

Dear Esty,

After consultations, I often write follow up reports with lists of resources and further suggestions for the improvement of the school. In this case, I feel as though I am writing a thank you note for the privilege of visiting your school community.

As you can see from the image I have inserted to the right, the value you place in relationships was evident everywhere.

I noticed that the children were collaborating in their work, were kind and inclusive in their play, and cheered on their friends while taking turns in their music group. It is a rare joy to be in a place where calmness is the palpable element in and of the environment. Let me be specific and tell you that what I noticed. You may take what I have to say for granted because it is so much a part of your lives, but trust me it is not always evident. I have been in hundreds of schools throughout North America, Israel and Italy, so I know that there are many variations even among what we would agree are in their own way, child centered programs.

So, what was so unique? In what I would describe as a very relaxed atmosphere there was a felt, yet invisible core of control from which the calm radiated. Esty, your strength is that you have found a way to share your vision and for that vision to permeate the school. It is easy to say that "relationships matter" but when you can observe how people speak to each other, work in supportive dialogue and watch as parents, board



members and teachers seamlessly engage with children and each other in and out of the classroom, you know that you are witnessing 'values in action.'

In the picture above you can see three of four groups of children not only having a snack, but actively engaged in a variety of literacy experiences - in Hebrew, English, in non-fiction, and in journal writing. In some schools, 'snack' is used as an additional break time for teachers- that was not happening here! In your school, as can be seen from the children's eyes in the above photo, the value of 'relationships' is supported in this opportunity for children to listen to each other, and for the teachers to work with small groups allowing them to focus on the individual children as well.

The "Jewish-ness" of your culture I can only describe as a normative part of your environment, You can hear Hebrew from teachers and parents, You can see language experiences of the children's interest in the 'police' and 'Passover" displayed in the same classroom. The Jewish 'curriculum' is the same: child focused and exploratory- it is not 'mass produced' commercial Jewish content merely decorating the room. The openness of your staff to embrace my suggestion that the super-heroes project could be expanded to include the Jewish teaching, "Who is Strong? The one who can control him/herself" Pirkei Avos 4:1, indicated to me that they were eager to learn even more opportunities for including Jewish values into the ongoing emerging curriculum. The comfort level of your staff to share their own personal stories of their history and experiences of Jewish life reflect their level of comfort, respect and support of each other.

To re-iterate my suggestion for gardening, I encourage you to use Mel Bartholomew's "Square Foot Gardening" as a basis for developing a healthy garden project.. For the children, the book "Seeds Seeds Seeds" can begin a conversation about seed sharing that could also engage families, or among classrooms with the children themselves, creating a school wide seed identification project.

My final suggestion is to explore additional ways of sharing the already excellent examples of documentation of the children's learning. I think that if the documentation could be more easily observed by parents, they would see the extraordinary work their children are engaged in, and could also be a continuing springboard for parents to participate in their children's learning to facilitate a common thread of communication within your community.

As I told your staff, as an artist, as well as an educator, I am extremely impressed with the quality of the art materials and experiences that your teachers are facilitating for the children. The children's work is exceptional- I encourage you to find even more ways to display their artwork. As you can see from this example, the color and textures are beautiful, and stand as an abstract construction, well balanced and executed. - but what is even more remarkable is how this example of a child's artwork does indeed evoke the feel and experience of being on a Mediterranean beach, or in Eilat itself (see attached)

What an extraordinary ways of celebrating Yom Ha-Atzmaot- Israel's Birthday.

i look forward to hearing from you and to seeing the growth and development of your school. You are welcome to contact me with any questions from this initial observation or if I can help you in any way in the future.

All the best,

Ruthie

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