

Boston Haifa Early Childhood Educators' Connection Mifgash, December 2017, USA

The Boston Haifa Early Childhood Educators' Connection has inspired and impacted hundreds of educators, thousands of children and their families in Boston and in Haifa. The connection was formed in 2001 and has been led by Hebrew College since 2009. It has several goals:

- Strengthen, deepen (and in some cases, develop) Jewish identity for educators both in Boston and in Haifa.
- Create a sense of peoplehood for people from both cities, and also within each city.
- Develop intentional, skilled and knowledgeable educators who can help young children develop their Jewish identity and sense of peoplehood starting from an early age.



From top right: Temple Emunah community celebration, Temple Emanuel community event; Temple Emanuel with education team director Wendy Falchuk and Andrea Shapiro; Israelis exploring Hanukkah and Israel with the kids.

Personal Connections- PEOPLEHOOD

One central goal of the Boston Haifa Early Childhood Educators' Connection is to form personal connections that will lead to a sense of belonging, or peoplehood. We designed the *mifgash* to include many opportunities to form new connections and deepen old ones.

All of our activities were open to educators from Boston. Please refer to the full itinerary for details.

One of the components was home hospitality and some free time with partners. Talia, a Haifa delegate new to the program this year, repeatedly shared her warm impressions during reflection sessions,

"I was surprised and moved by the willingness and warm hospitality of everyone we met...people drove us when it was out of their way, I felt like this is my family when we care for one another. The home hospitality with Vicky was very special, in the beginning I tried to stay away and not be a burden but then I realized that they wanted to spend time with me and we delved into great conversations with her and her husband...I am looking forward to hosting anyone from Boston in my home in Haifa, anyone!"

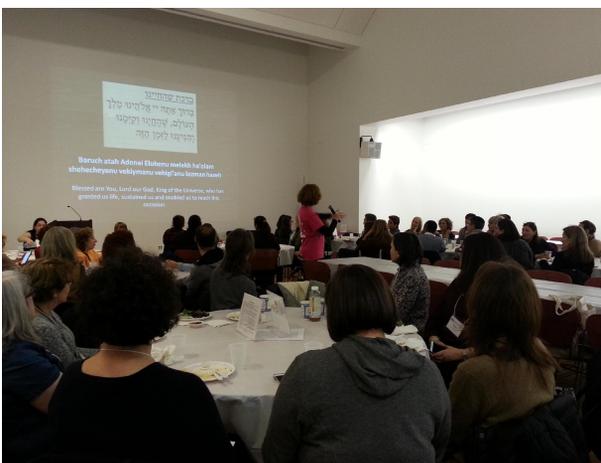
This year for the first time some of the Bostonians joined the Israelis in NYC. This experience was very successful and created opportunities to deepen and strengthen the personal connection. We will adopt this model in future *mifgashim*. In NYC we visited the JCC Early Learning Center in Manhattan, and met with Shellie Dickstein and her team at the Jewish Education Project. We delved deeper into questions about Jewish education and early education in general. Together we explored challenges, opportunities and best practices. This meeting will lead to future collaboration with the Jewish community in NYC that will also strengthen a sense of peoplehood and Jewish identity.



From top: Temple Emanuel, with Andrea Shapiro.
Middle: Lindsay Harvey (Director; Yal-Day-New Day Care) and Reut Fux exploring NYC together.
Bottom: September 11 Memorial, NYC (Israelis with Sara Sinai (Director Kehilat Israel preschool) Lindsay Harvey, Linna Ettinger and Rachel Raz.

Learning Together @ Hebrew College Early Childhood Jewish Education Conference

“The Book” or, the Bible, has inspired humanity for generations and it still does. Hebrew College’s Early Childhood Institute designed the annual early childhood conference to offer a taste of the possibilities that are in the Torah no matter where people are on their personal and professional journeys. Over 200 educators from 40 organizations including the Israelis studied together at Hebrew College for two days. We planned for our Haifa delegates to be able to attend and participate in the annual conference so that they could see different models of teaching about Torah and enjoying the sense of peoplehood shared through Torah and at the conference. We studied the text from *Breishit* together, asking our educators to look for the lessons for educators offered by the text. Our workshop sessions ranged in topics from hands-on workshops such as “Holding Torah in Our Hand: Using Puppets and Props to Engage Young Children in the Weekly Torah Story” and “Jewish Storytelling Comes Alive” to sessions geared towards more veteran educators such as “Torah Godly Play,” “Innovative Leadership Models from Ancient Jewish Texts” and “The World is Built on Loving Kindness” (Psalm 89:3): The Book of Ruth.” We heard from American Jewish astronaut Jeff Hoffman, who took a Torah into space. Our Haifa delegates were deeply moved and inspired by their time at the conference.



Reflection by Shifra Anteby, Director, Early Childhood Department of Education, Haifa Municipality and leader of the group from Israel:

“After all these years, I learn new things each time and return home with new insights and ideas...I am taking with me several things this year: 1) Connection of the community to the preschool. The preschool will be the change agent that creates the connection to the community with shared experiences. Something simple like the Lego Menorah building activity [at Temple Emanuel] allowed the child to make choices, strengthened the connection between the child and his/her family, and the community as a whole. Something we need to do more. It was nice to see how they integrated it with the holiday. 2) [The Early Childhood Conference]— I was inspired by the text learning from Rachel Raz on Genesis [Breishit] – it was deep learning that I have never done before, and made me think about maybe creating a Beit Midrash in Haifa for Educators. Another thing that inspired our entire group was the Torah Godly Play [with Rabbi Dr. Michael Shire]. We left inspired and touched by the method that allows a place for the child and the adult to connect to these stories in a meaningful way for them. We will look into bringing this to our schools in the future. 3) Visits to the variety of preschools inspired me to think about opening preschools within cultural institutions such as the science museum, art museum or a zoo. What we saw and the day we spent at the Lincoln preschool that works closely with the DeCordova Museum was an inspiration on many levels.”



Israelis with Dr. Jeff Hoffman, American Jewish Astronaut, who was the first astronaut to take a Torah into space.

Hanukkah vs. Christmas

We chose to hold the *mifgash* during Hanukkah for the following reasons:

- To create an opportunity to share a Jewish experience together.
- We are working with many interfaith families in the USA and this creates a natural opportunity to talk about the “December dilemma,” life in the USA as a minority, formation of identity and the need to be intentionally Jewish in the USA.
- Israelis can witness the rich Jewish life of the American Jewish community, learn to appreciate it and bring some of it back to their communities in Israel.

What did we do?

Together, Israelis and Americans celebrated Hanukkah in many communal settings. (Temple Emunah, Temple Emanuel, Jewish Preschool of Lexington.)

Together, Israelis and Americans studied the original text about Hanukkah and ways to share the learning with the kids. (Book of Maccabees and the Talmud.)

We lit Hanukkah candles each night which sparked many deep and meaningful conversations about our traditions, practices, families, communal and personal memories.

With Astronaut Jeff Hoffman we watched an original video recording of him spinning a dreidel in space and sharing the Hanukkah holiday with fellow astronauts.

We celebrated Hanukkah with the children in the preschools (Kehillat Israel, Yal-Day-New Day Care, Temple Emanuel, Alef Bet Day Care and the Jewish Preschool of Lexington.)



Top: Building the tallest communal Lego Hanukkah menorah at Temple Emanuel;

Bottom: Community celebration at Temple Emunah in Lexington.

Bringing Israel and the Boston-Haifa Connection to the Early Childhood Centers

Another goal of the Boston-Haifa Early Childhood Educators' Connection is to bring Israel to young children and start to form a strong foundation of connection to the land of Israel, its history and its people. This early exposure and connection will help the child as they develop their Jewish identity. Therefore, every *mifgash* includes time in the classroom for Israeli educators to engage with children in Boston. They prepared activities in Israel and brought materials to share with the kids including music, books, photos etc. This year they shared programs related to Hanukkah. The Israelis spent time at Temple Emanuel, Yal-Day-New Day Care, Kehillat Israel and Alef Bet Day Care.

Another goal is to connect non-Jewish schools to Israel through early education. We visited some of these schools to learn about their unique educational approaches and at the same time we taught the teams of these schools about the Israeli early education system. For many of them this was their first encounter with Israelis and Israel.



Israelis visiting Temple Emanuel Early Learning Center.

Reflection by Andrea Shapiro, Dor Chadash (Young Families) Engagement Coordinator at Temple Emanuel:

“I joined the Boston Haifa Connection a little over a year ago as a professional development experience, but it has become so much more. It has not been easy putting into words how much I have gained from this incredible life changing experience but let me try.

Originally when I decided to participate it was to learn about Israel on a deeper level, how I could bring what I was learning into my classroom and share with my co-teachers. What it has become is a life changing, dream fulfilling, relationship-building journey. One of the things that stands out most to me is the connections that I have built and maintained through BHC. I have formed relationships with people that I travelled to Israel from Boston with, I have formed and maintained friendships with teachers from Haifa, and most recently I met and found friends in teachers who came to Boston from Haifa. These amazing women came to my school, they shared some incredible activities with the children and teachers and they left an impact. The children from the class they visited have asked me when are we going to see the video we made?! They feel connected to the children they saw in the video, they are excited to hear from them! These connections run deep, they are meaningful and lasting. When we visited Haifa and had the opportunity to visit and learn from some incredible schools, it was an enriching and eye opening experience, I can only hope that we did the same for those who visited us.”

Temple Emanuel, Kaballat Shabbat with the Rabbi and Cantor



Kehilat Israel - Shifra and Annie are teaching about the Israeli Dreidel



Jewish Preschool of Lexington, Israeli and American dreidels

**Reflection by Sara Sinai, Director of
Kehillat Israel Preschool in Boston:**

"I have been involved with Boston-Haifa from the beginning almost 15 years ago, first as Director of Gan Yeladim, Newton, then individually, and now as Director of KI Preschool, Brookline. During Gan Yeladim days and collaboration with the BJE, we set the tone and standard for collaboration and learning. My early childhood program became the first Dancing School of Boston to compliment the one in Haifa. We also hosted many events and learning opportunities based on the partnership. On an individual basis I have kept in touch with leaders in Haifa and always welcome, host and participate when they come to the US. This year was wonderful to be able to take several of my staff for professional development at the DeCordova Museum Lincoln Preschool and the Forest School in Natick. I also went to NY with the group and it was an amazing experience!! Each time I think I have learned it all after so many years I am inspired or hear something I have not heard before. I appreciate the opportunity. My only wish is that we still had the finances for me to take a staff member to Israel. There is nothing that makes more of a difference than actually experiencing Israel and seeing the Haifa preschools that are exemplary. Much pride for all that we do on both sides of the ocean!"

Talia and Reut with the children at Yel-Day-New Day Care



Jewish Preschool of Lexington, Hanukkah and Havdalah celebration with the families



Best Practices in Early Education



Lincoln Nursery School
At the DeCordova Sculpture Park and Museum

The *Mifgash* included visits to a variety of educational settings for several reasons:

1. This is of shared interest for the Boston-Haifa group and the visits led to deep conversations and professional connections.
2. Skilled and thoughtful educators are able to help young children develop to their full potential and in the Jewish world, develop Jewish identity and a sense of peoplehood.
3. Keeping up-to-date with research is essential to understand the challenges and needs in order to better serve the child, families and our society.



Tufts University robotics for children- with Prof. Marina Bers and visit to the Elliot Pearson preschool

Forest Gnomes , Natick Community Organic Farm - Natick MA





JCC Manhattan,
NYC



Jewish
Education
project NYC,
Serving 250
preschools

What's next?

- Israel @ 70 seminar in Boston and in Haifa
- Exchange of packages between partner schools
- Ongoing communication: Facebook, WhatsApp...
- Planning for next year: *Mifgash* in Israel
- Mentoring on site



Join us for a series of professional development!

All meetings will take place at Hebrew College
from 12:00-2:00 with guests presenters.
PD certificates will be available.

This program is part of the Boston Haifa Early Childhood Educators' Connection and sponsored by CJP.

Sessions:

January 22: *Nature, Then & Now: From Biblical Times Until Today*

Presenters: Johanna Perlin & Lisa Kritz, Second Nature Design
Rachel Raz, Andrea Shapiro & more

March 8: *The Food and the People*

April 10: *Israel through Art*

May 15: *Jerusalem of Gold*

RSVP for the January 22 meeting by January 17: eci@hebrewcollege.edu