



## Beth Emeth Early Childhood Center

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### LOOKING BEYOND THE MASKS . . .

What is the first thing that comes to mind when you think of Purim? Personally, I think wearing costumes and eating hamentashen are pretty neck and neck (with the Megillah close behind), but for today's purposes I would like to focus on wearing costumes! This concept of things being hidden or masked touches home for me in a metaphorical sense as I reflect upon our preschool. Simply stated, I feel a child's precious process of feeling, thinking, and experimenting is often masked by things such as a final product or tangible outcome. Making an effort to discover what's hidden under the mask allows us to understand, learn about and appreciate on a deeper level what's behind it. This is the reason that BEECC we do our best to capture the processes children go through as they play and create. This in turn helps us to learn and grow as educators.

At our last faculty meeting, the staff engaged in a rich dialogue prompted by some documentation one of our Bet (two-year-old) teachers displayed. She took a set of photos that captured the process one of her children went through as he painted. She had noticed that this child spent a lot of time at the easel painting and tended to do a lot of "layering" often culminating in a big blobby like mush of colors at the end. She felt that the end product didn't do justice to the process that he took to get there – so was inspired to take snapshots along the way as he painted one morning to document his process. It's titled: "What's in a Painting? The creative process, in the most fascinating way." Had this Morah not taken the time to document this process, this valuable treasure would have been masked by the painting!

Our stimulating discussion allowed us as educators to reflect on our practice as we contemplated some provocative questions: what do we notice about his process? What does it teach us about him? What do we do with this information? We could have deliberated all day – but one thing that we had no question about was that giving children the opportunity and time to engage in a process, to experience a sense of curiosity and wonderment, and to live

in the moment, and furthermore bringing it to life for them and others to see, is a gift for everyone. Most importantly, what an amazing message it sends to our young children that we value them and honor the things they do as being important. Ideally, intentionally encouraging them to recognize and respect the layers within themselves will help build their self-awareness and confidence allowing them later on in life to not feel like hiding their true selves behind a mask.

I recently read: "The custom of wearing costumes on Purim is an allusion to the nature of the Purim miracle, where the details of the story are really miracles hidden within natural events." I especially love the latter half of that quote when viewed from a pedagogical lens. The details of a child's story (intrinsic in his/her process) are really miracles hidden within natural events (his/her play). It is our role, and privilege, to look beyond the proverbial masks to uncover their story and the hidden gems that hide within it.

Whether it be at the reading of the Megillah, the Purim carnival, or just thinking about Purim, I hope you take a moment to ponder the story behind the costumes everyone is wearing, and how it can help you to learn, grow, and self-reflect as a person and as a Jew.

*--Robin*



A young artist and his creation