

THE GAN

Early Childhood @ Adas

Connect, Thrive, Learn, and Grow. Together.



We've loved seeing you all recently! Our recent evening workshops on Child Behavior (watch recording [here](#)) and Learning & Curriculum (watch recording [here](#)) were wonderful chances to dive into these topics together with our parents, and Shabbat Sing and this week's Purim parade were wonderful chances to celebrate together in person. Join us for our next parent opportunity:

March 29, 7:00pm, in-person at Adas: Anti-racism at Adas and the Gan. Join Rabbis Holtzblatt and Alexander as they share about Adas Israel's anti-racist journey, highlighting the Jewish elements of this work as well as ongoing projects in the synagogue. I will then bring this narrative into our preschool work, discussing parent-staff interactions and school structure. We will also open up examples of pedagogy and curriculum in our classrooms that address this work. [RSVP here](#).

But before then!

There were two questions asked by parents during last week's Learning & Curriculum that I wanted to highlight:

When you say, "free play", what exactly does that mean?

Free play serves as the cornerstone of your child's day with us at the Gan and is where the bulk of their learning and development is occurring during their time with us. All our classrooms have free play for at least one hour every day, ideally in one long uninterrupted stretch. Breaking down the name yields precisely what is happening: children are engaged in play and are free to move around the room and use whichever materials they see fit in whichever social groupings work for them.

However, what sets apart our free play from a more casual, "run along and play now", is the deeply intentional and curative work of the teacher. This is a "tushy-down" portion of the day, as I'm often remarking to our teachers. Teachers use the daily Morning Meeting to set up the play – to read back to children observations they made during their play yesterday, share inspirations (books, new materials, etc) to push their play and ideas along, and provide a forum in which children can discuss and dialogue about their ideas for free play that day. Morning Meeting typically dismisses into Free Play, during which teachers are actively curating the physical and social environment – moving materials around the room fluidly to make sure each child has the right challenge and tool for their play, subtly affecting peer movement to ensure productive peer groupings, embedding age-appropriate developmental opportunities in play schemes (you can review here our [Developmental Framework](#), which guides this work), and, most importantly, engaging in the actual play with the child. It is through this close, fine-grained observation of the child, and direct involvement in their work, that free play is elevated to an intentional educational arena. This has been called "purposeful play" by Bank Street College's president, an apt phrase for what happens in our classroom (check out his op-ed here for a deeper review of free play than I am offering [here](#)).

Do you talk to teachers about this stuff, about learning and curriculum?

Yes! New this year in the Gan, we have added two weekly one-hour meetings for each teaching team. One meeting is the teaching team planning out the upcoming week and the other is a supervision meeting with myself or Darci. I meet with all Lower Level classrooms; Darci meets with all Ground Floor classrooms. In between each meeting, we make time to join and observe each classroom so that our feedback during those meetings is live and current. Each week we focus on pedagogy (the “how” of teaching) and curriculum (the “what” of teaching) and support our teachers in these areas. Further, we use our Professional Development time (like yesterday at 4pm – you can see what we were up to [here!](#)) throughout the year to push and challenge our staff in these areas. We also have a week and a half of Professional Development annually before the first day of school in which much of our time is devoted to these topics. We often also partner with a pedagogical coach or external consultant to offer a fresh perspective on our classroom. This year we are pleased to be working with [Tanya Morgan](#), who has spent several days with our teaching teams this year reviewing elements of Reggio-inspired pedagogy.

In the end, these two questions converge on each other – a massive amount of our professional development and supervision is spent on free play, as we know that is where the bulk of learning is happening throughout the day. Take a look at the recording from last week’s workshop for more or reach out directly – I am always (always!) happy to review these types of topics.

Shabbat shalom,
Noah

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