



THE LOLA STEIN INSTITUTE JOURNAL ISSUE #5 SPRING SUMMER 2009

MISSION CONTROL
GAIL BAKER : DIRECTOR

INTEGRATED SCHOOL CURRICULUM: LEVERAGING THE BEST EDUCATION

CHILDREN AS ACTIVISTS

JENNIFER KOLARI ON CONNECTED PARENTING

ENHANCE THE TEACHER, ENHANCE THE STUDENT

SMART SCHOOL, SMART STUDENTS

In his book, SMART SCHOOLS: Better Thinking and Learning for Every Child, David Perkins writes that smart schools are informed, energetic and thoughtful. In smart schools, thinking is the center of the learning process. The Lola Stein Institute builds smart schools. The Toronto Heschel School is an excellent example.

So we ask, "What is this notion of thinking? And why is it so important to being smart? How does a focus on the skill to think affect our children's lives today and in the future?"

The answer is that genuine learning results from thinking. With data and detail so readily available in our digital world, the skill to think is no longer an inevitable byproduct of daily life. Rote survival in North America is not difficult, but quality living requires thought. For our students to grow up and find their place in the global economy, they must grow to be critical and creative thinkers.

The Jewish intellectual tradition is to question ideas and struggle with issues. This tradition bolsters our students' thinking all round. We want our 21st century learners to see Judaism as relevant and dynamic and so we provide our students with a strong knowledge base from which to debate content and analyze implications. Their path begins at home with the familiar, the Jewish. Their guides are the ethics inherent in Judaism, with Ahavat Yisrael, a love of the Jewish people, at the centre. This empowerment to investigate, debate, practice and hone their Jewish identity, transcends as a habit to an ever widening circle of inquiry and to life long learning.

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Gail Baker Director of The Lola Stein Institute and Co-Founder of The Toronto Heschel School nurtures a career long passion for reaching and teaching to the essential individuality in each child. This has grown to a parallel commitment encouraging and refining the unique talents of each teacher on her team and beyond.

Greg Beiles Director of Curriculum and Training at The Lola Stein Institute believes children are active builders of knowledge and empathy, and that a child's perspective is shaped more by how learning is structured than by the specific content at hand.

Ellen Kessler Co-Founder of The Toronto Heschel School leads its award winning nature and ecological programme. Ellen is a math and science teacher who blends commitment to Jewish observance with her love for the natural world and for children.

Marlee Pinsker Verskin has been telling stories and writing always. Her stories appear in collections and in her own anthology *In the Days of Sand and Stars*. Marlee believes stories are vehicles for reflection, giving the reader a private space to ponder larger issues. Marlee has been teaching at The Toronto Heschel School since 1996.

Pam Medjuck Stein Co-Founder and Chair of The Lola Stein Institute and a founding board member of The Toronto Heschel School has collaborated on The Toronto Heschel team since 1996. Her eldest three children are alumni, the fourth now in grade five.

GUEST CONTRIBUTORS

Jennifer Kolari, MSW, is a therapist who has been helping children, teens and families get connected for 20 years. Her first book, *Connected Parenting*, is published in 2009 through Penguin Group. She has appeared in *Today's Parent* and *Canadian Family*; on Canada Am, Breakfast Television, and CBC's Steven and Chris. Her insightful strategies, shared with warmth and humour make her a sought-after speaker with schools, organizations and agencies in Canada and the USA.

Ricki Wortzman, M.Ed. is a Facilitator for the New Teacher Academy of Columbia University. She has taught JK through grade 8, co-authored texts in mathematics, science, language arts and the arts; and trade books for young children. She currently coaches new and veteran teachers and conducts workshops for educators.

With the prominence of the Internet, people the world over have access to the same information or knowledge. A student in New Delhi, India and a student in Toronto, Canada, have the opportunity to access the same information. What will set one student apart from another is the ability to consider content in a creative and critical way. Students who are deliberately taught to critique and analyze information will have the competitive edge in the workplace and in the pursuit of personal fulfillment. However, thinking skills do not develop automatically. To become effective, thinking skills require a disciplined approach.

For example, at our school we no longer ask Grade 2 students questions such as: "Who were the main characters in the story?" or "Why did Mary go to the store?"

Rather they are asked to consider possibilities. We ask, "If Mary hadn't gone to the store, what other things might have happened?" or "Based on what you know from the story about Mary's behaviour, does it make sense to you that she went to the store? Can you explain your reasons?"

When studying Chumash it isn't enough for our students to simply recite the narrative. From an early age we ask our students to articulate ethical considerations and discuss moral implications. We ask, "Why do you think that Joseph chose to forgive his brothers? Do you feel it was the right thing to do? Why or why not? How might the ending of this story been different had Joseph not chosen to forgive?"



"From an early age we ask our students to articulate ethical considerations and discuss moral implications."

In a Grade 8 class, students were brainstorming ideas on how to best express the topics studied in a creative way. In this particular class, as ideas were generated, there was no commentary on whether each idea had merit. The goal was to generate as many ideas as possible in a non judgmental atmosphere. Once a good sized list was generated, we assessed each suggestion analytically and debated the attributes of each.

The students then reviewed the list and evaluated each entry against the original rubric. During this analysis some ideas were discarded as not meeting criteria and others formed a short list. After a lively discussion, two ideas from the short list were merged and the students were ready to proceed. The class had ultimately selected the best solution and the results were fantastic. There's an important thinking skill in creating a short list. Students learn to narrow their options and take a second opportunity to look at their choices. They get used to the process of evaluating why some ideas may be better than others.

Creative thinking implies the ability to challenge assumptions, to make unlikely connections and to build on ideas towards new and more effective ideas. Critical thinking relates to strategy, to solving a problem, raising important questions while understanding present assumptions. Taught together creative and critical thinking skills enhance our children's ability to gather and assess relevant information and to effectively communicate well reasoned solutions.

Because the quality of our life benefits from the quality of thinking, it is crucial to sharpen children's thinking skills early. Their future success depends on learning the skill to think. That is thinking is the focus of our educational mission.

THE SHOW AND TELL BIRTHDAY ISSUE

Show and tell. You bring something forward and you talk about it. This is the Show and Tell issue of THINK.

On our journal's first birthday we seize the simcha to encapsulate what this whole effort is all about! What is The Lola Stein Institute? How does it relate to The Toronto Heschel School? What is this extra special programme we have built? Why does it all matter?

The extra special educational programme that grew from The Toronto Heschel School is composed of three elements; original curriculum, dynamic culture and community activism. The Lola Stein Institute develops the research, planning and production that underlies it all. Call it a think tank behind the scenes. The Institute creates inventive inspiring classroom units, enhances teacher passion and technique through workshops, develops leaders and encourages community service.

"The Institute creates inventive inspiring classroom units, enhances teacher passion and technique through workshops, develops leaders and encourages community service."

Our community ethos includes sharing the best educational practices. This year we went public and presented The Food for Thought Workshop Series to educators from across the GTA. The First Annual Lola Stein Symposium, featuring Professor Howard Gardner of Harvard University and a day of workshops, is slated for September 1st and 2nd, 2009 and is open to all Toronto schools.



In her Show and Tell, Gail reveals her focus on clear educational vision and supportive community. With new approaches demanded by the digital world, critical and creative thinking skills are core to the best education. Gail's threshold premise explains that for children to learn to think fully, openly and productively, they must first love themselves and their full Jewish identity. They then build out from a warm home base to reach the world. The context in which her students learn is the first ingredient in the programme Gail leads. Dynamic meaningful Judaism meets a whole child, who, in turn, meets evidenced based educational research!

The next 'simple' explanation of why our programme matters comes from Greg who Shows and Tells the meaning of "integrated learning." Learning is integrated when topics are regrouped and reexamined from an interdisciplinary perspective. Greg explains how integrated learning further increases the educational advantages already made possible by a teaching model which incorporates the theories of multiple intelligences and mindfulness.

There are three tiers. The first is context. We remember first that the goal of excellent education is to leverage the learning as high as is possible. Research shows that the standards students reach are heightened through parallel emphasis on moral development and academic mastery.

The second tier is method. Discoveries in educational psychology tell us that when information is presented through a variety of intelligence channels, mindful of critical and creative thinking goals, the child's natural intelligence is optimized and her or his creative thinking skills are enhanced. The third tier is to leverage the entire package again through an integrated presentation of topics.

"We remember first that the goal of excellent education is to leverage the learning as high as is possible."

Ellen Shows and Tells why an environmental studies programme is the heartbeat of a child's learning. Ellen starts in the schoolyard. Grounded in the physical reality of a fragile and endangered environment, the students become ecologically sensitive, socially responsible and spiritually appreciative all at the same time. Critical thinking is a habit of mind that begins with habits of behaviour in young children. Turning off lights and taps connects directly to saving the world and being grateful for all we have. Activism starts now.



This issue of THINK features two guest contributors. Jennifer Kolari, a well known Toronto therapist and author, shares her notion that parents have homework too. She lays out how the parent child relationship is key to how the child learns, performs and achieves at school. Ricki Wortzman provides insight into the New Teacher Academy and why having a cohort of teachers upgrading their skills matters to the students in the class.



WHY AN INTEGRATED SCHOOL CURRICULUM MATTERS TO YOUR CHILD

Progressive education is centred on integrated curriculum. We have advocated an integrated curriculum since The Toronto Heschel School began in 1996. But what exactly is “integration”, and why is it a good for learning? In fact, there are various forms of curricular integration, each with its own benefits.

One form of curricular integration is the study of a common topic or “big idea”, in a number of subject areas simultaneously. This approach is sometimes called interdisciplinary, cross-disciplinary or theme-based learning. Interdisciplinary integration works best when units of study are based on rich, thought provoking topics such as “freedom”, “balance”, or “hope”. The more angles from which students investigate and consider their topics the more profound is their learning of these themes.

A unit which exemplifies this approach is “Conflict and Cooperation” – a study of the encounter between First Nations people and European settlers. The unit includes some material traditionally taught in the Grade 3 Pioneers curriculum, but goes beyond this material to look at the bigger issue of what happens when two societies (or even two people) with different cultures and ideas meet. The unit includes social science activities, such as the examination of artifacts, as well as reading and writing skills



associated with short stories chronicling the historical period. Meanwhile in math class, as part of a unit on patterning, students examine patterns in First Nations’ craft and drumming rhythms. Good interdisciplinary units always address ethical and moral issues that relate to students’ everyday lives. In this unit, students are encouraged to think about conflict and cooperation not only in history, but in their peer relationships as well.

A variation of interdisciplinary integration is the integration of Jewish and General studies. The purpose of this kind of integration is to nurture among students a dual Jewish-Canadian identity, enabling them to find in Judaism a source for ethical guidance in all aspects of life. This dual focus further enables them to absorb and appreciate the different elements inherent in one’s identity, personality and perspective, as we remember that self-knowledge is a pre-requisite reference point to all knowledge.

When students study the exodus from Egypt (in Chumash class) along side the Underground Railroad (in language arts class) they learn how to compare and contrast historical experiences that have key similarities and important differences. Students appreciate the historical impact of Judaism when they learn how African American freedom songs were inspired by biblical texts and by the prophetic idea of justice. Moreover, students develop important values for citizenship by seeing how the quest for freedom and justice is a shared value among peoples.

“Good interdisciplinary units always address ethical and moral issues that relate to students’ everyday lives.”

In Junior High, students further develop their sense of civic responsibility by studying the shared roots of democracy in ancient Greek and ancient Jewish societies.

Students study sources from the Talmud, Mishna and Jewish philosophers as a basis for weekly democratic class meetings and to compose speeches in language arts class on issues of Human Rights. When studying the assimilation of Jews during the Hellenistic period, students examine the complexity of their own identities as Jews living in a secular society.

One of the best known forms of curricular integration is “arts integration.” This approach employs the arts – visual, music, dance, or drama – to enhance learning in one of the traditional academic disciplines, such as math, literacy, or science. When employed correctly, the arts can help convey new concepts, and provide differentiated opportunities for students to express their comprehension. Educational research has shown that expression or performance of an understanding embeds and therefore deepens the learning.



An excellent example of arts integration is a Junior High math unit that incorporates aesthetics into the study of triangles. The “Beautiful Triangles” unit begins with an exercise which asks students to look at a group of triangles and to select the most “beautiful.” Students then analyze the geometric properties of their selected figure, and use Greek and Latin etymologies, or word histories, to name their shape. The abstract art of Wassily Kandinsky

is then used as a model for students’ final project which is the creation of a work of geometric art based on a concept such as “freedom”, “friendship”, or “playing soccer”. Learning through arts integration activates students’ aesthetic and emotive interests, so that the geometry curriculum is learned in a deeper and more memorable way. Furthermore, this method helps students appreciate how geometric properties can serve as a language for expressing ideas and experiences beyond the confines of the math class.

The rationale for arts integration is buttressed by recent research in cognitive science. Howard Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligences, for example, suggests that some people are more successful in learning information that is presented visually, while others learn better through movement based activities, or music. (Prof. Gardner has elucidated 7 or 8 “intelligences” in all) Other research on arts and cognition (e.g. the [Dana Consortium Report on Arts and Cognition](#), 2008) has shown that training in the arts enhances general cognitive capacities such as motivation, memory and attention in ways that positively influence achievement in other areas of the curriculum.

“Educational research has shown that expression or performance of an understanding embeds and therefore deepens the learning.”

Learning through an integrated curriculum has cognitive benefits that extend beyond the topics studied. Through systematic interdisciplinary study, students learn to be flexible and comprehensive in how they approach issues. They become expert synthesizers and solve problems at higher levels of complexity. Children who learn this way develop a particularly strong ability to form analogies and metaphors which means they can readily make connections between information and shift modalities of expression.

In a recent study examining interdisciplinary work at institutions such as the Media Laboratory at MIT and the Center for Integration of Medicine and Innovative Technology, researchers reported that analogical think



ing was key to their work: “analogical thinking seemed to serve the interdisciplinary mind by inviting researchers to borrow concepts or modes of representation from one discipline and establish parallels with problems in another one, thus illuminating aspects of the problems that would have remained unseen.” (Mansilla, et al, p.57)

While strong disciplinary thinking remains important, it has become increasingly clear that interdisciplinary thinking will be an invaluable tool for solving problems of the 21st century. Medicine, for instance, which was once considered the realm of biology and chemistry, is now understood to involve important social, psychological, and economic factors to which a broad range of technological, biological, and socio-political solutions must be brought. In his recent book, *The Upside of Down*, Professor Thomas Homer Dixon argues that the solutions to global warming are as much social and political as they are technological.

“Through systematic interdisciplinary study, students learn to be flexible and comprehensive in how they approach issues.”

Integration makes sense because it speaks to the cognitive, aesthetic, and ethical dimensions of learning, and because it encourages a superior approach to problem solving. As schools prepare their students for the future, an integrated curriculum is a crucial asset to the school agenda. Our students are immersed in this progressive approach and the benefit to them is invaluable.

Works cited:

Mansilla, Veronica Boix, Dan Dillon, and Kaley Middlebrooks, “Building bridges across disciplines: Organizational and individual qualities of exemplary interdisciplinary work”, GoodWork Project, Project Zero: Harvard Graduate School of Education.

NURTURING NATURE IN OUR CHILDREN

ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES AND CURRENT EVENTS... CHILDREN AS ACTIVISTS

As a teacher I embrace the responsibility of being an “Agent of Change.” My goal is to prepare every child to become a global citizen, one who will make the world a better place in which to live.

I now look at my goal in the context of the state of today’s world. Economic distress and deepening ecological problems are forcing me and I hope, every educator, to radically reaffirm our mandate. We must change the way we prioritize our goals and properly prepare our children for the world they will inherit. We must make these changes fast.

Current events are driving environmental educators to develop programmes that can develop the skills, knowledge and perspectives our students need to become engaged and environmentally responsible citizens.

“Our children must understand that what we have is wondrous and beautiful, worth guarding and protecting.”

We need the next generation to understand how to live meaningful and sustainable lives. We need our children to learn to take what they need without jeopardizing or depleting the Creation for the next generation. But, to do this, we need our children to undo the very behaviours that we ourselves have modeled to them.

We need to begin with an apology as we explain to our children that our wasteful ways have been irresponsible.

We need to admit to error. At least on this continent, we have taken resources without any thought to whether they were renewable or not.

So I look to our curriculum and integrate the messages of the times. To me, the Judaic content is relevant and current. Prayer is about gratitude and appreciation. Our children must understand that what we have is wondrous and beautiful, worth guarding and protecting. We teach our students to pray harder than they ever have before. They must follow in the footsteps of Rabbi Heschel, who as an activist “prayed with his feet.” Deeds matter.

How do we teach our students to be activists? How do we develop in our students the ability to be critical thinkers, balanced and clear when considering issues, positions and actions to be taken? How early is too early? When do we start?

In the Early Years classrooms, the Creation story captivates our young students with awe and wonder. The cycles and orderly progression of life on earth as the Creator planned it makes a perfect framework for introducing children to a multitude of subjects: darkness and then light; day and night; Heaven and Earth; grasses, herb-yielding seed and fruit trees; stars and seasons, days and years; moon and sun; fish in the seas and winged fowl, and every living creature; and finally, male and female to guard over it and protect it, to serve and preserve it. What a perfect plan! What a perfect entry point for a multitude of lessons!



Here's how we handle teaching task of our times, how we begin to inform the ecologically literate child. First, we establish some area in our school ground that we can call an outdoor classroom. This is ideally a school garden, or an area kept free from mowers or pavement. We go there daily, often several times.

In this area, we encourage students to find a "special space" that they will return to in different seasons. We take guided walks there, sit quietly, enjoy a picnic, or read and play. We plant and nurture the living things that grow there and learn to "take only pictures, and leave only footprints." We get down on hands and knees, roll in snow or grass, play in the mud and stamp our feet in puddles.

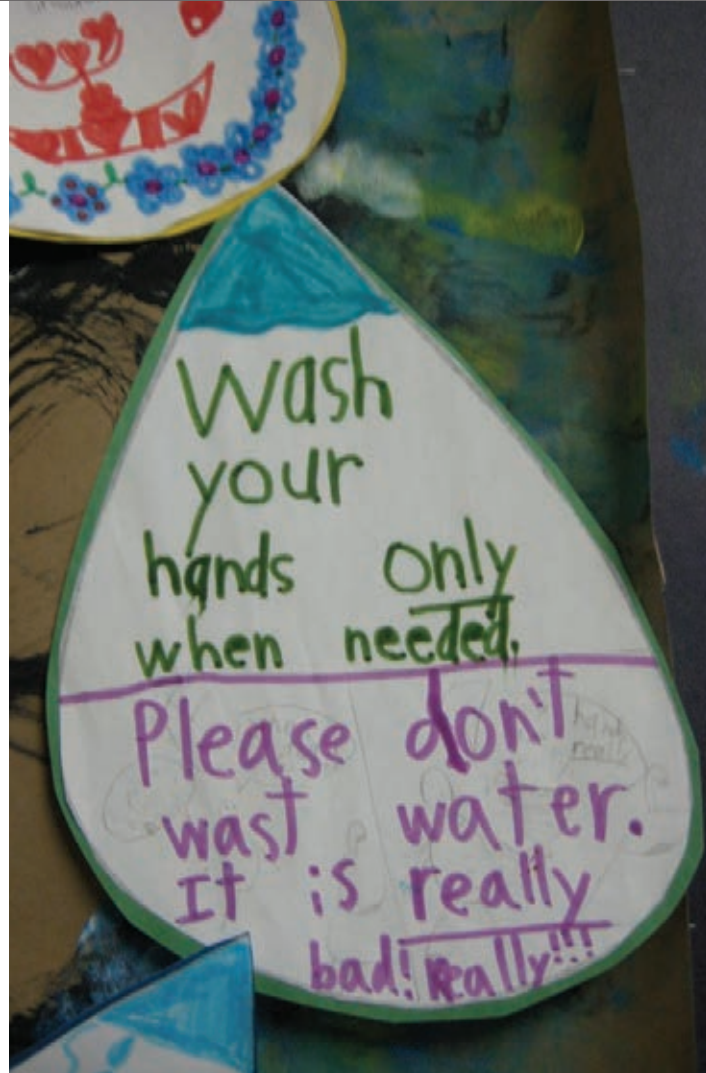
Inside the classroom, we make collections, sorting and classifying, looking closely at details, learning to find similarities and differences. We explore the intricacy of nature through the arts. We read non-fiction books about insects, birds and undersea creatures. A child who enjoys the natural world will grow to protect it.

By Grade 1, we look for opportunities to teach our students to become concerned for the state of the world. We continue to provide information. Many Grade 1 teachers honour bees and other pollinators by observing them as they move from flower to flower. We celebrate the bee's ability to live in communities, just like ours, where each tiny creature has a role and fulfills the duties that sustain the hive. The Monarch Butterfly is studied in depth in this grade as well as in Grade 3.

The Toronto Heschel School Grade 1 teacher adds a few mini-lessons relating to the scientific mystery of Colony Collapse Disorder. What if there were no more bees? What can we do to help? What are scientists doing about this? Did you know that the Monarch can only lay its eggs on the common milkweed plant? What if there is no milkweed in our garden?

"A child who enjoys the natural world will grow to protect it."

We guide our young students, as well as our EcoTeam and our Garden Guardians group (of after-school parents,



parents and children) in a plan to plant and maintain a butterfly garden and flowering native perennials. We abstain completely from any use of pesticides in our school gardens and lawns. We create an informed and active community of caregivers beginning at a very young age!

Another opportunity to inspire activism arises through the practice of recycling. A unit of study about the 3 R's (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle) is a natural Grade 1 fit. It is informative, supported by rich classroom resources, and integrates responsible action into the young student's life. The environmental educator enriches the topic by engaging the class in a school-wide waste audit.

Grade 1 classes assess the amount of waste the whole school generates. The classes weigh bags of garbage and recycling matter. Students learn to identify contamination and understand how to divert waste from landfill. Nature is seen as the best recycler and vermicomposters are introduced into the Grade 1 classroom.

"Reduce, Reuse and Recycle" expands to refusing excessive packaging, rethinking purchases and remembering to be responsible. We inform the EcoTeam of our actions and our learning and this waste audit initiates a school-wide programme geared toward waste reduction. This year, it meant "Boomeranging" our lunches (returning all waste back home), demonstrating to all how much waste a typical lunch produces.

"They learn at a young age that their actions can make a difference."

By Grade 2, conserving and preserving the Creation is an expectation in the Toronto Heschel community. Students learn about the water cycle: water evaporates, condenses, precipitates and the cycle goes on and on. Here the Toronto Heschel educator adds the lesson that all the water we have on earth is all the water we will ever have.

Grade 2 students learn how essential it is to conserve and preserve water and how simple actions at home and at school can make a difference. One action is simply remembering to turn the tap off after washing. Observing how long we shower or how often we flush are two others. Students conduct a full school water audit to discover how many school taps are left dripping and how many have aerators installed. They write a note to the administration, listing the problems and requesting plumbing aid. Action is taken. The students continue to monitor the equipment in their school space and they feel empowered and important. They learn at a young age that their actions can make a difference.



In Grade 7, a uniquely integrated unit begins every February when the students conduct an energy audit. Utilizing watt meters and conducting surveys, the students assess how much energy every light bulb, every appliance and computer requires. Next comes their inquiry into how many CO2 emissions this energy use expends. The Grade 7 students create spreadsheets for the EcoTeam and administration to review and provide suggestions for minimizing our school's energy use.

The science is irrefutable. At the earliest age that these messages are accessible our students learn about climate change and the solutions to it. Topics include alternative energy, renewable and non-renewable resources, and green clean energy. We build solar cookers in Grade 6 that can melt cheese on pizza for lunch. By Grade 7, more sophisticated renewable energy machines, built in class, produce electricity. We invite wind and solar energy experts for question and answer periods. In Grade 8 we learn about the Alberta Tar Sands and the ethical issues related to the development of this land. Through every grade level, we integrate learning about the current state of the Creation and seek opportunities where our students take real action to make real change.

"We want a thinking generation, a creative generation, a fearless and confident generation."

Responsible behaviour as global citizens is a meaningful goal. The Jewish imperative calls us to weigh our choices critically even when faced with the hypnotic convenience factor and this mindfulness, this habit of mind, is what we seek for our students to develop. We want a thinking generation, a creative generation, a fearless and confident generation. We pray for a generation that will lead us quickly to solutions for our troubled world.

The environmental studies lens is new to educators. It moves beyond traditional disciplines to develop in the child a deep understanding about how people interrelate with their surroundings... how they are connected with Creation's natural systems... and how they will continue from generation to generation to do so sustainably.

A PARENT'S HOMEWORK

We send our children to school each day hoping they learn well, feel confident and strong, and have some fun. Choosing the right school is vital. It's a huge comfort to know our kids are in good hands. A great school emphasizes community, responsibility, and the joy of learning. A school with a strong sense of community makes children feel safe, cared for—even loved! This is paramount, not only to your children's learning, but to their social health as well.

A child's emotional anchor at home is the parent. At school it's the teacher. Feeling respected and celebrated as an individual is an essential ingredient in a child's competence and success as a student. While teachers at a good school strive to provide this ingredient in a supportive learning environment, they can't accomplish it all on their own. Parents have homework to do.

Children who appreciate and integrate critical thinking are those who demonstrate empathy, respect, and a strong sense of self. These traits must be simultaneously taught, absorbed, and modeled at home and at school. The degree to which a child feels safe, loved, and connected at home determines his or her ability to take risks, accurately analyze information, and process what is learned at school.

“Research shows that protective love is critical to children emotionally and physically; it assists the healthy development of their brains.”

Loving our children is not enough. We must regularly demonstrate our love in special ways, deeply connect, share close moments, engage. Then our love becomes protective. Research shows that protective love is critical

to children emotionally and physically; it assists the healthy development of their brains. While we may feel we spend sufficient time with our kids, it may or may not be meaningful. Too easily, we talk at our kids, correcting behavior without stopping first to understand the cause. We might reprimand them, hoping to fix the behaviour, when we should first connect, ask real questions and listen. When we listen and reflect back what a child is saying, and what we think she is experiencing, we enhance the parent-child bond. For example, you ask your child to get off the computer and do homework. He says, “No, I’m not done. That’s not fair. I’m not getting off yet.” One instinctive response may be, “Please get off now or you will lose the computer.” Next comes the battle of wills.



If we connect before we correct, we achieve far greater compliance. In the computer example we might first ask the child what “level” he’s on. We could then comment on how skilled he seems to be (if true!), taking time to show interest in what seems so important to him. The conversation might continue with, “I see you are really involved and that you are right in the middle of an important part. I know you hate it when I ask you to get off the computer, but you need to get to a place, in the next five minutes, where you can turn it off.”

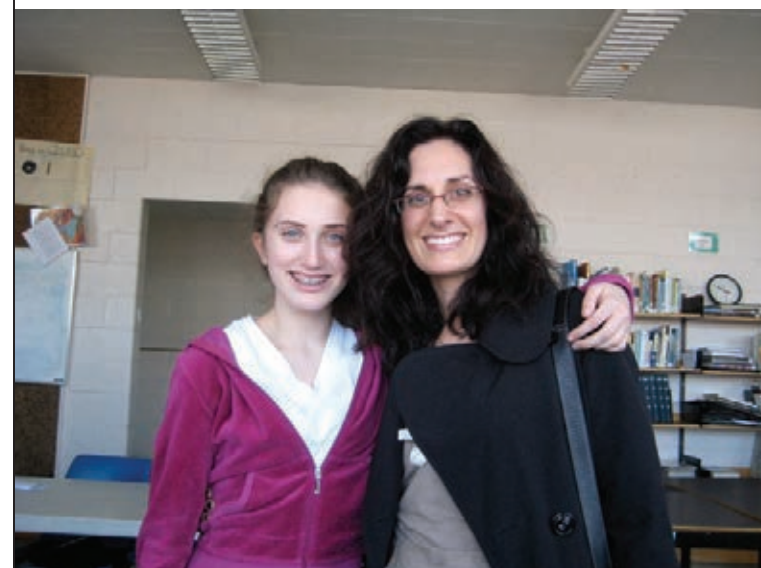
These words will feel warm and comforting. They will likely generate compliance. If the child still refuses, then you apply appropriate consequences to correct the behavior. The child will still remember that he felt heard and understood.



We all lose it from time to time. You can repair by considering how your words may have made them feel. You can then reflect their feelings back to them and connect by explaining honestly what happened and how you both may now feel. Take the time to reflect on the incident and talk about it. What a great example to set for your child.

Research in neuroscience has revealed that developmental experiences profoundly influence the functioning of the mature brain. What happens to children as they grow affects their adult brain. The more pleasant experiences a child's brain has, the more the brain specializes for positive emotion. In other words, parents have the ability to bolster their child's brain function

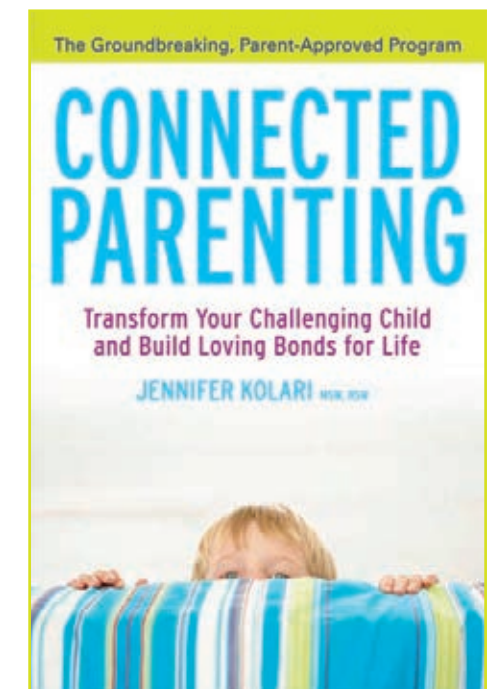
“When we listen and reflect back what a child is saying, and what we think she is experiencing, we enhance the parent-child bond.”



When you invest time and energy in your relationship with your child, you increase their chances of future success and happiness. The connected relationship boosts development of the emotional hardware children need to be happy successful adults, and will also enhance the wonderful things they learn at school. Life at home matters.

The stronger your relationship with your children, the stronger their resilience. The more you connect with your kids, the better they will meet intellectual demands, share and care for friends, set healthy boundaries for themselves and make good choices. Close relationships grow children who handle stress better and who mature with a more positive outlook.

As parents, we hope to enrich our children's lives with positive experiences and so we seek out the right school and best after-school programmes. Let's also direct that loving, caring energy toward our relationship with our kids. Their life experiences will be richer, their learning deeper and their joy greater. What parent could ask for more?



Connected Parenting: Transform Your Challenging Child and Build Loving Bonds for Life by Jennifer Kolari is published this May in Canada and the United States through the Penguin Group.

HOW STUDENTS BENEFIT FROM COLUMBIA'S NEW TEACHER ACADEMY

This year the Lola Stein Institute continues its partnership with Columbia University by offering the New Teacher Academy to ten teachers at the Toronto Heschel School. The New Teacher Academy supports, challenges and facilitates the professional vision of these ten practicing teachers. The teachers meet regularly to examine their teaching practice, to set and reflect on their personal professional goals, all the while building a community of practice which supports and enhances their teaching skills.

In a past issue of this journal Gail Baker wrote that, "inspired teaching leads to inspired learning." And so, we might wonder how do we get to that inspired teaching? How do we recognize the steps on the path to inspired teaching and how do we maintain inspired teaching once we have it?

When we give teachers the opportunity to engage with their colleagues and be challenged by discussions, tasks and activity related to their teaching practices we promote professional growth that has a direct impact on the quality of classroom instruction. Through regular focused meetings, where questions of technique and method are not only raised but answers and solutions are generated, a group of masterful teachers develops.

"Through regular focused meetings, where questions of technique and method are not only raised but answers and solutions are generated, a group of masterful teachers develops."

Columbia recently approved our teachers' Mini-Grant proposals. These projects are a good example of how the New Teacher Academy connects to the actual work our students do in the classroom. In the Mini-Grant process the teachers each identified a challenge in one of their classes and then proposed a plan of action to address it. In doing so they reflected on the needs of their students, the curriculum they are responsible for teaching, the school's values, and the classroom environment. Each grant also incorporated descriptions of meaningful student work, community involvement, connected activity, and appropriate resources. The fact that all proposals were enthusiastically approved by Columbia reflects our cohort's



collaborative work, creative thinking, and mindful choices. All of this valuable effort was directed at specific hurdles the teachers were facing in their actual classes this year.

For example, one class project addresses students' leadership skills through collaborative book writing. Sharing ideas, resolving personality conflicts and building a productive team are all part of effective collaboration. This project resulted from some very inspired planning and problem solving on behalf of our NTA teachers.

"The fact that all proposals were enthusiastically approved by Columbia reflects our cohort's collaborative work, creative thinking, and mindful choices."

Another NTA based project will see classrooms transformed into the Shushan Palace complete with stained glass windows and transformed entranceways. These decorative artifacts are a response by teachers who identified the need to develop students' fine motor skills. By working with their hands on an exciting enterprise laden with detail, the students will exercise their fine motor

skills, improving these important fundamentals while transforming their classroom.

At the end of the school year, teachers will have the opportunity to present their Mini-Grant projects along with other NTA course work to their colleagues and the extended community. Such an opportunity allows teachers to further develop the confidence and skills to assume leadership roles in the school as well as their classrooms. They see that their solutions and insights are worth sharing and valued.

The teachers say that no matter how much they learn about teaching, they learn best through teaching. The New Teacher Academy gives our teachers scheduled time to share, reflect, and collaborate so that they can, in fact, learn from their classroom experiences. Their discoveries and the lessons learned are then integrated into future classroom teaching where students reap the rewards through inventive programming and mindful teachers.



SUDOKU LEVENE ... AS IF (PART V)

** This story is the fifth part of a continuing story. Read on to enjoy a sweet and agonizing soap opera and float through one family saga.*

My mom says she doesn't have a boyfriend. But she has something, and what would you call him? I can't imagine, but he shouldn't be here.

She says, "Talk to me about it, Sudoku," but I haven't the slightest idea what to say.

That's why I went to my Chumash teacher's room, the one we all call Oy Gevalt. Mom would correct me here, and say, Mrs. Geva, but why do I have to do what she says? Oy Gevalt actually said a real Oy! Gevalt! in class once, and we couldn't stop laughing.

I wasn't going to talk with Oy Gevalt. Who would? I just wanted to sit there, and we would be there together, breathing. Okay, she'd be snoring or snorting or whatever she does out of that long nose. I think she has sinus trouble, always blowing her nose and making tissue balls. I thought I would just go sit in her room and listen to her, breathing in and out.

It was the middle of lunch period and Oy Gevalt's room was quiet. I sat and looked at the seat my mother had used on her spy mission, the day she had shown up at school.

My mom looked like a little plastic Barbie sitting in Chumash class. What would a Chumash Barbie look like anyway? A dark curly hairdo and lacy little hat? A little siddur in her hand? That's how my mom looked, but without the siddur. Everyone stared.

I wanted to stand up and say, "Make Chumash Barbie go away! She followed me!"

I sat there in my teacher's room thinking in the quiet. When we were doing the Weekly Parashah and studied Yitro, Oy Gevalt taught us that God carried B'nai Yisrael out of Egypt, on the wings of an eagle. She told us that Morah Nechama, her own teacher, said we should think not of one big eagle, but of many eagles, all winging their way, taking the children of Israel out of Egypt, towards Mount Sinai to receive the Torah. She said we should think of the eagle as the king of the birds, and I did. I thought of them as powerful birds gently carrying the Children of Israel.

Oy Gevalt's story was also about Israeli commandos and helpers. One of her friends in the Israeli army flew to Ethiopia to bring Ethiopian Jewish kids back to Israel. The Israelis hid their plane in a secret place, and then walked through the countryside gathering up children from the little villages. Soon they had a big group following them. I imagined their big eyes wide open and very scared.

They had to be careful because the Ethiopian army harassed everyone. The children knew they were in danger, and they did what the Israelis told them to do. One night they hid in a cornfield. Ethiopian soldiers roared up in jeeps. The children crouched among the corn stalks. The soldiers built a fire right there and could have burned down the whole cornfield. But they didn't. They just sat around drinking booze all night long. They staggered right into the cornfield when they had to pee, terrifying the little children hiding there.

In the lunchroom after the story, this kid named Avi said the children were really just scared of being peed on. We all laughed, but even as I laughed I could still feel that horrible feeling of being so scared of what might happen. Sometimes you really don't know, and things look bad.

When the soldiers finally fell asleep, up got the Israelis. They signaled and the children ghosted out of their hiding places, lined up on the road and marched on. No one mentioned being wet. They followed the Israelis until they got to where the plane was hidden.

The Israelis said, "All line up, we all get on the plane."

"No way!" the children said. They had never seen a plane. It

must have seemed strange and scary to them. Finally the Israelis explained to the oldest kids that they had to leave and fly home. They asked them to help get the little kids on board so they could all go to Israel.

The oldest child suddenly agreed. He told the little kids they would go al canfei nesharim, on the wings of eagles. The little kids knew what that meant because they had studied Yitro, just like we did. They got on the plane and were brought to Eretz Yisrael, just as though they were on the soft gentle wings of an eagle.

So our class clapped, and Oy Gevalt gave a real stabby look that time, like she knew we were putting her on. She didn't believe we could be so happy for those Ethiopian kids.

She told us Rashi said that being carried on eagles' wings meant God was concerned about B'nai Yisrael and wanted to take good care of us. She said that there was great love between the carrier and the one being carried because the carrier was more than just an eagle. Then, while she was still speaking, the bell rang. We all waited for one second until we got the sharp nod to go. Then we all ran out into the hall.

After school, I came back to her room again. This time Oy Gevalt was there, putting her books away.

"Sarah, have a seat," she said. "Did you want to talk with me?"

I sat down. She went back to her work. I could hear her breathing in and out through that long nose. I couldn't find the words to tell her my mom has a boyfriend, and that he isn't my dad, and that hearing about those eagles' wings made me feel good, for the first time in a long time.

TO BE CONTINUED

**"...they would go
al canfei nesharim,
on the wings
of eagles."**



UPDATE ON LOLA STEIN INSTITUTE PROGRAMMES

FOOD FOR THOUGHT WORKSHOPS SERIES

The Workshops began in September 2008 and ran all year, offering training in integrated studies to educators from across Toronto and beyond. Each session was hands on and participants left with new insight, new methods and beautiful materials.

Teachers and Principals came from Leo Baeck Day School, the Paul Penna Downtown Jewish Day School, Associated Hebrew Schools, The Toronto Heschel School, Jewish Federation of Greater Toronto, Toronto District School Board, Peel District School Board, York University and Nunavit. Interested Toronto Heschel School parents also attended.

York University invited Greg Beiles and Malka Regan to repeat *"A Critical Approach to Numeracy"* at the Faculty of Education. The feedback was outstanding.

Workshops drew thirty or so participants to the Wagman Centre from 5:30 until 8:30 p.m. where hors d'oeuvres and dinner served. Greg Beiles directed the training and Michelle Shulman managed operations. Congratulations to both for an excellent year!

THE FIRST ANNUAL LOLA STEIN INSTITUTE SYMPOSIUM

SEPTEMBER 1ST- 2ND, 2009

To start the coming school year, 2009-2010, the Institute is presenting an exciting event! 24 hours of powerful energizing learning open to the public.

On the Tuesday evening, Professor Howard Gardner of Harvard University will deliver a keynote address on "Excellence in Education." Prof. Gardner is renowned for his theories on Multiple Intelligences and Habits of Mind.

Prof. Gardner is a fascinating speaker. As much sought by business groups as by educators, he explains the differing ways that people think and work. He presents us with a way to understand ourselves as thinkers and as learners. The evening will be a rich opportunity to be stimulated by a leading researcher's insights and discoveries. Prof. Gardner speaks as a professor and as a parent and we invite parents and educators to hear him. (Learn more at www.howardgardner.com)

The following day, Symposium participants can attend three of nine available workshops. Gail Baker will frame the day with a morning presentation on creative curriculum design and inspired teaching and a closing perspective on meeting challenge. There will be five workshops on integrated Jewish education and four on general studies. The day will offer *The Food for Thought Menu* and a new environmental studies workshop, *"The Teaching Garden,"* with Ellen Kessler and Avi Helfand.

It is especially exciting to welcome Howard Gardner to the Lola Stein Institute. His research has informed our work since 1996. Prof. Gardner will lead a small group session with The Toronto Heschel School staff before his public lecture.

HOWARD GARDNER

Howard Gardner of Harvard University, is professor at the Graduate School of Education, Adjunct Professor of Psychology and Senior Director of Project Zero. He has received 22 honorary degrees. In 2005 and 2008, *Foreign Policy* and *Prospect* magazines selected him among the

100 most influential public intellectuals in the world. Author of over twenty books, now in 27 languages, and several hundred articles, Gardner is best known for his theory of multiple intelligences, challenging the notion that but a single human intelligence can be assessed by psychometrics. Looking to enhance the incidence of good work among young people he now co-directs the GoodWork Project, a study of work that is excellent, engaging, and ethical. At Project Zero, he is investigating the nature of trust in our society and the ethics of new digital media.



LOLA AND MANNY STEIN

LOLA STEIN

Lola Stein z"l was an early female pharmacist in South Africa, but her very special talent was in hospitality and friendship. She cared for family and friends, at home and abroad, individually, uniquely and lovingly. One friend chooses to honour her memory in a way that also reaches out to many.