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# Principle of Excellence 3 Indicator 7

*Classroom 4*

The Saul and Carole zabar Nursery School at The  
JCC in /14anhattan

Age of Children: *4-5 Years old*

The “Small Group” Curriculum of Classroom 4:  
How These Learning Groups Inform and Inspire Our Children’s  
Understanding and Interpretation of Jewish Customs, Cultural Identity,  
Daily Life, and the Larger World Around Us

**Indicator 7 -**

This year in Classroom 4 we have been exploring small group work. These small groups are not just a small cluster of children, but each functions as an ongoing learning group with approximately four to six children who meet regularly with the same teacher, one or more times a week, to explore one topic or theme more deeply. To form these small groups, the teachers watched, listened, and documented the children often during their play in different areas of the classroom. We created groups based on the three main topics of interest present throughout the classroom. We then placed the children in the group in which they were most actively interested. The groups that formed in our classroom this year are: “Chicks and Eggs,” “Hospitals and Doctors,” and “Fairytale.”

For Indicator 7 we will use examples from the “Chicks and Eggs” group; for Indicator 5A we will use examples from the “Doctors and Hospitals” group; and for Indicator 6 we will use examples from the “Fairytale” group. (All dated items are taken from our “daily reflections,” which are posted outside our classroom and emailed to parents regularly.)

**Small Groups Begin**

Jan 26, 2010

After listening and documenting the children’s work for several weeks, the teachers have identified several topics for small group work. Today the first of these groups met and began to discuss the topic of “eggs.”

Many children have been “laying” and “hatching” different types of eggs while discussing how and why animals lay eggs. With this photo [right] as a provocation (taken last week of the children’s work), the children’s ideas were off and running.



- Eggs have baby chicks in them. —Carly*
- Dinosaurs hatch out of eggs. —Oliver*
- Birds lay eggs. —Grace*
- Somebody could sit on the egg and hatch. —Kinsey*
- Like this [sits on the egg]. —Oliver*
- My egg is about to hatch. —Carly*



Following this initial conversation, the children began to construct their own nests to protect the eggs while they hatch.

- Carly: I’ll get more shade.*
- Grace: We want them to feel safe. Now let’s put the eggs inside.*
- Carly: We want them to feel safe so they won’t die.*

These small groups are a catalyst for children to work together, think deeply, and extend their current knowledge. The small group functions as a microcosm for a larger community; what the children learn through regular group work in the classroom will extend to the larger world around them, and inform the way they interact with the class, and the community around them.

While the children are assigned to specific small groups, all of the children in the classroom experience the presence of the small group work throughout the day. After work time, the class comes together as a whole group for a reflection meeting. The children share their experiences from their small group work and inform the class on what they are planning to do during their next small group meeting. This is one way in which all of the children learn about what is happening in the other groups. We also read books during storytime as a whole class at the end of each day, and these books often have to do with small group topics, such as fairytales.

Each small group meeting is based on those that came before—the children’s conversations, as well as our observations of their play, inform where the group moves next. The children come up with their own ideas of what the small groups should do, and what theories they should bring back to the rest of the class for discussion and collaboration. Recently the eggs and chicks group has decided to hatch real chicken eggs; the entire class will participate in this process, visiting the farm to pick up the eggs, and theorizing and documenting the growth of the chick inside the egg, and caring for the baby chicks once they hatch (before they go back to the farm).

**Holding a real, raw egg...**

**Carly:** *It isn't ready to hatch yet.*

**Abby:** *Let's name her Egggy. She's a girl.*

**Carly:** *I'm going to take Egggy to meet the class.*

**Bella:** *Is that a real egg.*

**Carly:** *Yeah it is.*

**Bella:** *Is it going to hatch?*

**Carly:** *Yeah!*

**Bella:** *No it's not.*

**Zoe:** *Can I touch it?*

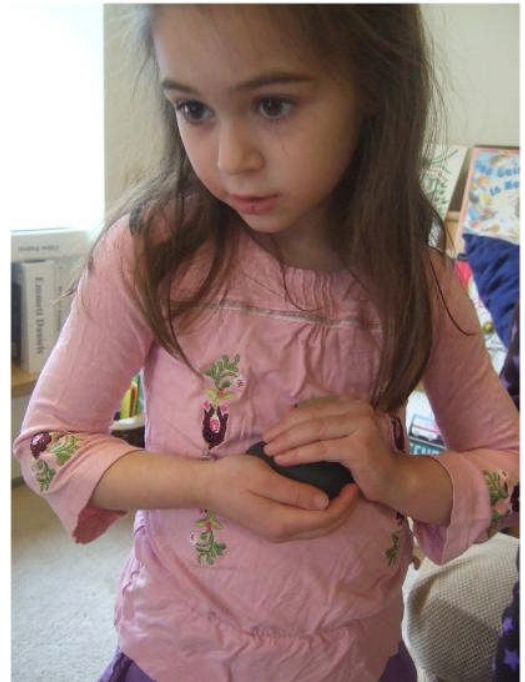
**Abby:** *We got this egg in the kitchen.*

**Cooper:** *We should go to the farm and get real eggs.*

The children’s play is a source for learning; many children play with plastic and real eggs, both those who are in the “chicks and eggs” small group and those who are not. They sit on the plastic eggs to keep them warm until they “hatch,” and carefully cradle the real eggs in their hands to keep them warm without breaking them. They build nests in the dramatic play and blocks area during work time. Their work deepened when children brought in sticks and leaves to begin to form a real nest and are beginning to theorize on how to take care the eggs in our classroom.



**Children building a nest and protectively caring for their eggs**



**March 12, 2010**

**M: You know why I brought the leaves? To share with all of you guys. Now, how can we make the nest?**

**C: We have to make it into a circle.**

**L: We need a mama bird to build the nest.**

**G: We could be their mom.**

**C: We can't be their mom, cause if we sit on them, then it will crack...and in the nighttime, there will be no one to sit on the eggs and keep it warm.**

**G: We can make something to keep them warm.**

**L: Like a heater—that makes the whole JCC so hot that we have to wear sunscreen.**

**M: How can we make a nest with these twigs and sticks and leaves? L: The leaves are nice and soft.**

**G: For the eggs to sleep in.**

**L: So the eggs won't crack and hatch.**

**G: We need some leaves in the middle for them to lay on.**

**C: We're going to put the tissue paper under—wait we can't have two nests—we have to work together. How would the nest stick together?**

**Ch: We just make it.**

**L: Guys, I have an idea. I'll ask my dad to make cement.**

**C: We have to use water, sand, and stick it on the bottom. Then it'll be perfect.**

**Ch: It's gonna dry out.**

**L: It's gonna get really hard.**

**J: How do the birds connect the sticks?**

**C: We have to tie them. We have to go over, under, and then tie it up.**

**G: We need real eggs.**

**C: We have to put the leaves on the sticks.**

**G: L--, can I help you?**

**C: How can we use one nest to fit twelve baby chicks? We need to combine their nest with our nest so it can be big enough for all the chicks.**

**G: What does a dead egg look like? We need to make a cage for the birds so the birds don't fly around the school.**

**L: Like a pet zoo. They hatch and then they might fly around.**

**G: We need a cage, like this (pointing to guinea pig cage) so it's wide enough for all the birds to fly around.**

The teachers also share this classroom learning with parents through a “Parent Night” twice annually. Parents come together to learn about their children’s work, through video, dialogue, conversation, and photos. And they also get a chance to experience some of the actual activities in which their children participate daily. This year’s spring Parent Night featured an exploration of small group work. Parents went through some of the children’s daily routines including a “morning meeting” in which they discussed the importance of small groups in the classroom, and learned how they were formed and directed based on the children’s interests. Parents were then divided into the same small groups in which their children participate. In these parent groups, they read the children’s discussions, watched videos of their hospital play, discussed and sketched their theories on chick

hatching, wrote their own fairytales, and related their ideas and experiences to those of their children. Afterwards, the whole group came back together for a reflection meeting, in which parents shared their impressions and experiences in their small groups.



**These were parents drawings from Parent Night on their theories about what is happening inside of the egg.**

Parents, children, and families also experience this learning daily through reflections on the parent board outside the classroom, and documentation regarding on-going class explorations on the walls of the classroom.



**Indicator 7 - Small group project work and documentation are part of the curricular process of teachers engaging students in constructing the learning experience**

Directions for Indicator 7 – Please provide support for at least 3 pieces of evidence from each of 7.1, 7.2, and 7.3.

7.1 Engaging children in constructing the learning process

7.1.1 Children’s ideas, interests, and/or feelings inform curricular choices.

7.1.2 Children are given choices of what to do in the classroom

7.1.3 Teachers use provocations to encourage children’s exploration

7.1.5 Teachers and children map out/brainstorm directions that exploration of a topic can

7.1.4 Teachers use their observation of and/or conversations with children to inform learning experiences.

go

7.1.6 Children’s play is a source for learning.

7.1.7 Children’s play is a source for learning

7.1.8 Children’s interactions with one another are a source for learning

7.2 Using small group project work

7.2.1 Children’s learning occurs over multiple sessions.

7.2.2 Children use a variety of media to explore a subject

7.2.3 Children’s work is expressive of their individuality and viewpoints

7.2.4 Children learn from one another

7.2.5 Children’s discussions and work with one another informs the directions that a project takes.

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7.3 Documenting children's learning

7.3.3 Teachers' documentation of children's learning occurs in multiple forms

7.3.1 Teachers regularly engage in the process of observation and documentation as a way of facilitating learning and growth.

7.3.2 Teachers use documentation as a tool for reflecting on and planning the learning experience.

7.3.5 Teachers document children's exploration of Judaism and Jewish life.

7.3.4 Teachers' documentation incorporates multiple perspectives and voices such as that of children, parents, teachers, and others as appropriate.

7.3.6 Teacher observation and documentation of children's work are used in assessing children's growth.

7.3.7 Teachers use documentation to help children reflect on their ideas and/or questions.

7.3.8 Teachers use documentation to celebrate accomplishments and growth.

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**Indicator 5A -**

One of the other small groups in the classroom is “doctors and hospitals.” The group was formed after the teachers noticed the children continuously building hospitals in dramatic play and exploring the roles of doctors, nurses, patients, and family members. In our dramatic play area there are materials such as stethoscopes, gloves, gauze, and plastic shot dispensers—real medical supplies provided for us by our very own doctor “on call,” “Dr. Judah,” who is a father of one of the children in our class.

January 22



The teachers noticed that the children often played “doctor” and “hospital” in dramatic play. We called in our own Dr. Judah for some questions and hands-on demonstrations.



Dr. Judah put a cast on Idan to show us how the material goes from soft to hard. He also showed us a sling and explained that when someone has a broken bone the sling helps keep the bone in place so it can heal.

Bella: Are you Idan's dad or Idan's doctor

Dr. Judah: I'm Idan's dad and a doctor, but I'm not his doctor

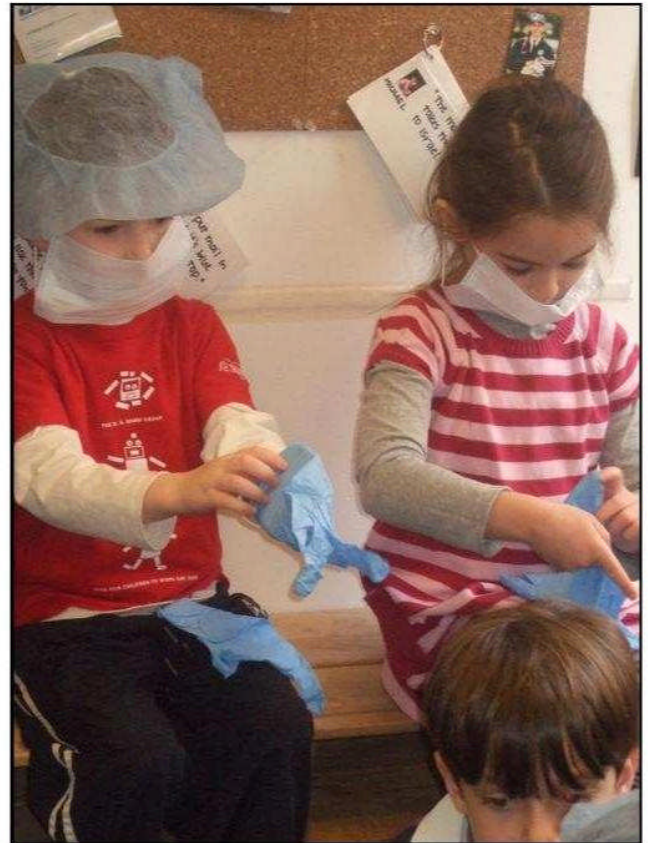
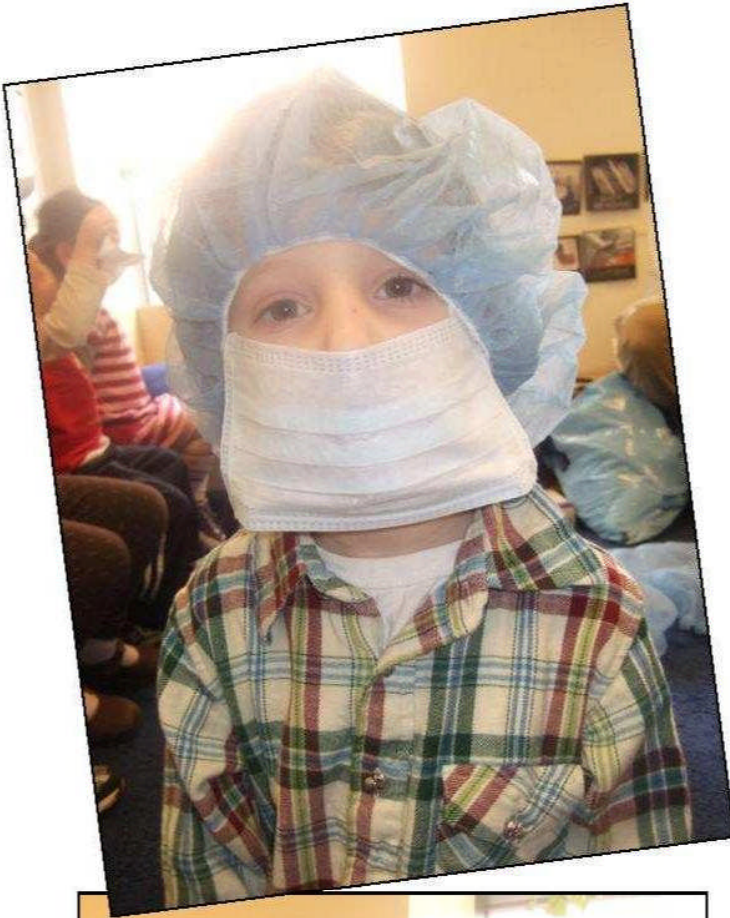
Bella: So you're just a pretend doctor?

Dr. Judah: No, I'm a real doctor. Idan goes to a different doctor, a pediatrician

Emmett: But if Idan gets a broken bone then he could just go to you to fix it!



## Doctors in training



We tried on masks and special hats that help keep away germs.

Liam: Why do you get shots?

Dr. Judah: Shots help keep people healthy

Liam: Shots for a flu



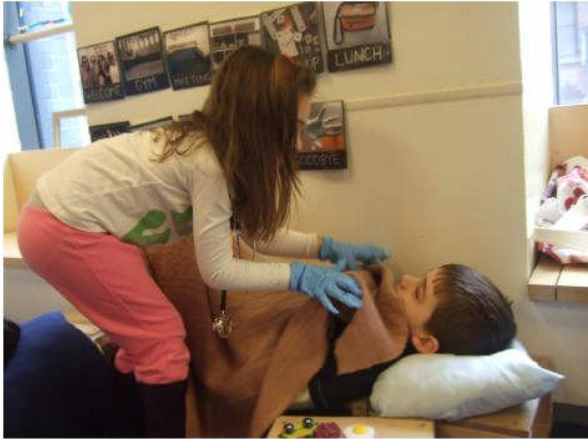
Dr. Judah: There are many different kinds of doctors

Charlie L: Like an animal doctor!

Lilly: My mom is a foot doctor!

Dr. Judah: I'm a doctor in an emergency room so I help lots of people from kids to grown ups, but not animals. I help people who come in because they have a fever or if they have a broken bone.

Within the hospital play, children manage their own behavior by choosing roles and caring for the “patients” in a respectful way. As doctors, the children carefully tend to their patients, making sure all their medical needs are addressed and that they remain in a comfortable environment, providing them with food service and entertainment.





Through this small group work, the children carry out classroom routines such as meeting frequently in their small group during work time, and bringing the information back to the whole class during reflection meetings. The children also theorize about the use of the different materials and the “why” and “how” of caring for patients and performing surgery. They help each other understand the workings of a hospital.

**Z: “Why do doctors need to wear hats?”**

**G: “You need the hat for surgery. It’s so you don’t get lice.”**

**Z: “What are gloves for?”**

**A: “To keep away the germs!”**

**G: Her heart is beating so slow I don’t know what’s going to happen! She just needs some surgery.**

**A: Oh no! If it’s her heart we’ll have to do a surgery. We’ll play some quiet music so she will fall asleep. Then we can start the surgery.**

After the disastrous earthquake in Haiti this year, the children discussed the effect of the earthquake and thought about how the people of Haiti might feel, and what we as a class could do to help.

**January 27, 2010**

**Yesterday at lunch some children were having a conversation about Haiti. We opened up the topic at meeting for a broader discussion.**

**Cooper: They need stuff. They need stuff because they don't have that much stuff.**

**%oe: They don't have money, they just need some money.**

**Riley: Everything got destroyed at Haiti. They don't have a grocery store.**

**Abby: They don't just need money. They need food, they need workers to build their houses up again. When they go inside and it falls down, they get hurt, because no one knows it's going to fall down.**

**Riley: We give cookies to Haiti, me and my sister.**

**Bella: I watched it this morning on TV. My dad told me that they're going to rebuild it.**

**Adam: Earthquake means that suddenly everything shakes. They sent an airplane from all the world so they could help them.**

**Charlie M: I don't think there was an earthquake at Haiti. Maybe it was just shaking and they didn't like it. They stopped the shaking.**

**Emmett: When it shakes it could break the ground.**

**Charlie M: Yeah, it can.**

**Emmett:** And then people could die 'cause there's lava underground. So they'll maybe die.

**Charlie M:** Maybe if an earthquake happens all the islands will break.

**Charlie L:** Some people even fell though the earthquake.

**Bella:** All the rest of their family are underground. That's why they're digging.

**Adam:** All the things about to shake. The earthquake made the buildings to fall, 'cause the earth shakes really fast.

**Grace:** A building gets knocked down from Haiti because the ground feels so excited that it needs to shake.

**Charlie M:** WE NEED TO TAKE A PLANE TO HAITI!

**Adam:** We can't fly to Haiti because the airport is broken. We can do something else. We can send them letters to make them feel better.

**Charlie M:** WE GOTTA GO TO HAITI because all the buildings are knocked down, so we need to fix the airport! When someone thinks the airport is down he yells, STOP!

**Abby:** We could just send the things on a plane to Haiti. We could send money and stuff that they need.

**Yael:** What kind of stuff do they need?

**Abby:** Stuff to make them feel better from getting hurt, food, money, stuff to protect them, stuff they can sleep in.

**Yael:** Has anybody seen the big box of shoes downstairs?

**Cooper:** Shoes to help Haiti!

**Yael:** I brought in a pair of shoes that I'm going to put in that box.

**Adam:** We can have a small group at work time to go a medicine store and buy them some medicine.

In one of the doctors and hospitals small group meetings, the children brought up the idea of sending relief to Haiti. Along with several wonderful parent volunteers, Classroom 4 planned and executed a successful Haiti relief project right in our own classroom. The children's families generously donated supplies so that we could create first aid kits to send to Haiti. Then the children, along with some of the parents, worked hard and packed over 60 kits that we then shipped to the earthquake victims.

February 11, 2010

## A Helping Hand for Haiti

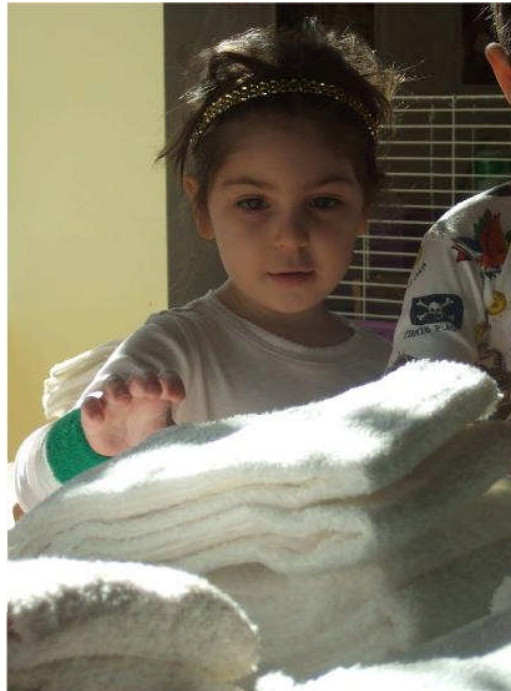
**Classroom 4 worked on a big "mitzvah" project today! We packed kits with useful things for people in Haiti, because:**

**Abby: Haiti had an earthquake.**

**Logan: And they lost all of their things.**

**Charlie L: A "mitzvah" is when you do something nice for other people.**

**Zoe: It's when you help them feel better.**





**The children worked hard and efficiently to pack 40 kits with necessary items to send to Haiti.**

**Thanks to all the parents who came to help!**

The children talked about the importance of caring for others by doing good deeds (*mitzvot*) and giving charity (*tzedakah*).

The children discussed what it means to do a *mitzvah*:

**Bella:** You give someone something to keep them warm.

**Grace:** You give someone a present when they're sick.

**Zoe:** We can give someone a hug.

**Riley:** You can do something nice for somebody.

**Logan:** I heard of a different *mitzvah*.

**Grace:** When a kid is sick you give them a soft bear or a baby that's not real.

**Charlie L.:** It would help people feel better if you give them a cuddly bear.

**Zoe:** I guess you can do that and it might help people feel good and better. It would be a good idea to do that.

The children discussed the meaning of *tzedakah*:

**G:** Tzedakah is money for people who don't have any.

**Z:** I guess it's money and dollars.

**B:** It's for people who don't have money.

**Z:** And we give it to them.

**A:** People who don't have any money and they have to buy a lot of stuff and we give them the tzedakah money for food.

**Indicator 5A Children (2-5 years) – Children take responsibility for themselves and others**

Directions for Indicator 5A – Please provide support for at least 6 pieces of evidence.

5A.1 Children help each other.

5A.2 Children carry out classroom routines.

5A.3 Children manage their own behavior.

5A.4 Children explore relationships through interacting with other children.

5A.5 Children engage in tzedakah (acts of righteous), chesed (acts of kindness), and/or mitzvot (commandments/deeds) that demonstrate caring for others.

5A.6 Children care for the school environment.

5A.7 Children are involved in helping others in the Jewish community.

5A.8 Children are involved in helping others in the general community.

**Indicator 6 (a) –**

Jewish learning is an integral part of our classroom culture. Our approach to Judaism is visible throughout the room, Journey Binder entries and Daily Reflections. Judaism is present in everything that we do; the stories we tell, the culture we celebrate, and values we teach permeate our curriculum seamlessly. The ways we celebrate Shabbat and Jewish holidays are meaningful and beautiful.

Jewish values are brought in daily through the way we encourage the children to treat each other. Our children have learned the value of taking care of their friends and are aware of each others feelings and safety. For example, if a block structure falls down all the children building in that area stop their work to make sure their classmates are okay. Or when a friend bumps his or her head, another child will bring over an ice pack. We also emphasize the important mitzvah of comforting the sick. When a child is sick at home, two classmates call to check in and see how he or she is feeling. We participate in *Tikkum Olam* by often doing *mitzvot* to help our world. The children collected school supplies to donate to a classroom in Africa. They also collected first aid supplies and packed kits to send to earthquake victims in Haiti. All of these Jewish concepts and values have helped us create a rich and meaningful curriculum that has strengthened our classroom and school community.

Small group learning also informs our study of Jewish life and holidays. According to the lens of D'rash, which speaks to interpretation through inquiry, dialogue, and transmission, the teachers' and children's interpretation and understanding of the holiday and customs of Purim were created through this year's small group work.





First, a teacher told the Purim story to the class several times throughout the month of Adar, using hand puppets as props. The children were excited by the story, and began using the puppets themselves to act out the characters. They participated enthusiastically, and shouting along with the memorable parts of the story. When the character Haman asked each child to “bow down to me” the children answered, “No! I’m Jewish! I will not bow down to you!” Another child added that the only person the Jewish people bow down to “is G-d.”

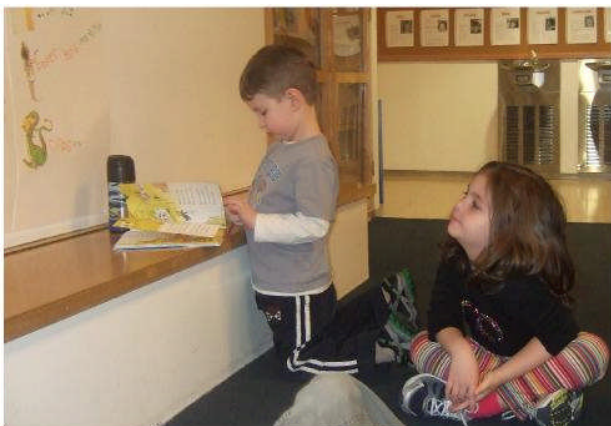


The Fairytale group met shortly after one of the tellings of the Purim story, and discussed the story. They then came up with the idea for each child to dress up as his or her favorite fairytale character for our school Purim parade. They then brought this idea back to the rest of the class during a reflection meeting, and the other children became excited about creating their own fairytale character Purim costumes. They each shouted, “I’m going to be ‘Baby Bear’!” or “I’m going to ‘The Princess and the Pea’!” and soon we made a list with each child’s character name and picture from the book. Throughout the week leading up to our school-wide Purim parade, parent volunteers joined us in the classroom to help the children create and sew their own fairytale Purim costumes. The children studied the pictures of their characters in our story books, and brainstormed with parents and teachers what items they would need to complete their costumes. They then worked hard to construct detailed costumes, and were proud to show them off during the Purim Parade.

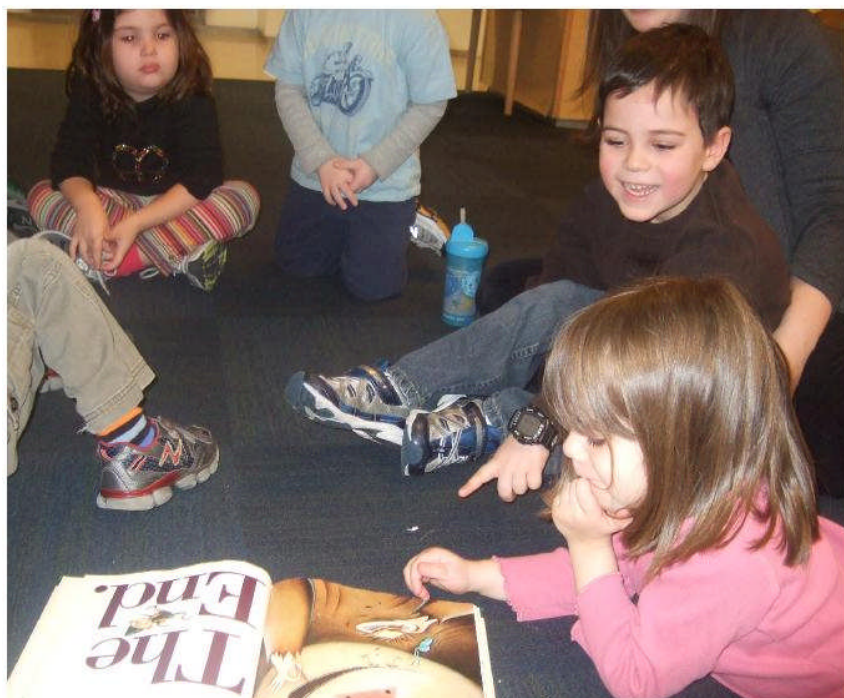
February 3

After listening to the Purim story, the Fairytale Group met to discuss some of the major themes of the Purim story. They were particularly interested in the idea of identity. They were fascinated and impressed with how Esther stood up for herself and the Jewish people. They talked about their own identities as Jews and how in a similar situation they would try to be as brave as Esther.

Cooper then brought up the idea of the Purim Parade at the JCC. And Charlie L. decided...we need costumes! These children thought that it would be fun if all of us in Classroom 4 dressed up as some of our favorite fairytale characters for Purim! The children studied the poster we made to figure out which Fairytale character they'd like to be.



Then this group of children shared their idea with the rest of the class. "We're going to be fairytale characters for Purim!" Abby said. "I'm going to be the Princess and the Pea," she explained. Charlie L. "I want to be the reluctant dragon." Cooper, Idan, and Emma decided to be the bear family from Goldilocks together. Kinsey: "I only want to dress up if I can be the Big Bad Wolf! Grrrrr!" Some other popular ideas were Little Red Riding Hood, the Paper Bag Princess, a Prince, the Stinky Cheese Man, and the Emperor who gets new clothes.



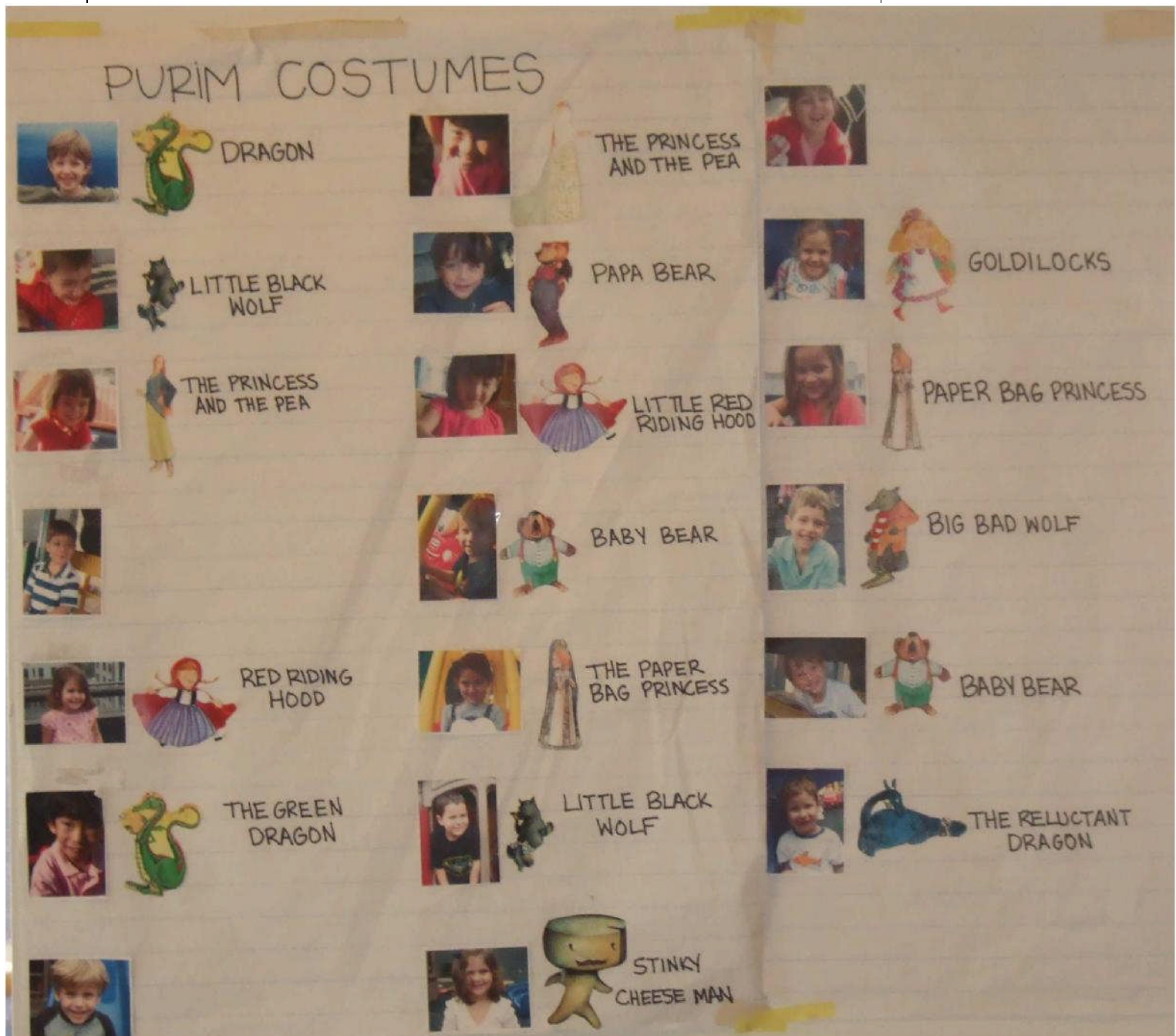
Cooper told us, “we really need to get some fabric to make these costumes!”

Abby: “Everyone will use different things to make their costumes!”

We can’t wait to start getting our Purim costumes ready, and we hope some of the parents will be able to help!

Today we decided which fairytale characters we would dress up as for Purim! We then went through our collection of fairy tales and chose the versions of the characters to model our costumes after. Here are the final decisions!

February 9, 2010



We can't wait to get started making our costumes!

If anyone would like to help out with the costumes we are looking for volunteers to join us in the classroom. The sign up

sheet is on the 25

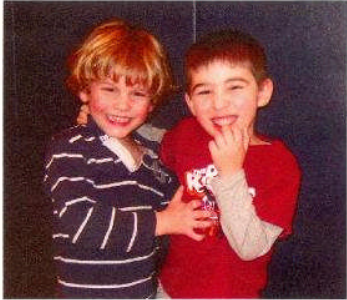


In addition to creating our own fairytale Purim costumes, the teachers paired the children into classroom “Purim Buddies” with another student, someone whom they did not necessarily play with so often. Then the children each made their buddies a *Shaloch Manot* basket, that included hamantaschen filled with their buddy’s favorite filling, and a card written in their buddy’s favorite color. In this way the children really learned about one of their classmates, and thought about what would make him or her happy. We broke down the tradition of *shaloch manot* into these terms—“we do something for someone else because it makes them happy.” The children learned to help others on a smaller scale—making a friend smile. The children took home their *shaloch manot* gift and shared with their families the joy of Purim.

This week each of the children were paired with a “Purim Buddy.” They posed for silly pictures together, made hamantaschen for one another and then decorated and wrote messages on the back of the photos before packaging everything together into *Mishloach Manot*. This project not only fulfilled the Purim *mitzvah* of *Mishloach Manot*, but was a great way for each of the children to learn more about their friends and make their classmates smile!



Posing for Silly Pictures



Purim 2010

**What is *Mishloach Manot*?**

Charlie L- It's when you put some hamantaschen and treats in a box and you decorate it and then you bring it to people

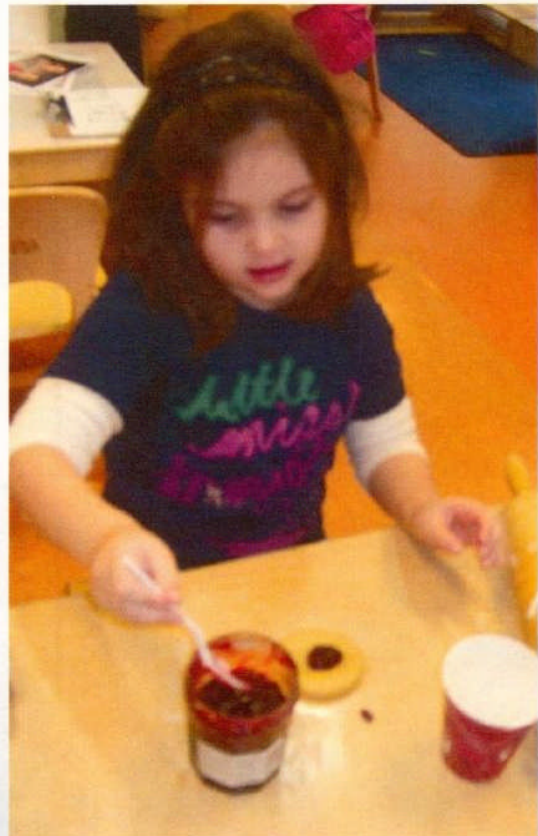
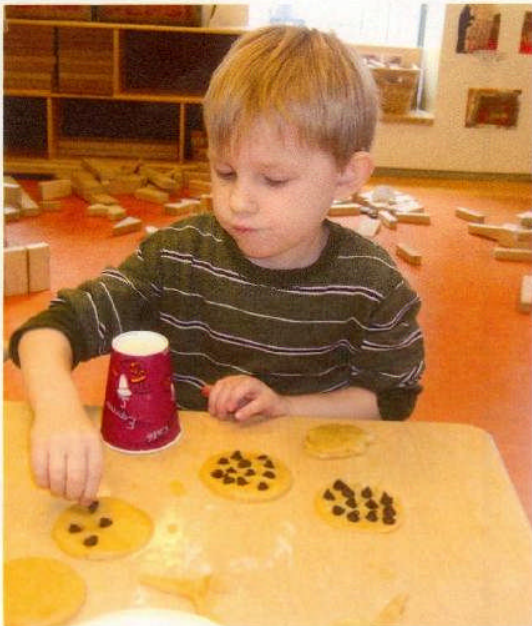
Abby- It's a Purim package

Bella- You can deliver it to each other when you're finished.

How would it make you feel to get a Purim package?

Logan- There's treats in there. It would make you feel happy.

Baking Hamantashen







**Indicator 6 – Jewish living and learning, ideas and values, are part of the everyday learning experiences**

**ALL TEACHERS MUST COMPLETE THIS INDICATOR**

Directions for Indicator 6 –

- a) Make visible your approach to integrating Jewish living and learning into your classroom. Include how the lenses are part of your approach. You can focus on one lens in your presentation.
- b) Please provide at least 8 pieces of evidence. All pieces of evidence must in some way be connected to Jewish living and learning. At least 5 of them must include the pieces of evidence that specifically mention children.

61 Children share their feelings, ideas, and/or experiences with their peers and/or adults.

62 Children have access to a variety of materials to explore Jewish life.

63 Children work on projects in small groups.

6.4 Children and teachers both explore and celebrate moments of blessing, transition, and thanks.

6.5 Children learn about their identities or uniqueness e.g. developmentally, culturally.

66 Children explore their ideas and/or feelings through art or nature experiences.

67 Children and teachers explore the why of Jewish symbols and practices.

68 Teachers create a culture of inquiry in the classroom; this cycle involves multiple steps such as dialogue, reflection, investigation, and action.

6.9 Teachers make Jewish learning foundational by exploring the JECEI lenses such as the ideas, values, symbols, stories, and/or practices embedded in them.

6.10 Teachers explore with parents the why of Jewish symbols and practices.

6.11 Teachers connect the stories and ideas in torah and/or other Jewish sources to daily experiences.

6.12 Teachers utilize a variety of Jewish sources such as stories, materials, artifacts, symbols, food, music, and/or Hebrew to deepen children's learning experiences.

6.13 Teachers share with parents evidence of the JECEI lenses in the children's learning experiences.

6.14 Teachers get to know children and their families by gathering stories or symbols about their histories, hopes, and/or dreams.