



Beth Emeth Early Childhood Center

Robin Cohen, Director (robin@bethemeth.org)

OUR EXCITING NEWS ...

How many languages do you speak? Wouldn't it be amazing if you could speak hundreds of languages? Think of how much that would stimulate your brain. Think of how many ways you could express yourself. Believe it or not, here at BEECC we believe children do have hundreds of languages – hundreds of ways of expressing themselves – and if we set up our environment to foster these languages and “listen” closely enough, we have the privilege of understanding their perspectives, what they are thinking and how they are constructing knowledge. “The Hundred Languages” is a key principle of the Reggio-inspired approach founded by Loris Malaguzzi – a metaphor for the extraordinary potentials of children, emphasizing the importance of providing children with 100 ways to share their thinking of the world around them.

The schools in Reggio Emilia have a space called the *atelier* (studio) and an *atelierista*, a teacher with an arts background, who support the many languages. The atelier thus becomes a place of research and creation to include clay, wire, fabric, paint, and natural materials as well as other forms of expression like, dance, music, and movement. The exciting news I have been wanting to share with you since July is that after much consultation and research, BEECC now has an atelier designed by our atelierista, Morah Kat. Whether it be with small groups in the atelier or working alongside children and teachers in the classrooms, Morah Kat introduces materials, concepts and mediums that allow children to explore their wonder and curiosities, test their theories, and express their ideas and interests.

At our back to school night last month, Morah Kat engaged parents in an activity similar to the way she will work with the children. Families were each given felt squares on which they assembled pieces of fabric to express a narrative- to tell a bit of their family story. What is your family about? What is the essence of your family? How can you use the language of fabric to tell what gives your family joy? What connects/bonds you to one another? Parents had an opportunity to experience first-hand what it feels like to use another language as a form of expression, enjoying the social, emotional, and intellectual benefits in the process. Morah Kat also led a follow-up workshop for parents that were unable to attend back to school night to work on their square. I was delighted when one parent began sharing her sentiments with me as she was mid-process and had an “ah-ha” moment where the intention of what we do came to life for her. I grabbed my pencil and captured as much of her thinking as I could as she spoke so passionately from her heart. I listened intently and watched her whole body light up as her understanding unfolded in front of my eyes. It was so genuine and pure that I couldn't have said it better myself:

“You see that piece of fabric, and it appears plain or ordinary – but then you realize, it's not about the whole fabric, it's about one little piece and where it can take you, and where it can take someone else. . . suddenly your heart and mind are in a quiet moment and the materials start giving you meaning. One

little piece of fabric can speak to you – it took me deep in my heart. The children can do anything to express what is in their mind or heart. They will understand how to put things together to express themselves with freedom . . . from nothing being there to creating something. They can let themselves go deep into an adventure. . . using their hands and minds to go into their world and start inventing. It's up to us to place value on this process . . .”



Back-to-School night

I can't help but think how fitting it is that we are beginning this month celebrating Simchat Torah. As we begin the Torah anew, we are reminded how we devote our life to the study and teachings of the Torah and soak up its wisdom year after year, as individuals and as a community. As teachers at BEECC we devote our time to the study and teachings of our children and soak up their wisdom as we discover how they make sense of the world, bringing it to their awareness both as individuals and as a community. The Torah remains a constant as does our image of the child as competent and capable, yet by intentionally going deeper, we can always learn new interpretations and gain new perspectives from them.

Just as the Rabbi works hard to bring the stories in the Torah to life, so too do we strive to bring the children's “learning narratives” to life. Having an atelier and atelierista will elevate the level of learning for teachers, children, and parents alike, and the relationships we all build together. Our learning journey continues . . . stay tuned..

-- Robin