

Israel in our Hearts and Minds:

Early Childhood Directors and the Place of Israel in their

Lives and Classrooms

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Introduction

From what age can connection to Israel begin? In the wake of exploration for avenues that influence the Jewish lives of younger generations of American Jews, early childhood education increasingly receives attention from Jewish communal leaders. For example, believing that early childhood education can shape the lives and identities of children and their families, The Jewish Life Network/Steinhardt Foundation recently invested in an initiative to make quality Jewish early childhood accessible to all Jewish families in America.

Inasmuch as early childhood is now central to the organized Jewish agenda, the place of Israel in early childhood is not necessarily fundamental to the agenda. However, the Jewish Early Childhood Association (JECA), an affiliate group of the Board of Jewish Education (BJE) of Greater New York, takes a particular interest in the place of Israel in the Jewish early childhood arena. In hopes of better understanding the presence of Israel in Jewish early childhood programs, and with the desire to strengthen its place, both in the lives and classrooms of early childhood educators, JECA embarked on a professional development journey entitled “Israel in our Hearts and Minds” (IHM) during the fall of 2003. The journey is conceptualized as an in-service training program combining a trip to Israel with pre- and post-trip workshops regarding Israel, and to a lesser extent, the place of Israel in early childhood education. The first year included Jewish early childhood directors, and subsequent years will include both directors and teachers.

JECA commissioned the Research and Development Unit of the Department of Jewish Zionist Education of the Jewish Agency for Israel to undertake a long-term research and evaluation project to assess the place of Israel in the lives of Jewish early childhood educators in the New York area, and to assess what IHM program participants gain through the in-service program, both in regards to strengthening their personal feelings towards Israel and the place of Israel in their early childhood programs. The working assumptions are threefold. First, professional development programs in Israel for early childhood educators provide opportunities to increase the place of Israel in their hearts and minds. Second, those who travel to Israel and internalize the importance of Israel in their hearts and minds are more likely to make Israel a central component of early childhood programs. And third, in-service programs including an Israel component and pre- and post-trip sessions provide opportunities for learning ways in which to bring Israel into the schools and classrooms.

The current report is based on data collected during the first year of the project. This report utilizes survey data collected from early childhood directors who are JECA members,

and interview data gathered from JECA directors who participated in the IHM program¹. Analysis of survey data focuses on the place of Israel (and Judaism) in both the lives and schools of directors, with an emphasis on differences between respondents who never visited Israel, those who visited once, and those who visited Israel more than once. The interview data provide an in-depth look at a handful of directors, all who visited Israel more than once, and who recently completed yearlong participation in the IHM program.

Methods

The research and evaluation consists of two components, one quantitative, one qualitative. The quantitative component is an online survey given to directors of Jewish early childhood programs who are members of JECA. We attempted to reach 187 directors (from just under 300 programs that affiliate with JECA) via email, though we removed 18 directors from the list either because they left their post, the email reached non-directors (e.g., the assistant director), or because the emails we sent bounced back. In the end, we surveyed a total of 120 out of a possible 169 directors, a 71% response rate. We administered the survey online by sending the directors an introductory letter and link to the survey at the beginning of December 2003, and following-up with three separate reminders over the course of three months. About 10% of respondents filled out their surveys by hand, either as part of a pre-test group, or because they printed out the online survey and sent it to us. All but one IHM participant completed surveys.

In addition to the quantitative component, we conducted a series of interviews with four out of twelve IHM participants (seven who are early childhood directors, four who work at the BJE office, and the husband, a lay leader, of one director). Among the directors interviewed, three direct Reform synagogue early childhood programs and one directs a Conservative synagogue program. Among the three other directors, one directs a Conservative synagogue early childhood program, one an Orthodox Day School program, and one a trans-denominational program. Ideally, we would have interviewed at least one of the two latter directors for the sake of diversity, but these women signed on only after we

¹ I would like to thank the following early childhood directors for participating in the interview process, Rachel Mathless, Vicki Perler, Judy Robbins Rosenberger, and Sari Luck Schneider. Each of these women candidly shared their thoughts and feelings about the IHM program, their early childhood programs and the place of Israel and Judaism in their own lives. I would also like to thank Cheryl Meskin for her time and commitment to the research component of the IHM project. Finally, I would like to thank Shira Ackerman Simchovitch for teaching me about Israel in early childhood, and along with Margolit Kavenstock, for teaching me about early childhood education in Israel.

completed the first round of interviews. Interviewees all agreed to take part in the interview process when initially approached via email or telephone.

The first round of interviews occurred during pre-trip sessions. Initially, we anticipated a second round of interviews during the Israel program, but because of the participants' limited free time, we interviewed only one director in Israel. A final round of interviews occurred at the close of post-trip sessions.

We also conducted participant observation during the Israel program. This provided an opportunity to interact with participants, to conduct informal interviews, and to form impressions about the group and the Israel program. I joined the group for a visit to an Israeli preschool (*gan*), a group discussion on bringing Israel into the schools and classrooms, an evening music program, and a group discussion debriefing the program.

The report is divided into two sections. The first section reports on the survey findings, while the latter section reports on field observations and interviews. The survey provides a general overview of the place of Israel in the lives and schools of Jewish early childhood directors in the greater New York area. In many places the data are subdivided and analyzed according to the number of times respondents visited Israel prior to the survey (i.e., never, once, more than once). The second section reports on IHM program participants. It combines the data from the interviews, the survey data on these specific respondents, and impressions from observation to paint a picture of the IHM program and its participants.

Part I: Early Childhood Directors

Survey Findings

1. The Survey Population

The survey population consists of 120 respondents, all but two who are female. Marital status includes 88% married, 8% divorced, 3% widowed, and 2% who have never been married. The age range includes 34% under the age of fifty (9% under forty, and 25% in their forties) and 67% who are age fifty or older (54% in their fifties, and 13% in their sixties). All but four directors in the survey were raised Jewish and all but three are currently Jewish. These data tell us that in the New York area, the vast majority of directors of Jewish early childhood programs are mature married Jewish women.

Age Group

Under Forty	9%
Forties	25%
Fifties	54%
Sixties	13%
Total	101%

* Figures not adding up to 100% are due to rounding

Marital Status

Married	88%
Divorced	8%
Widowed	3%
Never Married	2%
Total	101%

* Figures not adding up to 100% are due to rounding

2. The Early Childhood Programs

Among the early childhood programs included in the survey, 50% are part of Synagogues, 28% are part of Yeshiva or Day Schools, 19% are part of a JCC, and the last few are part of another educational setting. Seventy-eight percent (78%) of the programs are connected to a religious denomination, of which 37% are Orthodox, 30% are Conservative, 32% are Reform, and 1% is Reconstructionist. Among those programs affiliated with a denomination and part of a synagogue, 49% are Reform, 44% are Conservative, and the remaining few are Orthodox or Reconstructionist, while 90% of Yeshiva programs are Orthodox, and remaining few are Conservative or Reform.

Program Location

Synagogue	50%
Yeshiva / Day School	28%
JCC	19%
Other	3%
Total	100%

Program Affiliation

	Overall affiliation	Synagogue	Yeshiva/Day	JCC
Orthodox	37%	5%	90%	
Conservative	30%	44%	3%	100% (n = 1)
Reform	32%	49%	7%	
Reconstructionist	1%	2%	0%	
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

* The chart reflects answers from 78% of schools affiliated with a religious denomination

The vast majority of early childhood programs include more than one age group of young children, with most including classes for two to five years old. Forty-one percent (41%) of the survey population run programs for infants to 24 month olds, 81% direct

programs that include two-year olds, 92% run programs for three year olds, and 93% direct programs for four to five year olds.

Program Age Groups*

Infants to 24 months	41%
Two year olds	81%
Three year olds	92%
Four-five year olds	93%

* Multiple response questions

3. Israel in the personal and professional lives of the directors

Data analysis reveals that among early childhood directors, those visiting Israel more than once score higher on measures of Israel, both in the personal and professional realms of their lives. Among survey respondents, 26% never visited Israel, 23% visited once, and 51% visited Israel more than once. Among Israel visitors, 25% visited during the past year, 22% visited one to three years ago (during the current crisis), 9% visited four to five year ago, 14% visited six to ten years ago, and the remaining 31% visited more than ten years ago.

Been to Israel

Never Been	26%
Been Once	23%
Been 1+	51%
Total	100%

Last visit to Israel

Past Year	25%
1-3 years ago	22%
4-5 years ago	9%
6-10 years ago	14%
10+ years ago	31%
Total	101%

* The chart reflects answers from 74% of directors who visited Israel at least once

* Figures not adding up to 100% are due to rounding

Generally speaking, initial visits to Israel tend to be personally motivated, often related to an individual’s Jewish background and feelings of attachment to Israel. Because personal affection often influences professional choices, it is worth exploring respondents’ Jewish backgrounds and personal attachments to Israel before exploring the place of Israel in their schools and classrooms.

Furthermore, because the data show differences associated with the number of times directors visited Israel, in many places throughout the report the data is divided into three sub-groups: those who have never been to Israel (non-visitors), those who have been to Israel once (one-timers), and those who have visited more than once (return visitors).

4. Demographic and Jewish background in association with visits to Israel

Age is associated with travel to Israel. Sixty-five percent (65%) of directors under fifty compared to 76% fifty and over visited Israel, with equal proportions (49% each) visiting Israel more than once.

Been to Israel by Age

	Under 50	50 and over
Never Been	35%	23%
Been Once	16%	27%
Been 1+	49%	49%
Total	100%	99%

* Figures not adding up to 100% are due to rounding

More intensive forms of formal Jewish education are associated with increased levels of travel to Israel, whereas less intensive forms of Jewish schooling are associated with lower levels of travel to Israel. All Day School attendees report visiting Israel at least once (94% visiting more than once), three-quarters (76%) of Hebrew school attendees visited Israel at least once (49% visiting more than once) and half (50% and 58%, respectively) of Sunday school attendees and those with no formal Jewish schooling report visiting Israel (about a quarter of each visiting more than once).

Been to Israel by Type of Jewish schooling

	Yeshiva/Day School	Hebrew School	Sunday School	No Formal schooling
Never been	--	24%	50%	42%
Been once	7%	27%	25%	37%
Been 1+	94%	29%	25%	21%
Total	101%	100%	100%	100%

* Figures not adding up to 100% are due to rounding

In an analysis of patterns of Jewish connection, we found strong relationships between patterns of connection and the number of times visiting Israel. We created scales of religious observance (RO) and organizational affiliation (OA) by combining several variables related to each of the two measures.² Based on their answers to several questions, respondents received a composite score on each measure. Higher scores indicate higher levels of religious observance or organizational affiliation whereas lower score indicate lower

² The scale of religious observance (RO) includes questions related to keeping kosher; fasting on Yom Kippur; lighting candles on Friday for the Sabbath; and marking the Sabbath in some other way. The scale of organizational affiliation (OA) includes questions related to membership in a synagogue, JCC, and other Jewish organizations; contributing to the UJA; and working and serving as an officer in a Jewish organization.

levels. The composite scores indicate the mean (on a scale from 1 to 100) for all respondents, or for each sub-group of respondents.

Composite scores for religious observance and organizational affiliation are quite similar to one another. The overall means are 68 and 66, respectively, though there is a wide range that increases in gradation (with a wider range within RO than OA) with the number of times respondents visit Israel. While the mean scores for RO and OA among non-visitors are 41 and 48, respectively, the mean scores for one-timers are 56 and 65, and 88 and 74 for return visitors.

Composite scores of level of religious observance and organizational affiliation

	Level of religious observance	Level organizational affiliation
Never been	41.13	48.39
Been once	55.56	65.43
Been 1+	87.50	74.19
Overall mean	68.33	65.56

5. Personal attachments in association with Israel visits

The vast majority of directors (93%) indicate that being Jewish is very important in their lives. Among those who never visited Israel, 77% feel this way, while 96% of those who visited once, and all those who visited twice or more share the sentiment.

Being Jewish is "very important" in director's life

Never been	77%
Been once	96%
Been 1+	100%
Overall	93%

Sixty-four percent (64%) of the survey population have friends or family currently living in Israel, with the proportion reporting close ties increasing dramatically as the time spent in Israel increases. Whereas 29% of non-visitors have friends or family in Israel, 58% of one-timers, and 84% of return visitors report friends or family in Israel. It is possible that having close ties is what brings these individuals to Israel, or it could be that by spending time in Israel, respondents make friendships that catalyze return trips.

Director has friends or family living in Israel

Never been	29%
Been once	58%
Been 1+	84%
Overall	64%

Almost all respondents (95%) feel close *to a great extent* to other Jews. Eighty-seven percent (87%) of non-visitors feel this way, while 93% who visited Israel once, and all those who visited more than once feel close to other Jews *to a great extent*. In contrast, while a majority (68%) of multiple-time visitors feel close to Israelis *to a great extent*, a relatively small proportion of one-timers and non-visitors feel this way (23% and 22%, respectively). As mentioned above, visitors report higher levels of close ties in Israel than do non-visitors. It is thus logical that visitors will feel closer to Israelis. In addition, increased travel to Israel provides the opportunity to meet Israelis, formally or informally, potentially increasing attachment to them.

A minority (24%) of respondents feels close *to a great extent* to non-Jewish Americans, though a larger proportion of non-visitors (42%) and one-timers (37%) feel this way, than do those who visited Israel more than once (10%).

Director feels close to a great extent to:

	Other Jews	Israelis	Non-Jewish Americans
Never been	87%	23%	42%
Been once	93%	22%	37%
Been 1+	100%	68%	10%
Overall	95%	46%	24%

Sixty-six percent (66%) of directors feel *very attached* to Israel. Attachment increases progressively with the number of visits, with a considerable gap between visiting once and visiting more than once. Among non-visitors, 37% feel *very attached* to Israel, similar to one-timers (46%), but quite different than the proportion that visited Israel multiple times (90%).

In an analysis of expressions of attachment to Israel (during twelve months prior to the survey), we found strong relationships between expressions of attachment and the number of times visiting Israel. Through the use of a statistical test known as factor analysis, we created three scales based on how factors aligned during analysis.³ The first factor includes questions connected to emotional attachment to Israel,⁴ the second factor is associated with interpersonal support for Israel,⁵ and the third factor is associated with public support of

³ Groupings reflect how variables align during factor analysis, and also purposeful groupings based on previous Jewish social science surveys that build scales for analysis (see for example, Steven M. Cohen's 2002 National Survey of American Jews).

⁴ The scale of emotional attachment is based on questions connected to following the news about Israel; talking to others about Israel; feeling close to Israelis.

⁵ The scale of interpersonal support is based on questions connected to contributing to Israel-related organization; encouraging someone to visit Israel; writing someone in Israel.

Israel.⁶ As with the earlier scale, the composite scores for each factor indicate the mean (on a scale from 1 to 100) for all respondents, or for each sub-group of respondents.

Composite scores for each factor are relatively high, though there is a distinct range between sub-groups of non-visitors, one-timers, and return visitors. Mean scores for each factor increases in gradation with the number of times respondents visit Israel, with the larger gap between the first two and third sub-groups. In fact, except for their level of interpersonal support for Israel, non-visitors and one-timers are quite similar. The difference in composite scores from non-visitors to return visitors is most dramatic in regards to the level of interpersonal support for Israel (49 to 90, with an overall mean of 74), and less dramatic in regards to both their level of public support (47 to 79, with an overall mean of 65), and their emotional attachment to Israel (56 to 74 with an overall mean of 63).

Composite scores of emotional attachment, public support and interpersonal support for Israel

	Interpersonal support	Public support for Israel	Emotional attachment
Never been	49.46	47.31	46.77
Been Once	62.96	51.85	53.70
Been 1+	90.32	79.03	74.73
Overall Mean	73.61	64.72	62.78

We again see a wide gap between the first two sub-groups, and those who visited Israel more than once in regards to plans to visit Israel in the next three years. Thirteen percent (13%) of those who never visited and 27% of those who visited once intend to visit, while 84% of those who visited more than once intend to return in the next three years.

Director plans to visit Israel in the next three years

Never been	13%
Been Once	27%
Been 1+	84%
Overall	53%

Non-visitors are as likely as those who have been twice or more to report higher levels of involvement with Israel during the last three years (the approximate time since the commencement of the current crisis). Thirty-nine percent (39%) of non-visitors, 26% of one-timers, and 38% of return visitors report higher levels of involvement with Israel during the last three years. It is possible that Israel returnees are already highly involved with Israel, and therefore, have not changed their level of involvement as a result of the current crisis.

⁶ The scale of public support is based on questions connected to attending rallies, lectures or other programs about Israel; making an effort to buy Israeli-made product.

Change in the level of involvement with Israel over the last three years

	More involved	Not much change	Less involved	Not Sure	Total
Never been	39%	55%	3%	3%	100%
Been Once	26%	59%	4%	11%	100%
Been 1+	38%	61%	2%	0%	101%

* Figures not adding up to 100% are due to rounding

6. Israel in Jewish early childhood institutions

The number of directors visiting Israel multiple times slightly increases with the age of the children in the program. Just over a third (36%) of directors running programs for infants to 24 month olds visited Israel more than once, while almost half of those directing programs for children age three to five visited Israel more than once.

Program Type by Been to Israel

	0-24 month	2 year olds	3 year olds	4-5 year olds
Never been	30%	29%	26%	26%
Been once	34%	27%	23%	23%
Been 1+	36%	45%	51%	51%
Total	100%	101%	100%	100%

* Figures not adding up to 100% are due to rounding

Twenty-seven percent (27%) of the survey population indicates that Israel is explicitly mentioned in their school's written vision or mission statement, while just over a third (36%) have some type of partnership with an Israeli institution. A dramatic difference exists between schools where the director never visited Israel and those where directors visited more than once in regards to Israel in the vision/mission statement (0% versus 44%). The gap is less spectacular in regards to a partnership with an Israeli institution (29% versus 41%).

Director's school has a professional connection to Israel

	Israel is in school's vision (yes)	Partnership with Israeli institution (yes)
Never been	0%	29%
Been once	19%	37%
Been 1+	44%	41%
Overall	27%	36%

7. Israel in the professional development of early childhood educators

The more times a director visits Israel, the more likely she is to participate in professional development opportunities regarding Israel. While 19% of non-visitors participated in stateside professional opportunities, 44% of one-timers, and 64% of return visitors participated in such opportunities. The majority of all sub-groups express an interest in participating in professional programs *in* Israel, though a larger proportion of past visitors

than non-visitors convey interest (55% of non-visitors, 74% of one-timers, and 80% of return visitors). Thus, regardless of visiting history, there is a large untapped population interested in professional programs in Israel.

Director’s professional development vis-à-vis Israel

	Participated in professional development opportunities regarding Israel	Interested in professional development opportunities <i>in</i> Israel
Never been	19%	55%
Been once	44%	74%
Been 1+	64%	80%
Overall	48%	72%

A small minority of directors reports a *strong emphasis* on Israel in the professional development their teachers receive, although a third indicate that Israel is *somewhat* emphasized in their teacher’s professional development. Return visitors are slightly more likely than non-visitors and one-timers to indicate a strong emphasis. That there is no connection between the directors number of visits to Israel most likely reflects that other than providing the stipend and perhaps personal inspiration, directors have little influence on their teachers’ professional development choices. Unless it is an in-school workshop, teachers themselves choose which workshops and conference sessions they will attend. Interviews with directors indicate that teachers are more likely to choose topics related to developmental stages of early childhood than topics related to teaching Israel in early childhood.

Among the ways that Israel is emphasized in teachers’ professional development, the presence of Israel in the physical space of the classroom is least likely to be strongly emphasized (7%), followed by connecting Israel to the general curriculum (14%), and the Jewish curriculum (19%). About a third of directors indicate that each component is somewhat emphasized (32%, 30%, 30%, respectively).

To what extent is Israel emphasized in professional development of teachers?

	Somewhat Emphasized	Strongly Emphasized
Israel in the physical space of the classroom		
Never been	19%	0%
Been once	35%	0%
Been 1+	37%	13%
Overall	32%	7%
Connecting Israel to the Jewish curriculum		
Never been	39%	3%
Been once	23%	8%
Been 1+	29%	19%
Overall	30%	19%
Connecting Israel the general curriculum		
Never been	23%	7%

Been once	31%	4%
Been 1+	30%	14%
Overall	30%	14%

8. Israel and Judaism in the Jewish early childhood classroom

Early childhood directors are generally more inclined to give *a great deal* of thought to teaching Judaism than to Israel (88% versus 38%). The gap exists for all directors, but is most profound amongst non-visitors (83% versus 23%) or one-timers (82% versus 22%). In contrast, almost all directors (93%) who visited more than once give *a great deal* of thought to teaching Judaism, while over half (53%) give *a great deal* of thought to teaching Israel.

Survey findings concerning the place of Judaism and Israel in the thoughts of early childhood directors are also reflected in personal interviews. When asked about the place of Israel within the Jewish curriculum, directors agree that, "teaching Israel is not central". They spend more time teaching the holidays and Jewish values, and getting the children to connect to Judaism, rather than teaching Israel.

Over the past year, the director has given *a great deal* of thought to teaching...

	Judaism in EC program	Israel in EC program
Never been	83%	23%
Been once	82%	22%
Been 1+	93%	53%
Overall	88%	39%

In an analysis of the ways that Israel and Judaism are present in Jewish early childhood programs, we found strong relationships between the presence of Israel and the number of visits to Israel. We performed factor analysis on each of three question series concerning the physical presence of particular items related to Israel and Judaism found *a lot* in the classroom, particular activities related to Israel and Judaism performed *frequently*, and particular themes that *strongly emphasize* Israel. Based on factor analysis, we created several scales for each question series.

We created four scales concerning the physical presence of items found *a lot* in the classroom. The first grouping is related to the physical presence of Jewish associations in the classroom⁷. The composite score is extremely high (92), with negligent variation between sub-groups. The remaining three scales relate to the physical presence of Israeli items in the classroom. Composite scores for each Israel scale are significantly lower than the score for Jewish associations. Furthermore, mean scores are similar for non-visitors and one-timers,

⁷ The Jewish associations scale is based on the presence of a mezuzah, a chanukiah, ritual objects for Shabbat, and *a lot* of books about Jewish holidays in the classroom. This scale combines two factors.

while scores for return visitors are much higher. The composite score of the Israel symbols scale⁸ is closest to the Jewish associations score (69 versus 92), perhaps because of the items making up this scale. (A Star of David is included in the Israel symbols scale as a result of factor analysis, but it is essentially a Jewish symbol that is also associated with Israel).

Within the Israel symbols factor, mean scores for each sub-group are also relatively close, with the biggest gap between the first two and third groups (63, 60, and 76). The composite score for the Hebrew items scale⁹ is 33, with non-visitors and one-timers mean scores at 25 and 21, respectively, compared to a mean of 43 for return visitors. Finally, the composite score for the Israel associations scale¹⁰ is quite low (21), with a gap between the first two groups (10 and 15) and the third group (29).

Composite scores of the physical presence of items found “a lot” in the classroom

	Jewish associations	Israel symbols	Hebrew items	Israel associations
Never been	90.32	62.36	24.73	10.32
Been once	94.44	60.49	20.98	14.81
Been 1+	91.53	76.34	43.01	29.03
Overall Mean	91.87	69.16	33.33	21.00

We created three scales connected to the frequency of activities associated with Israel and Judaism in the classroom. Two scales are connected to Jewish activities, and the third is connected to Israel. The composite scores for the first two scales are much higher than the third scale. Again, the gap in mean scores occurs between the first two sub-groups and those who visited Israel more than once. The composite score of the Jewish music scale¹¹ is 75, with a range of 63 to 84 for non-visitors to return visitors. The composite score for the Jewish food scale¹² is 64, with mean scores of 58 and 57 for non-visitors and one-timers, and 69 for return visitors. The final scale, Interactive Israel¹³ has a much lower mean score than the two previous items (21), with a range of 10 to 29.

⁸ The Israel symbols scale is based on the presence of a map of Israel, an Israeli flag, and a Star of David in the classroom.

⁹ The Hebrew items scale is based on the presence of *a lot* of Hebrew books and Hebrew games in the classroom, and Hebrew letters on the wall of the classroom.

¹⁰ The Israel associations scale is based on the presence of *a lot* of Israeli products, posters displaying places or faces of Israel in the classroom, and Hallway displays covering Israel themes, and an El Al (toy) plane and blue and white coloring on the wall of the classroom. This scale combines two factors.

¹¹ The Jewish music scale is based on singing Hebrew songs, singing songs for Shabbat, and listening to Jewish music *frequently* in the classroom.

¹² The Jewish music scale is based on making challot and special foods for Jewish holidays *frequently* in the classroom.

¹³ The Interactive Israel scale is based on listening to Israeli music, learning Israeli dance, learning Hebrew words, hearing stories related to Israel, taking part in activities related to Israel, meeting Israeli parents or guests, learning about holidays in Israel, and making or tasting Israeli foods *frequently* in the classroom.

Composite scores of activities performed “frequently” in the classroom

	Jewish music	Jewish food	Interactive Israel
Never been	63.44	58.06	18.54
Been once	67.90	57.40	21.29
Been 1+	84.40	69.35	40.32
Overall Mean	75.22	63.75	30.41

Finally, we created three scales related to themes in which Israel is *strongly emphasized* in the program. The first theme is connected to Israeli holidays, and the second two themes are associated with Judaism or Jewish life in an immediate and in a worldwide sense. Interviews with early childhood directors indicate that *Tu B’shvat* and *Yom Ha’Aztmaut* are the two occasions in which Israel most notably arises in early childhood education, thus reflecting the high composite score for the Israeli holidays scale¹⁴ (79). The strong emphasis occurs in all sub-groups, with a range from 65 to 87 for non-visitors to return visitors. The composite score for the first Jewish life scale¹⁵ (53) is twice as high as the composite score for the second Jewish life scale¹⁶ (27), perhaps reflecting a focus in early childhood on immediate or local elements of Jewish life (those that are concrete), as opposed to global or distant elements of Jewish life (those that are more abstract). There is again a gap in mean scores between the first two sub-groups, and those who visited Israel more than once (47, 43, 61 in Jewish life#1, and 15, 14, 39 in Jewish life#2).

Composite scores of themes “strongly emphasizing” Israel in the program

	Israeli holidays	Jewish life#1	Jewish life#2
Never been	64.51	47.31	15.05
Been once	77.77	43.20	14.81
Been 1+	87.09	60.75	38.97
Overall Mean	79.16	53.33	27.36

Overall, survey data indicates that there is significant room to increase emphasis on Israel in Jewish early childhood programs, highlighted by the gap between directors who participate in professional development regarding Israel and those interested in doing so. The disparity is especially wide within the sub-groups of non-visitors and one-timers, the two groups showing weaker emphasis on the presence of Israel in their programs. Even among those who visited Israel more than once and show higher levels of engagement with Israel in their schools, the data indicate that there are still gaps and places for improving the presence

¹⁴ The Israeli holidays is based on a *strong emphasis* on Israel when discussing *Tu B’shvat* and *Yom Ha’atzmaut*.

¹⁵ The Jewish life#1 scale is based on a *strong emphasis* on Israel when discussing family, mitzvot, Jewish community, Shabbat, Jewish values, and Jewish holidays.

¹⁶ The Jewish life#2 scale is based on a *strong emphasis* on Israel when discussing Hebrew, daily rituals, Jewish life cycle, months, bible/Torah and traveling.

of Israel in the programs. In regards to the directors' lives, the data indicate that as the number of visits to Israel increases, so too does the level of personal connection to Israel, and also the level of professional engagement with Israel.

Summary of Survey Findings

- The survey population consists of 120 directors of Jewish early childhood programs, all but two who are female.
- The vast majority of directors are married.
- The majority of directors are fifty years or older.

- Half the early childhood programs are located in synagogues, while just over a quarter are located in Day Schools, and under a quarter are located in JCCs or elsewhere.
- Among affiliated early childhood programs, just over a third are Orthodox, just under a third are Conservative, and another third are Reform.
- The vast majority of programs include children ages two, three, four, and five, with slightly under half also including infants to 24 month old children.

- *Data analysis reveals that among early childhood directors, those visiting Israel more than once score higher on measures of Israel, both in the personal and professional realms of their lives.*
- A quarter of directors never visited Israel, almost a quarter visited once, and just over half visited more than once.
- Among directors under the age of fifty, two-thirds have visited Israel compared to three-quarters of those fifty and over.
- All directors who attended Jewish Day School as children have been to Israel, in comparison to about half who attended Hebrew School, Sunday School, or who had no Jewish education.
- A strong relationship exists between patterns of connection and the number of times directors visit Israel. Return visitors are much more likely than one-timers or non-visitors to score higher on levels of religious observance and organizational affiliation.
- The vast majority of directors indicate that being Jewish is very important in their lives, including all directors who visited Israel more than once.
- Two-thirds of directors have family or friends currently living in Israel, with the proportion increasing dramatically with the number of visits to Israel.
- The vast majority of directors feel close to other Jews to *a great extent*.
- Return visitors are three times as likely as non-visitors and one-timers to feel close to Israelis, and four times less likely to feel close to non-Jews than are the other groups.
- Strong relationships exist between expressions of attachment and the number of visits to Israel. Return visitors are much more likely than one-timers and non-visitors to express interpersonal support, public support and emotional attachment to Israel.
- Return visitors are six times more likely than non-visitors, and three times more likely than one-timers to express plans to visit Israel in the next three years.
- More than half the directors indicate that their involvement with Israel has not changed much over the past three years (during the time of the current crises).

- Return visitors are four times more likely than non-visitors, and two times more likely than one-timers to include Israel in their school's vision or mission statement.

- A third of early childhood programs have a partnership with an Israeli institution.
- Directors who visited Israel are much more likely than those who never visited to participate in professional development opportunities regarding Israel. However, regardless of past participation, the majority of directors express interest in future opportunities.
- Few directors indicate a strong emphasis on Israel within the professional development of their teachers.
- The vast majority of directors give *a great deal* of thought to teaching Judaism in their early childhood, whereas less than half give a similar amount of thought to teaching Israel. Return visitors are more than twice as likely as non-visitors and one-timers to give *a great deal* of thought to teaching Israel.
- Strong relationships exist between the presence of Israel in the early childhood classroom and the number of visits to Israel.
 - It is twice as likely that Hebrew items and items associated with Israel appear "a lot" in classrooms of return visitors as in classrooms of one-timers and non-visitors.
 - It is twice as likely that Israel activities occur "frequently" in classrooms of return visitors as in classrooms of one-timers and non-visitors.
 - It is much more likely that Israel is "strongly emphasized" in the themes of Israeli holidays, and local and global elements of Jewish life in classrooms of return visitors than in classrooms of one-timers and non-visitors.

We turn now to the qualitative data on IHM participants. The qualitative data provide us a descriptive window into the ways in which Israel enters into the lives and programs of directors considered highly connected to Israel in their personal and professional lives among the survey population of directors.

Part II: IHM In-Service Training Program

Interviews and Observational Findings

1. The IHM program

The survey data show that less than half the directors and teachers in Jewish early childhood programs in the New York area participate in professional development opportunities regarding Israel, though almost three-quarters (72%) of directors express an interest in doing so. Interviews with IHM participants reveal a perception among educators that few opportunities exist in the New York area for professional development regarding Israel in early childhood education. The Israel in our Hearts and Minds program addresses this feeling of dearth, and currently functions as the only program for early childhood educators that meets yearlong in the New York area and includes a trip to Israel.

During the first half of 2003, Shira Ackerman Simchovitch, Director of the Early Childhood Division of the Jewish Agency for Israel, and Cheryl Meskin, Director of Early Childhood at the BJE of Greater New York, submitted a joint proposal to the Jewish Agency to subsidize an in-service training program for early childhood educators. The New York director also submitted a proposal to the JECA board to partner with the Research and Development Unit of the Educational Department of the Jewish Agency on a five-year study of the place of Israel in Jewish early childhood education, and on the impact of IHM on participants. Both proposals were accepted and received the desired funding.

Upon receiving the grant, the BJE's early childhood department began planning the program with Tuvia Book, the group's tour guide and Jewish Agency *shaliach* (emissary) at the BJE of Greater New York, in coordination with the early childhood division at the Jewish Agency. The goals of IHM are twofold. The first goal focuses on making Israel a part of the participants' lives and with that, strengthening their Jewish identity and their work in early childhood education. The second goal combines Jewish experiences in Israel with professional development opportunities, the opportunity for people-to-people encounters, and time to process the personal and professional experiences. It is worth noting that the directors of the two early childhood units differ in opinion regarding the ideal proportion of each goal within the Israel program. Divergent opinions surfaced already in the planning stages, and continued during the program itself.

The first year of IHM centered on program directors, with the intention to open the program to both directors and teachers in subsequent years. The program combines pre-trip workshops, a seminar in Israel, and post-trip workshops. During the first year, five pre-Israel trip workshops ran monthly from October through January, followed by three post-trip workshops ending in June.

2. IHM participants

The IHM launch program intended to attract twenty directors, but only seven registered and attended the program. The other participants included four members of the BJE staff, and the husband of one director. Among the directors, three direct Reform early childhood synagogue programs, two direct Conservative synagogue programs, one directs an Orthodox Day School program, and one directs a trans-denominational program.

All director participants are female, most are currently married, and range in age from 51 to 65. All directors affiliate with synagogues, four with Orthodox synagogues, one with a Conservative synagogue, and two with Reform synagogues. All directors participating in

IHM previously visited Israel at least once, with most visiting more than once. Two directors visited Israel in the last year, while the rest have not visited in six years or more, three who have not visited for more than ten years.

Among the directors interviewed, three direct Reform synagogue programs (with 120 children in each program) and one directs a Conservative synagogue program (with 160-170 children). Two programs include two to four year olds, while the other two include two to five year olds. Three programs also include a parenting or “mommy and me” class once or twice a week. Program staff ranges from 20 to 26 members, including the number of teachers, assistants, and specialty staff.

All four interviewees connected Jewishly as children. Three grew up attending Hebrew School and the fourth went to Jewish Day School. Three attended Jewish summer camp for at least one summer through scholarships they received, and two directors actively participated in Jewish youth groups during high school. All directors learned Hebrew through high school, two reporting fluency by graduation. Two interviewees attended university in New York City in order to be near “a good Jewish life”.

Past experience in Israel among the interviewees exceeds the average among the survey population. One interviewee spent a high school semester in Israel, and another spent a high school summer with Camp Ramah in Israel and her junior year in college at The Hebrew University. A third director spent five consecutive summers after high school in Israel, visiting family and traveling the country. The final interviewee first visited Israel shortly after marrying.

All interviewees currently participate to a greater extent than the average among the survey population in various Jewish organizations and institutions. All affiliate with a synagogue, and one holds lifetime membership in Hadassah. All report that between half and most of their close friends are Jewish, and all report personal connections in Israel. All interviewees are JECA members (two who are elected officers) and are connected to the National Jewish Early Childhood Network (NJEEN). Regarding professional connections in Israel, one director has an art exchange program with a preschool in the center region of Israel, and one reports a professional connection with the Jewish Agency’s early childhood director, whose workshops she attends in New York and at various conferences.

3. The place of Israel in participants’ programs

During the first round of interviews, directors reflect on how Israel is taught in their early childhood programs. First and foremost, Israel surfaces around specific holidays, primarily,

Yom Ha'atzmaut and *Tu B'shvat*. Directors also bring up the use of Hebrew in classrooms, connecting Israel to the preparation of holiday foods and to discussions about far away places. These data closely reflect survey findings where the vast majority of respondents say that Israel is strongly emphasized in the themes of *Yom Ha'atzmaut* and *Tu B'shvat*, over half mention the frequent use of Hebrew words, almost all report that the children frequently hear about Israel in the preparation of special foods on Jewish holidays, and just under half report that the children frequently hear about Israel as a far away place.

Directors describe ornate *Yom Ha'atzmaut* celebrations, often a culmination of a month-long learning and preparation towards the actual event. Two directors describe the event in the milieu of full sensory experiences.

Our biggest thrust is for *Yom Ha'atzmaut*. We have a wonderful program that our parents created, which is a full tactile, multi-sensory experience for the children. The children come in, we make passports, and we pretend we are on the plane. We go to Israel, they squeeze fruit, they do Israel dancing, and they go fishing in the Dead Sea...

For the actual celebration, we enlist parent volunteers, and each class prepares a site in Israel to present. One may do an archeological dig, with things buried [in the sandbox], so the children dig, find a piece of something, brush it off, and put it together... One class may replicate Eilat, with beautiful fish, fishing poles, and painted fish. Another class will deal with the Dead Sea, with water bowls, one with salt, one without, and do sinking and floating experiments... Another group will make the Chagall Windows, making stain glass pictures to hang on their windows. We make a Kotel [Western Wall]. The kids will draw pictures or dictate messages to put in the Wall. We have a kibbutz where you can milk a cow (made out of a latex glove)... We make a camel and take pictures of the children as a souvenir. We have a post office with post cards. The kids dictate a message and we mail them. Before the "trip", we make passports and during the celebration we stamp the sites with a message, "I milked a cow", "I made Orange Juice" to show those parents who couldn't come [to our celebrations]. We also plant trees.

Two other directors describe the event in the context of learning about a far away place where other Jewish children live, and where children speak Hebrew.

The week before, teachers start talking about Israel. We show children where it is on the globe, and some teachers have a map. We show them where NY is, where Israel is. They have a sense that you can't drive to Israel; you have to take a plane to get there. They start with the fact that Israel is very far away. Most of the children have already been on planes. Also, there are Israeli families in school. If there are Israelis in the class, that family will become a part of the celebration in some way. Maybe parents will come in and make food with the children... The teachers start reading books and stories about Israel so the children learn that there are people just like them living in Israel.

We start by learning that there is a place called Israel, the home for Jewish people, where Hebrew is spoken. It is very far away, across the world. We read books about Israel, show pictures. One of the Israeli teachers or parents may speak about growing up there.

Teaching Israel in early childhood vis-à-vis Tu B'shvat is not without difficulty in the New York area. Directors point out the “big problem” and question, “How do we even think about planting trees when it is five below in New York? It is a little sketchy in trying to help children to understand that”. Nevertheless, Israel is part of Tu B'shvat celebrations, whether “as a recognition that the seasons come at different times in Israel” or “to compare different types of fruits, vegetables, foods, and trees”.

Hebrew is another way in which Israel enters into the curriculum, though some interviewees hesitate before including Hebrew in their list. One director states that, “One other thing I have done, this isn't so Israel, but Hebrew...”, an interesting comment in light of the fact that all interviewees speak and understand Hebrew to some extent, and during interviews each connects Hebrew to their Israel experiences. Hebrew surfaces in a variety of ways and to differing extents in early childhood programs. Hebrew includes learning Israeli songs and conversational Hebrew in the classroom. The extent that Hebrew arises often depends on the teachers' level of comfort or discomfort with the language.

Preparing special foods for holidays and other occasions is a large part of the early childhood experience, and thus, it is a good place in which to make connections to various countries, including Israel. In one school the director describes making both *latkes* (potato pancakes) and *sufganiyot* (donuts) for Hanukah, explaining to the children that in Israel the children eat *sufganiyot* as part of the holiday. On Passover, the same school makes various types of *haroset* (a symbolic food eaten on Passover). “We have Israeli children, Persian children, Ashkenazi and Iraqi children... We ask the families, it depends on what [they] make, and that becomes a part of our multicultural celebration”. Connecting food to Israel also comes up when talking about food in other countries. In one program, there is an “Israel snack day” where parents are asked to send their child to school with an Israeli snack.

Reflecting the diversity and international flavor of New York, Jewish early childhood tends to include children and families from all over the world. Interviewees mention how Israel emerges when talking about people and children who come from different and often far away places. “We start with America and then we go to countries where people [in our school] have a connection, such as Venezuela, Australia, our bookkeeper is from Kenya”. As

noted earlier, most directors invite their Israeli parents or teachers to the classroom “to talk about their childhood or their experiences in Israel”.

Directors convey several other ways of engaging with Israel. In one school, all classes participate in *tzedakah* (charitable giving) projects, where half the money is collected on behalf of Israeli organizations and institutions. Children bring in *tzedakah* money towards their adopted charity or organization, and when enough money accumulates, it is sent to the organization. Directors also cite posters or maps of Israel displayed in the classrooms, singing Israeli or Hebrew songs, and relating stories about Israel to the children. They also mention the benefit of having Israeli teachers and assistants in the school. As one notes, “I think having Israelis in the classroom make it a palpable experience for the children. They will visit Israel periodically; all have accents and talk about visiting their families. So I think that is an important piece in itself. The kids are able to pick up that accent which is just wonderful”.

In contrast, directors detect that those teachers who lack knowledge or personal engagement with Israel (or with Jewish life), feel uncomfortable engaging with Israel. One director suggests that, “Teachers who are early childhood educators, who happen to be teaching in a Jewish school, seem to have the most difficulty bringing the feeling of Israel into the classroom. They can bring in the feeling of Judaism because they are Jewish, but it is difficult for them to bring in a feeling for Israel”. Another director notes that some teachers resist efforts to prioritize Israel in the school. To encourage less connected teachers, directors work with them on initiating Israel activities and teaching them about Israel so that they feel more comfortable and become less resistant to teaching Israel. One director describes that, “With those teachers, I have even brought in my own son [after he returned from his teen Israel program]. He came in with little artifacts from when he was in Israel and he brought Israel to them... I felt that I needed to bring in other people beside myself for them to realize what Israel is... because they haven't had the experiences themselves”. Another interviewee comments on how she single-handedly created an enormous Yom Ha'atzmaut celebration during the first year at her school, and only after it succeeded did her staff begin to actively plan subsequent celebrations with her.

Not all directors feel supported by synagogue rabbis or the institution in regards to Israel in their early childhood programs. The lack of institutional support ranges from passivity to refusal to contribute to professional development funding for the director's participation in IHM. Though some rabbis enter into the early childhood program of their synagogue, (usually to talk to the children about holidays or Torah stories), no one cites Israel among the topics the rabbis cover with the children. Some directors perceive the hands-off

approach to Israel as reflecting the institution or rabbi's connection to Israel, while others perceive it as reflecting the hands-off approach to the early childhood program in general.

4. Resources, Materials, and Professional Development opportunities concerning Israel

All directors point out the lack of age-appropriate books on Israel for the early childhood years when asked about available resources and materials for engaging with Israel. "I will tell you there are very very few books. If there were a handful of really good quality books with short text and a lot of pictures, story-time, quiet-time, the teachers would be happy to pick it up, but there is nothing out there for them". This is especially noteworthy in light of the fact that, "Books in early childhood are a springboard for everything". Directors also note that there are few educational materials available to help teachers devise concrete ways of teaching Israel.

Regarding professional development opportunities concerning Israel, both for themselves and also for teachers, directors mention conference sessions and workshops that occur at the BJE, NJECN, and at the early childhood conferences of CAJE. Names associated with these workshops include, Shira Ackerman Simchovitch, Lorraine Sandler from Toronto, and Tuvia Book. One director, whose teachers participated in Shira's workshop at the CAJE conference last year, notices qualitative differences in Israel engagement in the classroom between teachers who attended and those who did not. This director sets herself the goal of bringing more teachers to future workshops, admitting that Israel "is always on my mind", motivating her to encourage teachers to learn new ways for connecting with Israel.

Directors observe that when attending professional conferences, teachers tend to choose general workshops and sessions, such as those associated with developmental stages in early childhood, rather than specific topics such as Israel in the classroom.

5. Personal and professional motivations for participating in the IHM program

Interviewees report an assortment of personal and professional reasons for participating in the IHM program. Personal motivation is connected to the time lapse since the participant's last visit. Among interviewees who have not visited Israel for more than thirty years, the trip is one way for them to return and physically reconnect to Israel. One participant who has not been to Israel since 1970 states that, "Just the idea of going back to Israel, I feel I am out of touch. I think Israel needs visitors and I wanted to do it. It is an affordable trip, which has been a block in my mind... I am anxious to reconnect, help support the economy, and see my friends". Her colleague who has also not visited Israel in thirty years remarks that, "My

brother has lived there twenty-five years with his family... I have been thinking more about the sacrifices that people make, wondering what I would do if I ever made *aliyah*... It is pretty disgraceful that I haven't been in thirty years".

Among the other interviewees, one last visited Israel in 1998, and the other visited a year prior to the trip (and five times since 1990). The five-year visiting gap between directors is quite large when taking into account the ways in which each describes her motivations for participating. For the director who last visited in 1998, her personal motivation is to reignite her connection to Israel by learning more about Israel ("the more you know, the more connected you are"), by feeling inspired, and by making connections or reconnecting to people in Israel. The director who visited Israel in the year prior to the program expresses her love for coming to Israel ("just being in Israel is great"), and sees IHM as a unique mode to come again. "I haven't done it before. Usually I come on a family trip with site seeing attached. I thought I'd get a lot out of this trip, both professionally and personally". Perhaps because she has been several times in recent years, this respondent does not state a need to reconnect or feel inspired by Israel, and in fact, she mainly focuses on professional reasons for participating.

Regarding professional motivations and goals, directors convey their hope for gaining new ideas and age-appropriate means for bringing Israel into their schools, and for learning general and concrete ways for engaging with Israel in the classroom. While one directors hopes that the program will inspire her to push Israel more strongly with her teachers, another notes that, "I am not going with the thought that I am really looking to bring Israel into the program much more, but I just need help implementing it". Another talks about finding ways to instill feelings for Israel among the children and teachers. "The more I can learn about ways to instill the feelings into the children and the teachers, that is always a goal for me as an administrator. I have a strong feeling for Israel personally, but I guess I am not doing a great job of transmitting it, the feeling, especially to the teachers who have never been to Israel and who are not as connected Jewishly".

Directors express excitement about sharing the experience with colleagues. "I like the idea of going with a group of Jewish early childhood professionals for that extra piece to bring back to my program that I didn't know how to do or if it was overkill... Is there a way for me to integrate Israel, to integrate things that make sense that are beneficial for everyone"? Furthermore, the visits to preschools and the possibility of making professional connections to individuals and institutions also inspire directors to participate. "I will try to bridge early childhood programs there to here, and maybe make a pen pal, even with the

teachers, for ideas and for thoughts and for feelings, and some kind of creative project ... I hope they take us to a lot of schools throughout Israel... I think they are creative, I think they are way ahead of us in many ways in some of the materials they use, in some of the creative ways the teachers can operate".

6. Philosophy on teaching Israel in early childhood

Although all interviewees express strong personal connection to Israel, they represent a range of philosophical outlooks to teaching Israel in early childhood. While one director has no specific goals, the other three have specific goals for teaching and exposing the children to Israel, including two directors whose goals also incorporate teachers, the school, and/or the synagogue community. All four philosophic outlooks are included because of the variety espoused among them.

Teaching about Israel is not central. I spend more energy on how to teach about holidays and Jewish values and how to get people to feel connected to Judaism in general. I think Israel is very important in the Jewish world but I have mostly approached it through the one holiday that is approachable, but it has not been a separate aim of mine to specifically teach about Israel more than any other Jewish holiday or segment of the Jewish curriculum.

Children's exposure to what Israel is has to be very palpable, a hands-on kind of a thing because otherwise, children are not going to get it. I think it is important that they have the connection. One has to think of ways to make it very concrete. But I personally don't feel it should be *the* curriculum piece, period, the end. The curriculum has to be balanced.

I think children need to know what Israel is. It is a name to them; it is a word to them, especially if they have never been there. But it is a home for them as well, and a place that they can always go to, that there are other Jewish children there, Jewish families there, Jewish people there, and that it should be a strong connection in their lives with the anticipation and hope that some day they will go and visit Israel. I really feel that you can't have a strong feeling if you never go. And it is an incentive to strive to know more about the land, know more about the people, and then go and want to be part of it in some way, here and there. But I think it should start when children are really young.

I want teachers to teach Israel not only on Yom Ha'atzmaut. I found that most would only talk about Israel and what Israel is in May. My goal is to have them, in small ways, talk about Israel throughout the year.

It is never too early to plant the seed, to deal with ideas and concepts for making Israel not an abstract but a concrete. ... But there are so many other people that need to work with us. Because we [teach the] very young and only have them two or three hours a day. I think that the education has to come to the parents too. ... The leadership of temples and organizations has to make Israel [a priority]...

Even something as mundane as having a Yom Ha'atzmaut fair and eating falafel, it is very mundane, but that is something that the parents and children take home. When we have experiences for the children alone, if we don't write them up and send home and explain word for word, it doesn't go home. The kids don't talk so much and can't express their experiences... If together, early childhood, the religious school, adult education, and from the pulpit, if it is all shared as one unit, we can hope some of what we do in the early childhood program will get a bit more retention at home. And that is our goal. Here and home. I do believe in teaching young children [about Israel], but it has to be sustained as they get older – in Day School, Hebrew High School, etcetera.

7. Program Content

a. Pre-Israel Workshops

Pre-trip workshops included four two-hour learning sessions with the group's tour guide, and a fifth informational session led by the director of early childhood at the BJE. The goal of the pre-trip sessions was to "learn to love Israel" through an overriding theme centered on "making a difference". According to one participant, the guide's "whole theme was about how one person can make a difference. He talked before and during the [Israel] program about these heroes who were regular people who took a chance and stepped forward to say and do something and changed the course of history".

The first two workshops covered an overview of Jewish history in Palestine from ancient times to the founding of the State of Israel. The guide interspersed politics into the discussion, and the complexities of politics and history in the region. A third session centered on learning about places the group would visit while in Israel, centering on the excavations of the Southern Walls of the Old City in Jerusalem. The final session dealt with the theme of "heroes", focusing on several individuals, such as Yonatan Netanyahu, whose lives reflect what one person can do for a nation.

Interviewees describe pre-trip workshops as informational, interesting, and inspirational. Not all respondents think the sessions added to their experience in Israel, although most feel the sessions connected well to the latter half of the Israel program, noting the educational link between the pre-trip workshops and the trip. One respondent remarks that, "It was great to have the history thing before we went so we didn't have to review as much while we were there. He did review [when we visited a site], but it clicked in place, rather than having to absorb it all from scratch". Another director remarks on the importance of the emotional piece of the pre-trip workshops. "I think they wanted to build a very emotional as well as intellectual connection as to why we should be doing things. I think that the technique of going all the way back in history, why this is our land, and hearing it from a

vehement Zionist is very important because you become passionate about it, or at least absorb some of the passion he is trying to give you". Participants agree that the guide "is a great teacher in what he is was trying to teach us".

Participants also appreciate the opportunity provided by the workshops to refresh their knowledge of Jewish history, and to think about why history and particular places are important to them as individuals and as directors. In addition to the learning pieces, participants feel it is important to get to know one another before the trip. They enjoy the social aspect of the workshops, and also the chance to begin learning together before traveling as a group. Finally, participants agree on the value of the informational session because it gave them a chance to ask questions about the trip.

b. Written Materials

Participants received various written materials during the pre-trip workshops. They received a short source book (packet) from the tour guide, which includes quotes from the Torah, and writings or quotes of individuals such as Mark Twain, Dov Gruner and Alex Singer. They also received the guide's educational booklet, "For the Sake of Zion: Pride and Strength through Knowledge, An Educator's Guide". During the informational session, participants received the itinerary and a "participant's advisory packet" with information concerning what to pack, how to rent a cell phone in Israel, how to get around Israel, etc. Throughout the year, the BJE office sent the IHM participants articles from journals, such as *Biblical Archeology Review*, on historical sites or important figures connected to the story of the Jewish people. Finally, during the Israel trip, the group received another source book from the Jewish Agency's early childhood division, which included an article written by the division director, "Israel Education: A Journey that Begins in Early Childhood", information on pre-school education in Israel, and other material about places on the group's itinerary.

Responses to the written materials vary. Directors found the guide's educational booklet on Zionism less useful than the two source books. While some directors read throughout the Israel program, ("I found every night I read before we visited a place, or afterwards. I found that very helpful"), others did not ("It is in piles and part of my summer work is to catch up on them"). One director suggests that, "Probably the most valuable reading material would be something hands-on that I will be doing in the classroom", though she is not sure this information is in the readings she received.

c. The Israel Program

The Israel program included both personal and professional enrichment aspects. The Jewish Agency's early childhood director led the first half of the program, directly focusing on professional development, but also including programs less directly connected to early childhood, and sites intended for personal inspiration or enrichment. The tour guide led the second half of the Israel program. Less applicable to early childhood, he focused on historical and cultural pieces (discussed in pre-trip workshops) intended for personal inspiration.

In reflecting on professional aspects of the trip, participants hone in on visits to Israeli early childhood programs, commenting on two key facets. First, remarks center on the “eye-opening experiences” that deconstructed myths held about early childhood education in Israel. As one director notes, “A lot of people are quick to condemn simply because of the [student/teacher] ratios”. In fact, directors express their pleasant surprise at how large class sizes did not seem harmful to the children’s learning or the teachers’ ability to provide personal attention to children. Directors convey amazement at the children’s independence, competence, and ability to take responsibility for one another. They compare how the teachers in Israel leave the children to play together without adult supervision, whereas at their own schools, it is hard to leave more than two children engrossed in an activity without adult intervention. And finally, directors comment on the creativity they saw in the schools. One director is impressed with how teachers in one school turn the bomb shelter into a colorful and warm desert-scene. She describes the room, noting that the children use it as a place to learn Torah, “so that if they would ever need to go there in an emergency, they would feel comfortable in the space”.

Second, directors’ highlight specific happenings they hope to emulate in their own classrooms. Two directors emphasize the large map in one classroom, with lines drawn from Israel to each of the countries from which the children originate or visit. Both directors anticipate replicating the map idea because of the mobility and diversity of their student populations. One director notes the shelves where Jewish items from various holidays are kept and displayed throughout the year, even after the holiday is over.

Three interviewees feel the program did not include a sufficient number of visits to Israeli preschools. The director who participates in an exchange program with an Israeli *gan* wishes the group had visited her exchange school.

All directors refer to their hands-on experiences at Neot Kedumim, where they participated in a guided biblical walking tour through nature. They convey the professional value of the visit and its applicability to early childhood. One director notes that, “It was

much more hand-on and real. ...The idea seemed really good, just being there and just seeing that it doesn't look too difficult to make it happen that way. Neot Kedumim was a big thing for me". Another remarks on the value of learning *Tanach* through nature and her desire to try "some of those real hands-on experiences with nature. If we can bring that into the class...next year when we discuss the holidays, when we do Tu B'shvat, I will try to get my hands on great photos, posters of almond trees blooming, and if possible, a real branch".

For at least one director, the professional development aspects of the program functioned as an extension of her prior participation in workshops and seminars on the place of Israel in Jewish early childhood. For her, the professional experiences in Israel "extended all the prior knowledge that I had been teaching and it made it much more hands-on for me".

Although not directly linked to early childhood, participants convey the value of the latter half of the trip, emphasizing the importance of re-connecting to Jewish history. One director remarks that, "It was just good to learn Jewish things again, not just for my job, but for myself", and another suggests that, "On a personal level, this is our own professional development. And even if you don't use it for school, it is a personal development... There are many things I know I learned and...studied before. But it is just important for me as a person to...refresh it...and move it up towards the front burner".

In addition to professional development and knowledge acquisition, interviewees reflect on the personal aspects of the trip. All interviewees discuss the profound spiritual and emotional impact of being in Israel. Those who had not visited Israel in thirty years also indicate an increased commitment or renewed connection to the country and to friends and family residing in Israel. Several participants feel "inspired by the people" and impressed with how Israelis live their lives in the midst of the current security situation. Acknowledging their outdoor disposition, some directors reflect on activities that provide a means to hike and enjoy nature. Specifically, they cite the walk in Neot Kedumim, the walk and meditation session in Ein Gedi, and their enthusiasm for being in Israel when everything is green and flowers are blooming. Finally, directors express satisfaction with experiencing Israel with colleagues and new friends.

Overall, participants express a high level of satisfaction with the Israel program, with different sections appealing to each director. In the words of one director, "I think the trip was brilliantly designed. I think it was physically, emotionally, spiritually, and owing to the fact that everybody has something different that moves them ...I think it really catered to everybody on some level, to others on different levels. It was well organized".

Although participants express general satisfaction with the program, all interviewees mention a point of contention occurring during the Israel program, with each director responding differently to the tension. Just as the directors of the early childhood divisions of the Jewish Agency and the BJE differ in opinion about the ideal weight given to each goal of the Israel program, so too do IHM participants. While some directors express satisfaction with the number of professional experiences, others feel the number of professional opportunities was insufficient. Supporting the New York director's opinion, one interviewee believes that, "Her goal was more important. The motivation was more important than how exactly are you going to do something because you can always figure out how you are going to do it if the motivation is enough. And therefore the attitude was more important". In contrast, another director relates that, "Israel was already in my heart and my mind so I didn't need that piece... I would have liked more of what we had [in the first half of the trip] to continue for the rest of the trip, on a professional level". This interviewee supports both the opinion and professional asset of the Israel director. "I really feel that she was not allowed to provide the extent of her early childhood knowledge to this group. That to me was very unfortunate, personally, professionally". This interviewee also feels that the lack of contact with a group of British early childhood educators (who were also on a professional development program in Israel) was a "missed opportunity" for the group.

d. Post-Israel Workshops

The first post-trip workshop, led by the director of early childhood at the BJE, served as a group evaluation of the Israel program. The session included a discussion and comparing notes about "what aspects were important to the program, what should have been done differently and ...what else could be included". The evaluation helped participants understand that "anything extra that was added meant something would have to be taken away". Most respondents feel the session was "necessary and helpful", though at least one director expresses dissatisfaction because the group did not discuss the low the level of professional development offered by the program.

The proceeding workshops, led by the group's tour guide, related to Israeli art. The first session "was an art thing where he introduced something and showed us lots of slides. Exactly what it was, I am not sure, but I enjoyed it and I enjoyed the cultural part of it". None of the interviewees can pinpoint what they learned, though all agree that the discussion was interesting and engaging. For the final session, the group met at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City to view an exhibition on ancient ruins in the Middle East art gallery.

Reactions to post-trip workshops vary. On one hand, some directors wanted more time reflecting on the Israel program and how to practically incorporate particular aspects into their early childhood programs. One director remarks that, "[The sessions] could have been done differently. The idea of introducing new topics, while it is always good to learn...and learning about Israel is exciting and meaningful, ...I think specifically because these are suppose to be post-sessions for the trip, I think they could have spent more time with a leader of the discussion that would have helped us really focus what we got out of [the trip] and how we are going to use it. That really didn't happen". On the other hand, directors enjoyed learning new things and feel that "if I get one idea out of a session, or a germ of an idea out of a session, then I have gotten something out of it." And in fact, the post-sessions had practical value for some directors. One conveys that, "Talking about Israeli art resonated greatly with me... We do an art fair every year in which we take many pieces of art the children have done... Personally for me, that arts thing and going to the museum was important because I know that I am going to integrate that somehow into my art fair... We are going to choose five to six Israeli artists and work in their style and display [the children's] artwork".

At the end of the final session, the group decided to continue meeting. In the words of one director, "I don't know if this is the 'Ya-Ya Sisterhood' or whatever, but we just don't want to let it go!" Enjoying being with each other is one reason the group will continue meeting. In addition, they express a desire to keep learning together, and a need to find ways of applying what they learned to the early childhood arena. One director feels motivated to continue with the group because, "I enjoyed immensely the classes. I enjoyed the camaraderie. I enjoyed hearing other people's ideas and listening to their experiences... We still have a piece of [the program] that we have not finished, which is, how do we maximize the experience and what is the optimal level that we can bring...into the classroom"? Although she intends to continue with the group, another director expresses skepticism regarding future sessions and the group's ability to focus on professional dimensions and practical applications. Her doubt reflects both a frustration at the pace in which the group functions, and also an uncertainty about the goals for future sessions.

8. The future of Israel in early childhood programs among IHM participants

In reflecting after the program on changes in their overall philosophy for teaching or celebrating Israel in Jewish early childhood, directors agree that their philosophy has been strengthened or intensified. Though their thinking has not changed dramatically, they feel a

stronger commitment to making sure the place of Israel in early childhood exists in a real and profound way, and they are prepared to make this happen. Capturing the sentiments of many, one director conveys that, “I would have to say yes, it has changed from wherever it was only because I am more aware of the different ways that we can teach Israel and talk about Israel in the classroom. I am also feeling much more empowered to...even say to the teachers, ‘we need to do more’. And when they say ‘how’, I know how or I can come up with creating and adding to the how, but at least there is a base from which I can work”.

Directors agree that the program in Israel increased their personal inspiration and enthusiasm for pushing Israel in their schools, and also for encouraging others to visit Israel. One director notes that being in Israel, “drove home what I guess I knew all along but never really was that adamant with my staff and myself about – in bringing Israel more and more into the classroom”. Another feels “more secure touting that type of involvement to other people having recently been there myself. It is hard to convince people in a deep honest way that they should have more connection or go on this program when we ourselves have not [gone to Israel] for many years”. Directors also agree that the professional development aspects of the program increased their confidence in promoting Israel in their schools. One director remarks that, “Now I can go back and do some of the things I have been learning about and feel much more confident doing it”.

Directors describe a variety of ways they intend to advance engagement with Israel in their schools. First and foremost, they aim to strengthen what is already being done vis-à-vis Israel in their programs. Several directors intend to increase the amount of Hebrew words spoken in classrooms, and to increase the extent to which they personally enter classrooms to tell stories and show pictures about Israel. One director hopes to extend her exchange program to include younger children. She believes a “real connection with children” is the best way to help children concretely understand happenings in a far away place. Another wants to extend the tzedekah project in her school to include more Israeli organizations, and to extend the arts program to include more Israeli artists and art styles. One director, who is in the process changing schools, is unsure what she will do in her new school, though she is committed to bringing Israel into the program “in some way”.

Inasmuch as directors express increased levels of energy and confidence for bringing Israel into their early childhood programs, and inasmuch as the directors describe specific ways in which they hope to further integrate Israel into their programs, few directors implemented change upon their return from Israel. (Though it is perhaps unreasonable to assume that directors would have the opportunity to implement change immediately upon

their return, rather than in the forthcoming school year.) The few exceptions include an increase in posters and maps of Israel in the classrooms, and an increase in storytelling by the director. In at least two schools, directors spend time sharing stories from their trip with teachers, with one director increasing time spent with the children, showing photographs and telling them stories about her trip. This director tells a story of how several children in her program took a family trip to Israel during Passover, and similar to her own storytelling, they share their stories with her and the other children when they return.

As a result of engaging with teachers and children upon returning from Israel, and as a result of teachers' interest and request for help in implementing more Israel-related activities, one director sets herself the task of designing a curriculum for the upcoming school year. She explains that, "[My teachers asked,] 'why don't you write up a curriculum and why don't you teach it to us during staff orientation in September and let's do something different next year?' So that's how it started, and I agreed. I agreed that if they haven't been to Israel, they *do* need to be taught much more specifically about what it is I want to teach them, and I am going to have to do it. That was the realization I came to". The collective decision among the staff is to focus on four-year-olds, "using the seven species throughout the year in the teaching of Israel". The director refers to her personal experiences at Neot Kedumim, and bringing in the theme in a "much more hands-on ways". She intends to involve the four-year-old staff in the process, rather than taking on full responsibility for designing a curriculum herself. As she conveys, "My goal, if we only do it as a four-year-old team, is that there would be team meetings the week before and that we work together to create it. My goal is not to create the whole thing by myself and just give it to them. I want them to be part of the process, to start thinking about it and to do the research". The director also intends to involve the rabbis of the synagogue in teaching the teachers, especially around the holidays.

Although directors express excitement and intention to implement change in the upcoming school year, all seek further engagement in discourse on *how to* practically integrate new ideas into their schools and classrooms. They call for age-appropriate Israel activities for the youngsters, and ways for creating "gut emotional" feelings for Israel among their teachers and the children. In addition, directors request more educational materials involving Israel, such as posters, pictures, and books. Finally, directors continue to look for ways to increase teachers' involvement with Israel, and ideally, to bring teachers on professional development programs in Israel.

Recommendations and Conclusion

The first year of research and evaluation on the IHM project indicates that the level of engagement with Israel among directors who participated in IHM is higher than the general population of directors of Jewish early childhood programs. Even though two participants had not visited for over 30 years prior to the program, all visited Israel at least once in their lives, and all indicate strong feelings of connection to Israel. A group with such a high level of commitment functions as a useful pilot group, providing the opportunity to focus directly on issues related to *increasing* knowledge about Israel and *improving* the place of Israel in early childhood programs (rather than beginning these tasks on an elementary level). However, if the intention is to make Israel more central to Jewish early childhood in general, then future IHM groups will need to incorporate a more diverse population, attracting non-visitors and those less engaged with Israel in their early childhood programs.

Interview data suggests that in order to satisfy the needs of a diverse group of early childhood educators, it may be necessary to run different tracks of the IHM program. Even among directors who are more engaged than the general survey population, there are still a variety of motivations and goals for participating in the program. While some directors (especially those who have not visited Israel in over a decade) seek a program that touches on Israel in their hearts and minds, others seek a program that primarily concentrates on professional development concerning Israel. The latter group prefers to focus on practical ways of increasing the level of Israel engagement in their schools, and thus, while the pilot group's itinerary may be satisfactory for the first group, the latter group needs an itinerary that includes more visits to Israeli pre-school visits, discussions about practical applicability, and other professional opportunities while in Israel.

Survey data indicate that a large gap exists between the number of directors who participate in professional development regarding Israel, and the number who express an interest in doing so. One reason may be financial. Although many schools and synagogues have funds available for educators to participate in workshops, conferences and other professional development opportunities, these funds are generally not sufficient to cover costs of programs that include a trip to Israel (even a subsidized program). Furthermore, the funds are not necessarily at the director's discretion. In some cases, synagogue administrators choose what the funds can and cannot be used towards. Thus, if the IHM program intends to attract a large number of teachers and directors, it is essential to increase the financial support to those who want to participate. For those less likely to express interest, it may be helpful to offer some type of incentive for participation.

Interviewees indicate that there are not enough educational materials about Israel available for the early childhood years. Directors seek books about Israel to read to the children, Israeli posters to hang in their classrooms, and help in finding ways of translating Israel into age-appropriate and hands-on classroom activities. Thus, the number of seminars and workshops focusing specifically on practical applications of Israel in the classroom ought to increase in the coming years. Such high quality local programs will act as a first step in encouraging directors and teachers to participate in professional development programs in Israel. Since many teachers do not choose to attend practical seminars at professional conferences, it may be necessary to arrange workshops outside of conferences. It may also be helpful to bring experts on Israel in the early childhood years into individual schools to work with the staff on creating activities and curriculums that increase the level of Israel engagement in the school. And finally, it may be worth commissioning a writer of children's storybooks to write a series on Israel, which may include how Jewish holidays are celebrated in Israel, what children do in Israel, the different seasons and weather in Israel, among other things.

Overall, the first year of IHM ended successfully and provided a useful lens for viewing the place of Israel in the lives and schools of directors of Jewish early childhood programs. During the coming year, we will widen our research to include teachers in Jewish early childhood programs. We intend to survey a wide array of teachers, and to follow a small group of directors and teachers from the same institution that participate in the IHM program together. We hope to discover what can happen when educators from one institution participate together in professional development concerning Israel.