served to motivate them to integrate the study of Israel on many different levels into their curriculums not only for a two week period at Yom Ha'Atzmaut but throughout the year. Nevertheless, what made the biggest difference was when members of my staff had the opportunity of joining me in partnering with Haifa educators in Israel and experiencing the power of this exchange firsthand.

Fortunately, the Boston-Haifa Connection has made it possible for five of our educators (three of whom had never been there before) out of a staff of twenty, to travel to Israel. One has only to visit our center and each of the classrooms to see the enormous impact these visits have had upon our staff, our students and their parents.

While I have primarily focused on trips taken by the Boston educators to Israel, I would like to add that welcoming the Israeli teachers into our classrooms has also proven to be enormously helpful and mutually beneficial. A few years ago, I agreed to host the collective group of both Israeli and Boston educators at our site. The Israelis who had trained and worked with Rami Katz prepared an interactive workshop in an evening where we could experience many of the activities that were developed to help children with special needs. What a constructive evening this was for us all! Sharing the work that we do in our classrooms with our Israeli partners has proven to be both an informative and powerful experience.

My travels to Israel have personally motivated me to take my family there for our granddaughter's bat mitzvah. Additionally, one staff member, who had the opportunity of traveling to Israel through the Boston-Haifa Connection, encouraged her daughter to apply to the Birthright program. She felt it would be as life-altering an experience for her child as it was for her.

The Boston -Haifa Connection is important to Jewish educators on so many different levels. In an age where interfaith marriages are common and the connection to Israel does not appear to be as strong for many of the younger families as it was in days gone by, we need to do everything in our power to continue to make these visits to Israel for our educators possible. In doing so, I am confident that their enthusiasm and knowledge will be transmitted and shared.

It is with the fondest of memories and the experience of ongoing impact that I write this note of reflection upon my participation in the Boston-Haifa Early Childhood Educators' Exchange.

I am most grateful to the BJE, and to Naomi Chernin in particular, for creating and cultivating this program that has enriched so many Boston-area early childhood educators over the years.

Even from the beginning, each component of the program offered its own opportunity for personal and professional growth, including both the thematic foci of our meetings together in Boston and our growing network of professional peers. From practical project ideas to philosophical thinking about bringing Israel alive for young children, we felt that we had a true *chevre* dedicated to the same important goal.

When our local work culminated in the chance to meet with colleagues in Israel and to share ideas and practices, visit their schools and their homes, it was an experience beyond expectations. Naomi's dedicated cultivation of the partnership with her colleague in Israel also led to the creation of collegial relationships among Israeli teachers who had previously worked in isolation. The idea that this could be a mutually beneficial relationship was a surprise as many of us totally expected this to be one-sided: We would have so much to learn from them! What could they possibly learn from us? It turns out that we really do have much to give to each other!

Let me dwell for a moment on the utter thrill it was to be in Israel and to be learning from new friends and colleagues there. It was easy to marvel at how one teacher and an aide could manage a classroom of thirty-five children but to do so with such love and creativity was inspirational. Teaching "up" to children, as opposed to "down" was evident, for example, in the way real and beautiful art, artists and media were taught, used and displayed. Being in Israel and observing through the eyes of a teacher put an entirely new point of view on my experience. The sights, colors, smells, sounds, and feelings all became possible to take home and share. Especially wonderful for so many of us was

the new and growing friendship with partner teachers in Haifa. I was most fortunate to have one of the few teachers who did not speak English. The chance to reinforce my Hebrew speaking skills was a total gift and one that brought added value to my own classroom. For over six years I was a participant and beneficiary of this amazing partnership as each year brought new learning and alternating opportunities for our Israeli counterparts to come here and for us to go there. Mutual learning about themes of water, art, and ecology gave us a framework for sharing and teaching that benefited us as teachers and all of our young students. Israel becomes real in the classroom when it is real for the teachers. I believe that every Jewish educator from early childhood on up should have the opportunity to visit Israel. It completely changes one's perspective; it becomes personal for us and, by extension, for our young students.

For a number of years, I taught in both early childhood and religious school settings. Currently I am the Director of a Religious School and, to this day, I think every day about how to make Israel more a part of what I do. We now have our own Boston-Haifa Connection highlighted by our Kitah Hay partnership with the Zichron Yosef School. Letter -writing, shared curricular projects and videoconferencing give our kids a personal connection to peers in Israel. I also continue to be in touch with my partner in Haifa and while it is still about the teaching, it is also about our families. I am so grateful to the vision of the BJE, CJP's Boston-Haifa Connection, and Naomi Chernin's gentle and persistent nurturing of this wonderful partnership that has been such a source of enrichment to me and, through me, to my colleagues and students.

Personal Impact

7 Lisa Aframe	Director, Gilson JCC Early Childhood Learning Center	Sharon, MA
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The Striar JCC Early Learning was very excited about becoming an important part of the Boston-Haifa Connection. In the first years there were several staff teachers who were totally committed to the development of the program and were most excited about building connections with colleagues in Haifa. The idea of having an ongoing relationship with teachers in Israel who were doing similar kinds of programming with young children and yet doing it “differently” put forth the opportunity for enormous professional growth.

At that time Randy Bergel, Striar JCC ELC Assistant Director and Gayle Karp, Canton JCC ELC Director, both became very involved in the project along with a number of teachers from Striar and the Canton ELC, attending meetings and gathering support for what was to become a many years of exchange and growth between early childhood educators in Boston and Haifa.

Something “electric” came about in the first few years of the Boston-Haifa Connection. Those who made the first trip to Israel returned to the States having made new friends, forming new professional relationships and learning about endless possibilities and methods of how to share Israel with young children and their families. Their learning included fundamental ways of making the land of Israel “real” for young learners. In the first years this was done primarily through the mail. Packages were exchanged between teachers in Haifa and their partners in the Boston area. The packages typically included pictures of children busy in their classrooms – sometimes involved in holiday celebrations and sometimes doing the typical routines of an early learning center. The bundles always included special learning tools to be shared with children in Israel or in the States -- books, tapes, pictures, drawings, and sometimes materials bringing a given activity to life. Every time a package arrived for one of the “partnering classrooms” there was enormous excitement as to what had been sent.

In the Fall of 2004 there was conversation surrounding the possibility of my joining the group and making the trip to Israel. Initially, I was uncertain, as I felt that it should be a project where teachers partnered and inspired each other and I was not sure that the funding should go to sending a director who was not working in a specific classroom with a group of children. After much discussion it was decided that I would join the group and make the trip with the Boston group in February 2005. I along with one of my staff teachers, Ilene Beckman, were privileged to join 24 other educators from the Greater Boston area as we made plans to go to Israel for twelve days. This experience was to forever change my perspective and understanding of Jewish early childhood education.

The 2005 “theme” of our visit was “water” – what it meant to human survival, its place in Torah, and its fundamental importance to the land of Israel. From the moment we arrived and made our first visit to a national park outside of Tel Aviv, to hearing the Biblical stories shared by the young children whose school was on the grounds of the park, to

the amazing experiences had by all at the Dead Sea (particularly for those who had never been before), or splashing in the wonderfully cool waterfalls of Ein Gedi, followed by our explorations along the Galilee and submersion into the mineral waters of the hot springs, or the magnificent walks along the shore in Caesarea and the exploration of ancient aqueducts, or standing on the edge of the Jordan River as it gushed with early spring energy, and finally dancing merrily on Shabbat morning on the shores of the Mediterranean in Haifa, we learned that clearly “water” in Israel means “life” – and it would be that message that we would bring home to share with children, staff and families.

Whether on a returning visit or for first time visitors, visiting Jerusalem is an experience not to be replicated anywhere else in the world. We visited an early learning center in Jerusalem and marveled at children at play outdoors – dancing and singing, children and teachers together – as music filled the air from a boom box. It was much more about *playing together* and much less about an area filled with “outdoor equipment” as we are so accustomed.

Some toured as first timers and others returned to locations that they longed to revisit from earlier trips. For me, during my first visit to Israel the excavations beneath the Kotel had begun but were nowhere near completion, and now on this trip all was ready. With colleagues and friends I followed an amazingly brilliant guide who not only shared historical information, but respected the fact that for some, these were very powerful moments. For me, it was one of the most religiously spiritual experiences of my life. Several times, I found myself dropping back from the group to engage in my own private moments for prayer. I felt so close to the actual structure that had once been the Temple in Jerusalem. Shabbat was wonderful as we joined other congregants of a local synagogue that was not far from our hotel. And of course, when Shabbat was over, we became “thoroughly American tourists,” grabbing our passports and credit cards and making our way to all of Jerusalem’s wonderful shops.

Each day was charged with learning. Sometimes the learning came to us through some of our Haifa friends traveling with us aboard our bus and their delight in sharing knowledge of their homeland, sometimes from the professional insights of our tour guide

and sometimes it was purely the individual experience of taking in all the visual splendor that was before us as we road, hiked, walked, chatted, asked questions and *learned*.

Our bus took us north from Jerusalem through the Galilee and down into Haifa. Once in Haifa we joined the greater group of our Haifa friends, who were filled with joy to have us with them and bursting with excitement to share their variety of early childhood settings with us. Ilene and I were privileged to be partnered with our friend Shlomit. We had the opportunity to visit her one room schoolhouse and marveled at her passion for teaching young children. We observed a true love, respect and partnership between the children and their teacher as she moved through group time, center time and a fantastic puppet show. Later in the morning, as Shlomit gathered her class to celebrate Kabbalat Shabbat, Ilene and I were both struck by the genuine tenderness in which she guided these young children through the preparations, group gathering and the reciting of the *brachot* as we all readied for the coming of Shabbat that evening. As it was Friday, both moms and dads arrived at noon to retrieve their children, finish last minute errands and return home to prepare for Shabbat. Many had already picked up a bouquet of flowers, wine and a fresh challah. *It all seemed so natural and so right!*

We spent Shabbat with Shlomit's family – just the best! Her husband and adult children spoke English quite well and respected the fact that I could speak Hebrew; however, Ilene had a wonderful time trying to put her conversational Hebrew to good use. As we relaxed late Friday afternoon awaiting the arrival of extended family members and friends who had been invited to join us for Shabbat dinner, conversations swirled around political issues that were presently very “hot” in Israel at this time – should Israel get out of Gaza or remain in control? The range of opinions was staggering and each one had profound merit – I couldn't take in this much information this fast. It was provocative, challenging and gave me a whole new understanding of the situation as I listened to the perspectives of Israeli families. Incredible! On Saturday morning we rose, packed up, had breakfast and walked down to the waterfront. There by the Mediterranean Sea, endless people of all ages gathered to celebrate Shabbat in the form of song and dance. It was truly the gathering of *community*.

In closing, my 12-day experience with friends in colleagues from Israel and the US was not to be matched. The learning was happening every minute of every day and six

We visited preschools that served children who were Jewish, Ethiopian immigrants and Arab. We saw schools that were based on the educational philosophy of Rami Katz and a school on an organic kibbutz which followed the Waldorf School model. We also spent time in special needs schools dedicated to serving deaf children and mentally challenged students and were also privileged to spend time in two art enrichment preschools.

During the evenings, along with our Haifa teacher hosts, we enjoyed shopping, special dinners, and even the opera (of course sung in Hebrew). The culmination of our visit was an overnight hospitality visit at one of the teacher's homes. During my visit, which I shared with another Boston teacher, I was treated to a delicious Shabbat dinner, a day trip to Tiberias, the Jewish National Forest (which was wondrous) and an incredible lunch at an Arab restaurant near the Sea of Galilee.

The Boston-Haifa Connection has changed my life! I remain actively involved in the program as an ambassador from TBSCC to the Connection. I look forward to learning and sharing with everyone taking part in the program both in Haifa and here in Boston. I truly hope that I can return to Haifa in February of 2012. I now share with my own children their passion for Israel. What an incredible thing to have in common with them!

9	Cindy Gray	Teacher, Frances Jacobson Early Childhood Center at Temple Israel	Boston, MA
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I attended the Boston-Haifa trip in 2007. I was quite excited about going as I anticipated seeing all the places I had learned about in Hebrew school — Jerusalem, the Western Wall, the Dead Sea, etc. After spending the time in Israel and seeing the sights and the cities, I felt Israel really became more real for me. Experiencing Israel firsthand strengthened my feelings for Israel and made me realize how important Israel is to the Jews. This made me feel so proud!

I did experience times that made me question and other times where I was surprised at what I saw. For example, being accustomed to no religion in public schools here in America, I was surprised that there were public religious schools. It made me realize how important a part religion plays in some Israelis' daily life.

I learned so much about their early childhood teaching methodology and so enjoyed meeting colleagues who do the same thing I do, view young children with such interest and try so hard to start their education in a positive way. This whole experience was really exciting. It made my teaching of Israel in the classroom more concrete, more fun, and more real. I use materials from my trip such as a book I made with Jon, the Rabbit, who visited all the places that I visited, a children's apron I bought at the Israel Museum, and pictures of me doing things in Israel, such as riding a camel! As a Jew, Israel was an important place for me to visit. I'd love to go back someday!

10 Darby Crowley Teacher, Frances Jacobson Early Childhood Boston, MA
Center at Temple Israel

My understanding about Israel was that it was a country that meant a lot to people who were Jewish, as well as many other cultures. I had a historical view to be sure and I also was familiar with the geography of the region. Since teaching in a school whose curriculum is based on the Jewish faith, I have continued to acquire SO many different points of knowledge about Israel. However, I truly believed that when I would finally go there, my views/emotional ties/experiences in the future would change.

My connections to Israel will always be different now. I remember the smells of the different regions. I remember the people who so kindly welcomed me. I also now know how it feels to be a minority. I tried to be respectful of the different expectations put on me as I moved about the different cities.

I was able to visit so many different parts of Jerusalem and see the old buildings and cities. I ate food that connected me to the region. When I talk about Israel with the students, I have a different love in my heart for the place. It is so nice to tell (I feel authentic) about the Dead Sea, Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, the way they use every part of the land and how they took the desert and worked it to support life.

I was unprepared for the effect I felt when I went to the Palmach Museum which is totally devoted to the making of the State of Israel. I knew the old Biblical stuff but nothing about the making of the State. It was amazing and for the first time, I felt when Ellen played the music on her tape player as we danced into the sanctuary on Israel's

birthday, I got it. I felt the pride and remembered everything. I remembered the young Zionists sitting around the campfire, thinking about their future.

I loved meeting the teachers in Haifa and visiting in their classrooms. I was able to get hands-on instruction using Rami Katz's methods and see it in action. Ronit's class was amazing and inspiring. I left the classes feeling more confident to use the different instructions. The teachers were so welcoming and ready to stop and share what they were doing in the classroom. When we plan for new units, we know we will be employing Rami Katz based activities -- they are highly successful for all levels of students. As a non-Jew, I had a connection to Israel, but it was more connected to *my* background. However, as I have been a part of the school for so many years, I have made connections as someone who, although not Jewish, feels a part of the holidays, the traditions and the values. I came back feeling like I had experienced something that gave me a deeper feeling for Israel. I love being a part of the whole experience, and now I feel that I have a stronger emotional attachment to the State of Israel, its people and its culture.

When I am talking to children, I feel authentic as I say "I was there." I also like the memories to spur me to think outside of the box as I plan for new ways to do the unit on Israel. Having tasted the food, walked through the shuk and seen different people from many different places, my awareness of what can be done in the classroom has heightened.

I enjoy talking to the families in my school about my experiences in Israel. I feel more connected to those who have been to Israel because of this trip. I hope that those families who have not been to Israel will be encouraged by my enthusiasm to someday make the trip.

We need to continue this exchange of teachers -- such common bonds. It is good for children to see what we do and they need to know this is what living in the world is about -- sharing peacefully our love for education and promoting children in all ways.

יצאנו (חברותי ואני למשלחת) עם תוכנית לימודים עשירה ומקיפה עם מטרת חינוכיות ונושאים שהותאמו ליהדות התפוצות.

השתתפנו בהשתלמות שנתית בנושא זהות יהודית.

הכנו חומרי למידה שכללו תמונות, דפי משימה, תקליטורים, פלקטים ועוד.

נחשפנו למסגרות לימוד אחרות, לשיטות לימוד שונות ולגישות חינוכיות מעניינות. גנים ששייכים לרשת חב"ד, גנים לילדים בעלי צרכים מיוחדים ועוד.

טיילנו במקומות בעלי זיקה ליהדות.

ביקרנו במוסדות חינוך ובמוזיאונים.

פעלנו בתוך גני הילדים: סדנאות, שיחות, מוסיקה, דרמה ועוד.

התארחנו בבית המשפחות, ארוח מפנק מיוחד וחם.

הביקור בבוסטון מעניין, מאתגר, מהנה ומרגש כאחד. הקשרים המקצועיים הפכו עד מהרה לאישיים וחמים מאוד, גם היום כאשר אני כותבת שורות אלו אני נזכרת במרחבים, בשקט המופתי בארגון ברוגע בהון האנושי והמשאבים האין-סופיים. רוצה אני מעומק הלב להעניק את כל אלה לילדים הלומדים בגני גן הדר בחיפה.

חוויה מרגשת במיוחד מהביקור האחרון מרץ 2007

איילין בקמן (הפרטנרית שלי) הפכה במרוצת השנים מגננת למנהלת אשכול-גנים. הביקור אצלה נפתח בסיום: הכיתות מרווחות ומספר הילדים קטן בהתאם לצרכיהם. הטיפול בכל ילד כמעט אישי והצוות מסור חם ואוהב. סדר היום דומה לזה בגנים בישראל. סופי משה ואני אספנו את ארבעת הכיתות, 30 ילדים באולם ספורט מרווח ובנינו עמם בשיתוף פעולה את מפת ארץ ישראל. בתחילת הפעילות נתנו רקע קצר והופתענו מרמת הידע של הילדים בנושא **ישראל**. ברקע שמענו

שירי ארץ ישראל וכל ילד הניח על המפה פרח, סירה, מנורה וכו' אותם הכינו לפני הפעילות. כשמפת ארץ ישראל היתה "יפה וגם פורחת", חלקנו לכל ילד דגל איתו צעדו הילדים כחיילים מסביב למפה.

למסתכל מהצד נראתה התמונה מרגשת מאוד ומסמלת בעיני את ניצחיות העם היהודי. ילדי גן יהודי בבוסטון מניחים את דגל ישראל על רקע "ארץ ארץ" המעמד ריגש אותנו במיוחד ואנו גננות ישראל-חיפה מניחים את האבן הראשונה (רוחניות) של שיתוף-פעולה של אחווה בינינו לבין אחינו היהודים מבוסטון בסיום הפעילות, מסרנו לאיילין תוצרים רבים במתנה.

איילין בקמן: "אתן מציידות אותי בחומרי למידה רבים, אני אתאים אותם לילדים גני ואשלב עברית בתוך תוכנית הלימודים".

באחד הערבים התארחנו יחד עם איילין בחוג לרקודי-עם, בנה של איילין (מרקיד במקצועו) סחף את כולנו ברקודי עם מרגשים מראות "בוסטון הלילית" הממו ביופיים חבל שהעייפות והקור העז הכריעו אותנו חזרנו למלון ושקענו לתוך שינה.

הקשר ביני לבן איילין הוא הדוק רצוף ונשמר לאורך שנים, אני תקווה שהוא יישמש.

The Boston-Haifa Connection: A Professional and Personal Account

The proposal to make a connection with Haifa schools was a welcome venture. At Gan Yeladim there was already a commitment to Israel and the Hebrew language being a living part and essence of our program. Many looked upon the program as the closest you could get to one in Israel.

There was some trepidation about who we would be partnered with and what the expectations would be. We were matched with the only Arab-Israeli participants. This ended up being very positive to us all as we had the benefit of experiencing a new perspective and then discovering that we were still very much the same. We were all dedicated to young children and families. We were mothers and grandmothers who took pride in our own children. All of us had a lot to share about our lives and how we approached education at our centers.

The bonus was that we became close individually and collectively. We all bonded with our fellow educators from across the ocean. To this day many of us are still friends with those who participated in the Connection. Much of the success of this initiative is attributed to the Bureau of Jewish Education in Boston (BJE). The BJE organized and planned our trips and was a constant resource and inspiration. We all had accountability to the BJE and had regular meetings to plan, share and document the outcome of our experiences. Naomi Chernin, BJE Early Childhood Consultant, was the driving force and glue that held us all together. She listened, asked questions and pushed us to develop deep connections as we shared curriculum and collaborated with our new found sister schools (here and) in Israel.

Gan Yeladim was one of the first schools that received *Magen HaGan* Jewish accreditation. The process began with my predecessor, Sherry Grossman, and was completed after three years while I was the Director of the Gan. This accreditation was one of the successes we achieved with the prompting and support of the BJE. It allowed us to organize and document our Hebrew language program and developmentally

appropriate curriculum outlines. The 62 families at Gan Yeladim benefited and appreciated the work we were doing.

Over the years we were able to send eight teachers to Israel, some independent of the Haifa Connection. This solidified their commitment to the highest level of excellence in their teaching at the Gan. It also gave them the special opportunity to see and absorb the uniqueness of the Holy Land. Each had a life altering experience as a result of their visit. Evidence of this was clear when one classroom decided to dedicate a whole curriculum on Jerusalem using the Reggio-Emilio approach. For months the children studied and discussed Jerusalem. Documentation, written and in photos, showed the process of their learning which culminated in a huge handmade quilt. The children designed what they felt Jerusalem looked like. They drew, picked out fabric, cut and helped to sew. It was a reflection of their exploration, complimented by their photos and writings set up around the room, so that everyone could witness and revisit the experiences the children so much enjoyed.

Another highlight for the center as a whole was when it was transformed into Wadi NisNas, a special marketplace area in Haifa. Some of the teachers returned from a Boston-Haifa trip raving about how interesting it was and so we decided to build a curriculum that would reenact and bring it to life at Gan Yeladim. As we recreated this marketplace we also brought in Hebrew and Arabic into our lessons. We discussed our cultures through music, dance, books and foods. In the end we invited all the families to join us in our fun. Parents were exposed to all that we learned and were able to purchase the children's art work and crafts. One of our small group creations was a beautiful mosaic masterpiece that sold for \$75!

The Boston-Haifa Connection was priceless. So much came from this partnership. We were always inspired in some way, whether it was visiting a school for children with special needs, or one that had a wonderful music program for new Ethiopian immigrants. We saw how our partners taught in their schools and were always inspired when they presented curriculum to us during their visits to the US. The admiration and respect was mutual and each country's educators were in awe of the other.

We were always full of pride and joy when the Haifa teachers came to visit. Each time

the Gan would host an elaborate meal, curriculum exchanges and evening of fun with dancing and singing. One of the outcomes of our visits was to make Gan Yeladim the “Dancing School of Boston.” We modeled it after the dancing schools of Haifa. Our children from ages 2-5 learned Israeli songs and dances. We performed for others and created a CD with dance instructions. I, along with one of my teachers, Stella, went around to area schools as well as workshops to teach this program. It was a source of delight and pride to all our families and to those who got to see that even two-year-olds can learn Hebrew and dance!

As Director and an Israeli-American, it was truly rewarding to be a part of the evolution of Gan Yeladim. It made sense to be partners in the Boston-Haifa Connection along with the BJE. The extent of the positive outcomes over the years has also been reflected in my own life. I participated in the Hebrew College Early Childhood Directors program and I also received my Masters in Jewish Education from Hebrew College. I created a resource guide for teachers on “How to Help Children Cope with Loss,” based on my research in Boston and Haifa, Israel. To date, I remain good friends with my former staff, colleagues, and my sister educators who love me and I them in Haifa. I will always have the satisfaction that my work made an impact and contributed to the lives of young children, families and early childhood education and that the connection to Israel will remain strong.

13 Lucie Chag	Teacher, Billy Dalwin Preschool of Temple Emanah	Lexington, MA
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Here are some of my wonderful memories of Israel. I had such a wonderful time in so many ways. First, I feel that my relationship with the teachers from my preschool was incredibly enhanced. Living and learning with each other was really a great experience and I feel we became so much closer because of this. To this day, I feel that we have a different and more comfortable relationship. I had never been to Israel (except through our virtual trips). Several things stick in my mind. First, my trip to Masada was one of the highlights of my trip. Realizing the history and actually experiencing the place was almost magical. Learning the history and its significance was just an amazing experience for me. Learning how everything was carried up such a distance and how the water system was created was just unbelievable. It was quite amazing to learn how it was defended.

Our visit to Jerusalem was also an amazing turning point for me. I was privileged enough to personally deliver a special message to the Wailing Wall. One of my children had an aunt who was quite ill (and later passed away) and I was asked to deliver a special message to the wall about her health. LET ME TELL YOU WHAT A MOMENT THAT WAS FOR ME. It really brought home the meaning of prayer.

I also learned so much from visiting the preschools. They were hospitable and I feel we (as teachers) carried back so much from visiting each classroom. Learning about the Rami Katz technique has been of great value to me as a teacher. I have incorporated many of his teaching aspects into my curriculum.

Finally, it was so great actually meeting and continuing our relationship with the teachers in Haifa. They are an amazing and dedicated group of people and I truly value my continued relationship with them. I feel very honored to be an Ambassador this year and look forward to my commitment to Haifa.

Professional Impact

- General -

14	Vicky Benedek	Director, Jewish Preschool of Lexington	Lexington, MA
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Boston-Haifa Connection -- Reflections

As I look back at our many years of partnership with preschools in Haifa, I can only marvel at how enriching this connection has been for our school community. The children's knowledge of Hebrew is expanding, the bond with Israel is stronger, the teachers are empowered and eager to learn, and the parents are involved. I must admit that being Israeli myself helps as information and language acquisition are more accessible. But growing up in Israel or knowing the language is not sufficient; there must be a commitment to maintaining the lines of communication open, and that is the most important factor for keeping the Boston-Haifa Connection alive.

On several occasions I had the honor to host several educators at my home for a Shabbat weekend. One of them was an educator from the Arab sector. Sharing a relaxed Shabbat weekend with Etimad, hearing firsthand about her preschool program,

the challenges she faces, and how she weaves Israel and Arab culture curriculum into her daily plans, all added a new perspective and appreciation to the importance of keeping such a connection alive.

Integrating materials and curriculum from Israel into our program became second nature. Israeli books are displayed regularly on our bookshelves for children to choose from, as over the course of years we have build up a book selection rich with Israeli classics, and translations of popular books in English. Eric Carle would be one of the very proud authors and illustrators to hear his books read aloud in Hebrew. Children can often be seen playing board games from Israel, listening to Israeli music, or dancing Israeli folk dances. Our Haifa partners in Israel have shared with us materials which we adapted for our use; the stories they read, music they sing, the art they teach, and ideas from their family programs.

And our families love what they see. Parents comment to us how happy they are to learn Hebrew words from their children. They are eager to volunteer in family programs. One put together a CD with music we like to listen to, another was a “tour guide” during our virtual trip to Israel, and yet other love to prepare Israeli food for the children and the families. Having several Israeli families enrolled in our program only helped take our experience to another level of excitement.

Can such a connection be maintained without knowing the language or visiting Israel? Of course it can. How many Jews are “connected” to Israel without knowing Hebrew or ever traveled there? It just requires more of an effort, strong commitment and the hope to have financial resources to one day visit Eretz Yisrael. Our teachers have made such a commitment. They were motivated to take a basic Hebrew language course at Hebrew College, they ask to post vocabulary to use with the children, and they constantly update their postings relevant to their needs in the classroom. The teachers attend and present during our Haifa partners’ visit to Boston, they come to video conferences, and try to keep Israel alive in their classrooms.

It is exciting to move into the next phase of the Boston-Haifa Connection. One of our staff members is now the Shagrira (Ambassador) for the Jewish Preschool of Lexington,

and she is looking forward to this collaboration and to the possibility of traveling to Israel next year.

We at the Jewish Preschool of Lexington are very proud to be part of this collaboration and appreciate the financial commitment on the part of CJP.

15 Debbi Fendell Assistant Director, Frances Jacobson Early Childhood Center at Temple Israel Boston, MA

Growing up as a Conservative Jew, the State of Israel played an important role. In Hebrew school we raised money to plant trees in the JFK Forest there, with a personal family connection in a particular grove of trees in the name of my maternal grandparents. My religious school education included study of Israel during which we learned about the ingenuity of Israelis when it came to such things as irrigation, and the importance of Israel as our homeland as well. As a teenager, my younger sister traveled to Israel for a whole summer and I remember anxiously waiting for the first letter to arrive from overseas.

Finally, two years ago, it was my turn to visit this mysterious and historic destination. I was so fortunate to be able to travel there through the Boston-Haifa Early Childhood Educators Connection! Even better, the two colleagues from my preschool and I were able to go even earlier than the rest of the group so that we could see and experience even more of the country. From the old city of Jaffa to the teeming streets of Tel Aviv, from the Palmach Museum to Tel Aviv University, through the countryside to the Old City of Jerusalem, we walked the streets that I had been reading about since I was a young girl. To think that in Jerusalem my feet were able to touch the same stones that had been there since the Romans were there was quite surreal. In addition, I saw the irrigation methods that I had previously only read about, in action! At the Ayalon Institute I learned even more about the bravery and ingenuity of the settlers in the early history of Israel.

We celebrated Shabbat at the Wailing Wall. How moving that was, especially when we heard the joyous singing of “David Melech Yisrael” and realized that it was coming from an Israeli army troop dancing and singing with each other on the men’s side. Will I ever

hear that song again without remembering the goose bumps I felt at that moment? The answer to that question is a resounding ‘no!’

During my second year at the FJECC, both the director and the two of the teaching staff who were exposed to Rami Katz came back with enthusiasm for incorporating some of his ideas into our curriculum. The following year, when our Haifa counterparts were in Boston, they put on a display of 32 of his activities for all of us to try one evening. And so it was that after hearing about Rami Katz for two years, I felt it was a real gift to meet him as he joined us during visits to several preschools which were using his methods every day! It was inspirational to see him interacting with the children in the preschools as they manipulated materials using his suggested methods. He was so happy to hear their appropriate responses to his questions, as well!

On our return from Israel, the preschool began to gear up for our annual ‘trip to Israel’ in each classroom. I was happy to print up photos of myself on camelback and in the Dead Sea (with mud all over me!). I had so much fun visiting classrooms and relating stories of my time spent in Israel, and it was with a whole new understanding that I was able to do so. I am forever grateful for the opportunity that the Boston-Haifa connection offered to me.

16	Sherry Grossman	Community Special Education Coordinator, Gateways	Newton, MA
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Reflections on the Boston-Haifa Early Childhood Connection, 2000-2012

Role of Bureau of Jewish Education

The BJE provided leadership, inspiration, coordination and offered full cooperation to ensure that each of the years visiting and hosting, studying and connecting with our colleagues in Haifa grew in both sustainable and successful ways. The biggest challenge of getting to know our counterparts in Haifa was made much easier because of the fluency of the Haifa professionals in both Hebrew and English. As the liaison for our exchange, Naomi Chernin, Early Childhood Education Specialist at the BJE, facilitated every step of the project to enable the development of personal and professional relationships. A key focus for the colleagues included developing

relationships with specialists, special educators and leaders in both the Haifa Municipality and the different private and public systems in Greater Boston.

Role of the JCCs of Greater Boston Early Learning Centers

Following a year of study with the Early Childhood Directors Institute, I was inspired to study more deeply, applied and was accepted to the MAJS program at HC. I took a sabbatical year to begin the journey. Along with 5 other directors we trekked to Jerusalem to study about King David at Pardes Institute and then we traveled to our sister city Haifa where we began to cultivate new relationships with our counterparts in Israel and embarked on a life changing journey!

From its inception when we founded Gan Yeladim for the JCCs of Greater Boston, our mission integrated both the Hebrew language and a strong connection to Israel in the curriculum. At the same time we cultivated this approach in each classroom, we also worked on Judaic accreditation, *Magen HaGan*, and celebrated with our families throughout the year with Israeli songs, dances, and artwork and shared learning on topics of *Water*, *Tzedakah* and Special Education approaches. The exchange with Haifa bolstered all our efforts.

Later, as the JCCGB Director of Early Childhood Education we built on the success of teacher-partners with counterparts in Haifa for two classrooms at Gan Yeladim and worked with the other JCC preschools to involve them in the developing exchange. Over the next seven years, close to 10 teachers and 7 JCCGB directors and administrators traveled with the Boston group to experience Israel, most for the first time themselves and also through the eyes of our Haifa colleagues.

The professional growth that permeated our relationship over the years cultivated sharper emphasis on both inclusion of students with challenging behaviors and the direction we were heading professionally. Compelling observations in the Haifa classrooms demonstrated new teaching strategies and special education techniques. The use of visual supports, three-dimensional developmentally targeted tasks made from recycled materials in addition to ongoing relationships with birds and animals inspired changes in our practice. Conversations with the Haifa group here in Boston continued to support asking questions about how we can look at each child's situation

with fresh eyes and coordinate all of the therapeutic interventions to optimize his/her development. Meanwhile, our Haifa colleagues learned about family education and the connections between community and congregation schools.

Presently, while serving as the Gateways Community Special Education Services Coordinator, there is not a day that goes by that I don't consider the lessons learned from the work with our colleagues in Haifa.

1. Building one-to-one relationships with individual educators, specialists and teachers inspired profound change in the practice.
2. Shared cross-cultural professional experience provides both a platform for discovery and accountability to achieve deeper understanding.
3. Learning together, early childhood educators of Boston and Haifa built a very strong relationship knowing that what is good for one child in Israel or Boston can be good for all of the children in both cities.
4. New professional relationships are fragile, like the human beings who make them. Consequently, lasting change takes time and requires ongoing support.

17 Helaine Katz Preschool staff, JCC Early Learning Center Acton, MA

My first connection to Israel was as a young college student spending her Junior Year abroad in Jerusalem. The nugget of my love for the land, people and all that is Israel was planted in my heart the moment the El Al plane began landing at the airport in Tel Aviv with Hatikva playing over the planes speakers. Of course I was going to return the very next year but as we know life gets in the way.

Becoming part of the Boston-Haifa Connection, rekindled my relationship with Israel some 30 years later. Now as a mother and educator, I had an opportunity to see Israel with a fresh set of eyes. The first day we landed weary and bleary eyed ready for sleep; we were immediately whisked away to an outdoor classroom outside of Tel Aviv. The presenter explained how they connected Israeli children, immigrants and native born alike with their culture, heritage and history through investigations of plants, artifacts and other natural elements in this outdoor environment. I had my first aha moment of the trip, it finally made sense how the symbols and customs of the holidays actually connected to

the agricultural reality of the seasons in Israel. The foods, plants and elements of nature associated with holiday celebrations no longer were something we just did well because that was the traditions we had learned, it actually made sense in the context of Israel. Now I could bring Israel alive for the children in my class.

When our group was there, it was right after the Iraqi War when ketusha rockets had been fired on cities and kibbutzim in Israel. Haifa and the northern part of Israel had been hit the hardest. We learned first hand how our counterparts had to deal not only with the social, emotional and academic needs of young children like our own but the additional burden of the realities of living in an area of conflict. One day as we were with our partner in her gan, one boy jumped at the sound of a car backfiring. She explained that rockets had fallen in front of some of these children's homes. She spoke about the program they were using to support children who had fears and how they helped children who were now fearful of transitioning from their parents. While we live in more tranquil surroundings, these were valuable lessons that I could bring back to our classroom to deal with the fears, anxieties and worries of our own children no matter how small.

Finally, it strikes me how powerful my connection to the land of Israel is as I recall planting with our Israeli colleagues trees in the area of forest devastated by the rockets. What was once black, we were turning to green. With the recent fires in Haifa, I know first hand how vital it is to support the drive for planting trees in Israel. The Boston-Haifa Connection will be ever present as we make an appeal to our families to plant a tree in Israel in honor of Tu B'Shevat.

I look forward to my continuing connection with my partners in Boston and Haifa and hope to return once again to Israel to continue my educational and personal journey.

18 Chris Balmer Teacher, Kehillath Israel Nursery School Brookline, MA

Though I am not Jewish, I have been a preschool teacher at KINS in Brookline, MA, since September 1999. From my early days at KI, I enjoyed learning the Judaic curriculum along with my students. And when, in February of 2005, I was offered the

opportunity to visit Israel as part of the Boston-Haifa Connection, I accepted the offer with enthusiasm.

I have always believed that to have a real impact on my students, I must first incorporate whatever I want to teach them into my life. If I want to teach tolerance, I must be tolerant. If I want to teach humility, I should be humble. It is true that as educators, we sometimes teach curricula that we have not truly internalized. However I believe that my students are more willing learners if I have first made the change within myself that I am asking them to embrace.

This concept was reinforced for me after my trip to Israel. Though I had been saying the Hebrew blessings each day at snack and teaching the Jewish holidays for five years, it wasn't until I experienced Shabbat in Jerusalem and visited the holy sites, that it truly became a part of me. I will never be Jewish, but participating in the Boston-Haifa Connection has enhanced my ability to teach a love of being Jewish to the young people in my care.

19 Kate Hermann Teacher, Billy Dalwin Preschool of Temple Lexington, MA
Emunah

The Boston-Haifa Early Childhood Connection gave us the wonderful opportunity to meet with Rami Katz and see his approach in action. Our whole school now incorporates Rami Katz's ideas into all of our all-school curriculum (including all the Jewish holidays).

On a personal level, my favorite part of the Boston-Haifa trip was our weekend hospitality with Dorit. She and her family were so generous with their time, space, and delicious food. It was an experience that culminated with a rainbow over the Galilee, so expressive of the magic of that encounter.

- Curricula -

20 Lisa Kritz

Director, Erna and Julius Hertz Nursery
School

Sharon, MA

I didn't just put sunglasses on the first time I returned to Israel in 2001 after an almost 30 year lapse. I wore the lens of an early childhood educator. These glasses never left my thought process in Israel, in 2001, 2005, and 2007 and are always on in Sharon.

The Boston-Haifa experience was born on the last few days of a study mission to Pardes as part of our Early Childhood Directors Institute, supported by Hebrew College and the BJE. We had studied for 5 years with Ina Regosin and this was the culmination of our certificate program. (We still continue to study together today).

Our last few days were spent in Haifa meeting other early childhood educators. It became clear from the get go that education, children and the love of teaching was universal. It did not matter what language we spoke or curriculum we had...we were one. Curriculum, language and culture became important side bars as our relationship grew.

For Hertz Nursery School, two teachers who went on two missions and several others who became involved on Haifa teachers visits to Boston our school has connected the importance and beauty of Israel from both the historical and current perspective.

One of the greatest programs we developed from one of our Boston-Haifa experiences was the creation of our Lion Curriculum. This wove staff professional development, with Hebrew College, the context of the Lion in Tanach, to creating a secular unit on the Lion. Lions of Jerusalem led to a special exhibit illustrating the Lion in Synagogue life and Carousels.

Another piece that was very impressive to us during our school visits around Israel was their Parsha space. We now have created a "Parsha Spot" and have our "Parsha Spot Theatre" there weekly. Our dream became a reality this year and has enhanced our environment.

Another interesting share was our “Archeological Dig” program that we do in December when we ‘visit’ Israel with the children. Our Haifa partners were fascinated by the idea of us doing archeology, they did not, and how we organized and ran parent education programs. We were not the sole beneficiaries of the exchanges. Our colleagues also grew, learned and gathered valuable new ideas to bring back to their schools.

There is no way to properly measure the value of our involvement in Boston-Haifa. It is priceless and has helped to make Hertz Nursery School grow and share so much with our families. We have been truly blessed by the gift of inclusion in the Boston-Haifa CJP program.

21 Heidi Baker Director, Temple Beth Avodah Nursery School Newton, MA

An ongoing goal in the preschool is to increase Judaic curriculum in our program. We teach Israel as the Jewish homeland, a real place with children and families similar to us in many ways, and try to provide developmentally appropriate experiences for the students so that an understanding of Israel will develop.

Nine years ago we began a partnership with teachers from Haifa. The format was that the Haifa teachers were to travel here every other year, and a group from Boston travels to Israel every other year. I had the good fortune to attend two of the Bureau of Jewish Education’s Early Childhood Seminars in Israel. This was an incredible experience that further developed our Israel connection and curriculum. The first time I attended I went by myself. I knew to bring our preschool program’s connection to Israel to the next level teachers would have to have this experience as well. When the next opportunity arose in February of 2007, three teachers, from three different classes, joined me on the seminar in Israel. We were able to provide this opportunity due to the generous support of CJP. The trip was greatly subsidized and we were able to approach our synagogue for the remainder of the cost.

The overall effect on our program was immediately reflected in our Israel programming and unit that year. Israel became integrated into many areas of our curriculum. In our weather time, we discussed the weather in Israel. The teachers created books to share with the school using their photographs from the trip. The children related personally to

the photos from the schools. We discussed the similarities between our school and the gan in Israel and what is different. We also compared Newton and Haifa. At the end of our school year we “traveled to Israel” for a month. Although we have had our “trip” to Israel for many years the planning and implementation were much more authentic. The places visited were many of the same places we had visited ourselves on that trip; Jerusalem, Haifa, the desert and Dead Sea, and Safed. I have attached a copy of the many activities that families experienced on our Israel Day which is a culmination of our Israel Unit.

Unfortunately, funding for these exchanges has been dramatically cut. We have many staff members that have never been to Israel and feel that this professional opportunity to have an open and meaningful exchange with an opportunity to experience Israel is key to our Israel programming and curriculum. Personally, two of the three teachers that attended the seminar in 2007 have left our program. This has truly left a hole in our ability to share the real Israel with our students.

We are excited to continue to participate in the newly designed Boston-Haifa connection. Our teachers are delighted that we will be partnering with a school in Haifa to share information and experiences. As meaningful as this type of exchange can be, I do think that the actual trip to Israel for our staff is still the most impactful experience we can give our early childhood teachers which then resonates in our programs.

- Classroom -

22 Ellen Forman

Judaic Specialist, Frances Jacobson Early
Childhood Center at Temple Israel

Boston, MA

I had the fortunate experience of going on the Boston-Haifa trip in 2007.

Although I had been to Israel several times before this trip, I had never gone with the intent of looking at early childhood education and how it's done in Israel. My role at the Frances Jacobson Early Childhood Center is Judaic Coordinator. In my position I teach Judaica to children ages 2 to 5 as well as support the teachers and the parents.

What I saw in school after school was so moving. The children have such a deep passion for their country and their culture. Each classroom we saw, whether in a religious school or not, prominently displayed the symbols of the State of Israel as well as pictures of the heads of state and the words for Hatikva. In each classroom as well, we saw a display of the Shabbat ritual items sitting on a table, waiting to be used for Kabbalat Shabbat. We went at the time of Purim and the joyousness of the holiday was so integrated into all of their learning from face painting to festive costumes to try on to games involving clowns to uplifting, spirited music to dance to. I came away with the impression that we could duplicate this festivity into our classrooms at the time of the Jewish holidays.

I understood that although our children do not live in Israel, we could imbue in them a love of the land that could possibly emulate the love of the country that I felt in those classrooms that I visited.

For me, this experience helped strengthen my commitment to having a strong Judaic program on the preschool level. Learning to love the land of Israel, its people, culture and language can start at an early age and continue to grow with the child in order to make her/him a committed Jew.

- Teaching Strategies -

23 Linda Burton

Teacher, JCC Early Learning Center

Acton, MA

There were many formal educational experiences I had on my Boston-Haifa trips. We had speakers from the school systems, government officials, educational tours, museum and school visits and home hospitality. At the Israel Museum, we participated in a program for people with sight to experience navigating through some ordinary daily routines in total darkness... for an hour. It was scary and it required that we trust those we were with to help us through this. It is a fact of life in Israel that there are many people with disabilities from terrorist, war and traffic incidents. This was a powerful and unforgettable experience. After these many varied events, we came together with our colleagues to share and process what we took away from these opportunities. On the tour buses to and from these activities, we shared stories with each other. It was on the bus that I learned from a Boston teacher, sign language (unofficial) for the Shema. We visited Yemin Orde and learned of some of the varied paths to Israeli citizenship and experienced the coming home of the "wandering Jew," a story old and new.

The most memorable part of my combined Boston-Haifa Israel trips came as a result of an informal educational opportunity. It was from the preschool classroom strategy, born out of necessity that was shared with us by one of our Haifa teachers. We saw first hand the high number of preschool students to teachers in our visits to the Haifa schools. On her visit to us, Shlomit, a gan teacher of too many, so envied our student teacher ratio and told us what she did to maintain a personal connection to each of her students. At the beginning of the school year, with a school calendar and the list of students before her, she assigned a day to each student as many times as she could throughout the school year. Each morning she checked who the student of the day was and, though this was not announced, she focused special attention on this student all day. It was a touch on the shoulder as she passed, calling on this one to be her helper, directing questions, making eye contact. This small but powerful method has had an immense impact on me. After feeling gratitude for our better ratios, I immediately implemented this method not only in my preschool class at the JCC but also in my Hebrew school classes in two different schools. It has helped me to create human moments and maintain richer personal connections with all of my students.

- Haifa Preschool Experience -

24 Carol Brown Teacher, Erna and Julius Hertz Nursery School Sharon, MA

My Boston-Haifa experience left me with a view of the creative energy of the Israeli teachers. It is infectious. It is impossible not to want to bring their ideas and enthusiasm back home.

Teaching about Israel gives one an entirely different point of reference. The visual and emotional experience is undeniable, whether it's the simple sight of a pomegranate, the landscape, the architecture, the food, and, of course, the people.

25 Ronit Ben-Shir Director, JCC Early Learning Center Acton, MA

Several years ago when I was introduced to the Boston-Haifa program, I was very excited to learn about and looked forward to being a part of this experience. As an Israeli who has lived in the USA for the last 20 years, being away from Israel, I pay a price for being away from my homeland, immediate family and the place where I belong. I have chosen to live here and work in Jewish early childhood education to teach the next generation about belonging to the Jewish community, to be proud of being Jewish and to create a connection to Israel. This is my personal mission. Growing up in the Haifa area made the Boston-Haifa Connection even more meaningful for me. It felt like it was meant to be.

My higher education in Haifa University and my early childhood education in Oranim made my connection to Boston-Haifa a natural one. During my years of connection between Boston and Haifa, I was excited to see the educational approach and dedicated work of the Israeli teachers. I came to see what things are similar and different between Israel and the USA in early childhood education. The exchange of ideas allowed me to reflect on my own practice. Being connected to the Boston-Haifa program, gave several of my teachers the opportunity to be connected to Israel. As a result, they are able to emphasize the importance of Israel and connecting the families and children to Israel. Visiting Israel with the Boston-Haifa connection was a very unique experience. It was my first experience visiting Israel as a tourist; seeing the other teachers' reactions to the

experience helped me to connect to what is important to emphasize in our educational approach here in the USA. I look forward to continue being a part of the Boston-Haifa connection.

- Local Network -

26 **Robin Sagarin** Director, Temple Emeth Nursery School Chestnut Hill, MA

I have spent over 20 years in Jewish early childhood education and as a teacher. Israel had a strong influence on our curriculum and environment. Although I personally have not been able to travel to Israel I can remember the excitement when a teacher from Haifa was coming to spend the day at our school. She was greeted and rotated through our rooms doing a short lesson with the children in the four year old classroom. After dismissal, many of our staff gathered for lunch and discussed some of the major similarities and differences in an Israeli *gan* compared to a Temple preschool in the United States. Some staff attended Shabbat dinners on the South Shore with the visiting Israeli educators, others an evening at the JCC; a session on Israeli art stands out in my memory.

As a new Director at Temple Emeth Nursery School I hope to make the Boston-Haifa Connection a part of our school for the first time. We serve a unique multicultural population; the Boston-Haifa Connection helps to support our mission to include Israel as a major component of our nursery school.

Last year two of my four year old teachers participated in a workshop at a local community farm; they then joined me in attending a session at Hebrew College where *Bringing Nature into the Classroom* was the topic shared between Boston area schools and visiting Israeli teachers. Regina Luff and Florence Stuchins, Temple Emeth's four-year-old classroom teachers, had a display showing many of the nature lessons and exploration that their children had experienced. There was a lot of sharing and learning going on, but it was the feel in the room that I recall, local teachers who had made the trip to Israel as part of the Boston-Haifa Connection and those who had previously housed Israeli teachers were reuniting their friendships, we were all early childhood educators, Klal Yisrael.

This year five teachers from Temple Emeth attended the Israel Connection Conference in December. I was delighted with their interest in representing Temple Emeth in our continued effort to remain a part of the Boston-Haifa Connection. They returned to school to report that it was a lovely evening. One teacher said, "I was impressed with the rhyming story about building cities. I liked this idea for teaching about the different cities in Israel."

Thank you for the opportunity to stay connected with other Jewish educators and to keep Israel in the forefront of our school.

- Home Hospitality -

27 Sarah Scully	Teacher, Billy Dalwin Preschool of Temple Emunah	Lexington, MA
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The most memorable time for me in Israel was staying with our host family in Haifa. It was such a treat to get to know people on a more personal level, and to see how people live in a city like Haifa. To think that people gave up some of their time and their living space to make our trip so special was touching. Our host, Shira, made plans to show us around the city and outlying areas, and constantly asked if there was something else we would like to see or do. The hospitality of Shira and her family made the trip much more personal and we got to see parts of Israel that we otherwise would not have been able to experience. Caesarea was incredibly beautiful on the day we were there, very windy and cloudy and the sky was intense and the waves were huge. This side trip was not a part of our regular itinerary, so we would not have been able to see this had it not been for Shira, our own personal tour guide. We also got to experience a Shabbat dinner with Shira and her extended family. It was nice to see how they welcome Shabbat each week and to be included in such a special time.

- Family Engagement -

28 Jenny Brown	Parents, Billy Dalwin Preschool of Temple Emunah	Lexington, MA
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When my daughter was a student in the Kofefim Room at Billy Dalwin Preschool of Temple Emunah (my son, an alum of the program, was in kindergarten), we visited Israel with a group from Temple Emunah. While we were in Haifa, we had the

opportunity to visit Billy Dalwin's partner class in Israel. Walking up to the gate of the school, my kids were thrilled both to see Anat -- who as Billy Dalwin's partner teacher, had visited the school a number of times -- as well as the group of kids who held up signs welcoming us to their classroom. The experience was really a fascinating one for me, and a fun one for my kids, who joined right in with the activities going on. My daughter jumped into the pretend play areas and my son joined in a game that the Lexington and Haifa children were playing together. I was so impressed with the way the room was structured and what the kids were doing. While it beautifully replicated many of the experiences my daughter was having as a student in the Kofefim room at Billy Dalwin, the students were older, and my son's kindergarten -- with students the same age -- had none of the experiential activities and creativity in his public school kindergarten. I was definitely a little jealous. Visiting the classroom was an illuminating peek into Israeli schooling!

- Haifaiim in Boston -

29 Tali Koenig	Director, Flora Special Educational Center (Nassau Center)	Haifa, Israel
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נסיעות לארה"ב הם עניין שגרתני בחיי הפרטיים, ובוסטון היא בית שני עבורי. אולם נסיעת העבודה הנוכחית הייתה עבורי חוויה מרגשת בעלת ערך מוסף הן בהיבט המקצועי והן בהיבט האישי. הנסיעה כללה חוויה אינטימית עם עוד ארבע נשות מקצוע, כאשר כל אחת מביאה את עולמה הייחודי. ההיגד: "סך השלם יותר מחלקיו" נכון לגבי המשלחת הנוכחית בעיקר בתכנים העשירים אשר הבאנו עמנו. במהלך הביקורים הפחנו רוח חיים ישראלית, והרבה אנרגיה חיובית. הפעילות שבחרנו להדגים במסגרות החינוך כללה ריקוד, כפי שהדבר מתקיים במסגרת הפרוייקט של גנים רוקדים. פעילות סנסומוטורית, אשר כללה מגע ותחושה באמצעים טבעיים. כמו כן, הביקורים במסגרות החינוך היו מגוונים ומעשירים: זכינו להביט באשכולות גנים יהודיים, ולהבין כיצד הקשר היהודי – ישראלי בא לידי ביטוי בבתים שונים. נהננו מאוד באשכול ייחודי הפועל על פי רג'יו אמיליה, המשלב התבוננות אומנותית עם אמונה בלמידה חווייתית. הסביבה מותאמת ומורכבת מחומרים טבעיים, ביניהם בדים רכים, שטיחים, קש ועץ טבעי. בנוסף, נכנסנו לבתי ספר מיוחדים ציבוריים ופרטיים. היה מרגש להבין כיצד חברה שלמה מיישמת הלכה למעשה את עקרון השילוב. כיצד רשויות מקומיות מאפשרות שילוב של ילדים בעלי צרכים מיוחדים בקהילה, וכן כיצד ניתנים משאבים פרופסיונאליים ופיסיים, המאפשרים מתן מענה יוצא דופן לאוכלוסייה פגועה.

עבורי, הביקורים המרשימים ביותר היו:

- באשכול הייחודי אשר פועל בשיטת רג'יו אמיליה נהייתי לראות כיצד אדם בעל אמונה בדרך ייחודית, מצליח להגשים חלומו הפרטי ולהפכו לדרך חיים. מנהלת האשכול למדה ורכשה ידע ומיומנות באיטליה. היא משלבת בהתמדה בין אמונתה וחזונה, לבין יישום עקרונות השיטה במהלך העבודה.
- בבית הספר פרקינס, בו זכינו להיפגש עם נשיא ביה"ס: לגעת בהיסטוריה של הלן קלר, להתפעם ממרחבים וציודים מרשימים, ובעיקר- להתרגש מעבודת צוות עם אוכלוסייה כל כך מאתגרת, ולהבין, שבעצם, זה מה שאנו באשכול שלנו (אשכול גנים פלורה) עושות בכל יום! לפעמים צריך באמת להתרחק- כדי להאמין!

בל נשכח, ששבועיים מחוץ לבית, וניתוק מהעבודה, אינם דבר של מה בכך. הגעגועים למשפחה התרככו בזכות קבלת הפנים החמה שקבלנו, הדאגה לפרטים הקטנים, והקשר החם שנוצר בין האנשים. נעמי, רכזת המשלחת והאשה שעומדת מאחורי שיתופי הפעולה רבי השנים, מיוחדת במינה הן בגישתה לחינוך בכלל והן באמונתה בקשרי חיפה בוסטון. זוהי הזדמנות לברך את כל העושים במלאכה, להודות לשפרה- האחת והיחידה, אשר מאפשרים דיאלוגים מקצועיים כל כך חשובים, ומממשים חוויות אישיות כל כך מעצימות!

30 Annie Bugin

Special Education Supervisor

Haifa, Israel

בשנים האחרונות זכיתי להיות שותפה בקבוצת הגננות חיפה בוסטון.

בקרתי במסגרות הגניות ובמוסדות חינוך בעיר בוסטון והשתתפתי במפגשים שנערכו בארץ. מפגשים אלו תרמו: ללמידה משמעותית כיצד משמרים דת ומסורת יהודית כאשר חיים בקרב קהילה מגוונת הן מבחינה דתית והן מבחינה תרבותית.

נחשפתי למערכת החינוך הקדם יסודית הפרטית בקהילה היהודית .

למדתי על מודלים שונים לעבודה חינוכית בגלאי הגן ובעיקר בגילאי 3 עד 5. למדתי כיצד מעצימים אהבת ישראל בגולה.

נתרמתי במעגלי חשיבה שונים כיצד ניתן לקדם ילדים עם צרכים מיוחדים: שיטות עבודה אמצעים ותוכניות. קשרתי קשרים עם קהילת הגננות הן מבחינה חברתית ואישית ובעיקר נחשפתי לחיים הקהילתיים בקרב יהדות בוסטון והזיקה שלהם למדינת ישראל.

הגעתי לארצות הברית עם חששות גדולים . למרות שהכרתי חלק מהבנות שביקרו אצלנו במרכז מילוא הרי ידעתי כי אנגלית אני לא כל כך יודעת . החמימות בה התקבלתי וההרגשה שאני רצויה הקלו עלי את הביקור. בביקורי בגנים לימדתי את הילדים דקלום הקשור לקבלת שבת . כדי ללמדו השתמשתי בבובות בשיר וברקוד.

לאחר שבוע נפגשתי עם הגננות ולשמחתי הן סיפרו לי כי כל הילדים מדקלמים את השיר **בעברית** בסיורי בגנים גילית שוני רב בהגשת החומרים הנהוגה אצלנו , יחד עם זאת מאוד מצאה חן בעיני התכנית של שהיית הילדים בגן כלומר, שכל ילד יכול לבחור את מספר השעות המתאים לו על פי יכולתו הרגשית וצרכיו.

עוד מהמפגש הראשון עם האורחות מבוססון נוצר קשר יוצא דופן, על הפער של תרבות ושפה, גישרו/חיברו הנשיות, האנושיות והמקצועיות..

מצאתי כי יש לנו יותר משותף משונה. הביקורים ההדדיים גרמו לי קודם כל שמחה אך גם העשרה גדולה. מתנות גדולות ניתנו בשותפות בביקורי מעבר לים למדתי להעריך את המאמץ הגדול של יהדות הגולה לשמור את יהדותם (מה שכל כך קל לעשות בישראל), קיבלתי נקודת מבט חדשה ומרגשת על המושג- "קהילה", ראיתי כי "עזרה הדדית" ו"צדקה" אינן מילים אלא הווייה שלמה הבאה לידי ביטוי בעשייה יום יומית המתחילה בגן הילדים וממשיכה בעולם המבוגרים.

היכולת לגייס הורים וליצור שיתוף פעולה איתם היא מודל לחיקוי עבורי.

במסגרת השותפות נתתי הרצאות והצגתי חומר לימודי . ההערכות לקראת מפגשים אלה דרשה ממני מיקוד חקר ולמידה מעמיקה . מה שאפשר גם לי להרחיב דעת