

Journal of Jewish Early Childhood Education

Vol. 1 No. 1 | 2026

Aligning Slow Pedagogies with Early Childhood Jewish Education

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This article is part of the inaugural issue of the Journal of Jewish Early Childhood Education.

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Introduction

In this policy paper, we address two of the many pedagogical approaches found within the realm of Early Childhood Education (ECE). We consider ideas upon which Slow Pedagogy (SP) and Early Childhood Jewish Education (ECJE) are based and explore the compatibility of these approaches. We begin this discussion with an introduction to SP as put forth by Alison Clarke in her seminal book *Slow Knowledge and the Unhurried Child* (2022). We continue with a broad overview of ECJE identifying the focus on the holiday cycle as a common thread in the multiple models and traditions. We suggest the possibility of addressing the broad spectrum of ECJE models by focusing on adherence to the holiday cycle as an organizing principle. We follow with an exploration of the values underlying SP and the commonalities found in the various ECJE models. The central pillar of this policy paper is the section comparing SP and the holiday driven ECJE curricula, revealing areas of potential conflict. In conclusion, we suggest resolutions of the discrepancies enabling policy alignment between the two pedagogies.

Slow Pedagogy

Like other progressive philosophies in ECE, SP is a child-centered educational approach advocating meaningful learning, driven by the child's curiosity, passion, and interest. It strives to offer children deep experiences while respecting their natural pace of development and learning. SP focuses on the depth of experience and not the quantity of outcomes or speed of progress. Thus, time to explore, create and question characterizes the learning approach, which grows out of Froebelian philosophy (Froebel.org.uk). Furthermore, it endeavors to create a learning environment where children are truly seen, heard, and supported as they develop and learn. As such, SP reflects a universal framework for teaching and learning, as educational experiences are accessible and engaging for all students, regardless of their background, culture, learning style, or abilities.

SP is unique in its emphasis on and close examination of the role of time in young children's experiences in Early Childhood settings. Clarke (2022) views time as an expansive resource, enabling deeper relationships, richer learning, and greater responsiveness to

children's needs and interests. Furthermore, Clarke (2022, 2023) asserts that time is not often explicit in discussions about working with young children, but it is fundamental to how young children and educators experience everyday lives in ECE. Other seminal learning approaches also relate to time as an important element in the EC curriculum. Malaguzzi (1996), the pedagogue who developed the Reggio Emilia approach insisted on providing children with adequate uninterrupted time to explore topics of interest. He stressed patience and perseverance as guiding educational values. Helm and Katz (2001) developed Project Based Learning, claiming that in ECE learning is maximized by shifting activities from short segments to extended periods allowing children to investigate their own questions about the here and now. In Israel Gideon Levine (1989) introduced the reorganization of the kindergarten day with the notion of "flow time", which opens the entire day for children's unrestricted choice of activity.

Clarke's (2022) study of "stretched time" or non-fragmented time periods in the EC classroom reframes time as an educational asset. By allowing children to stretch moments of everyday life, educators create pathways for richer learning, relational depth, and genuine childhood experiences. Additionally, this conception of time is an intentional shift away from the hurried, well-organized rhythms that frequently dominate early childhood education (ECE).

In her book on the topic of SP, Clarke (2022) coined phrases reflecting and expressing her rethinking of time in ECE. The concept of "being with" is considered the essence of slow pedagogy. It goes beyond simply spending time together; it involves adapting to the rhythms and paces of children, adults, and the environment, emphasizing the significant concepts of listening and lingering. "Diving deep" refers to creating the conditions for children to conduct extended, in-depth exploration with materials, ideas, or environments. SP views detours and surprises as opportunities for experimentation and discovery of the unexpected and the unknown. In line with this, SP encourages children to "go off track."

According to Clarke (2022) when the educator is able to "hold onto the longer view" they honor the integrity of the learning process and the wholeness of the child—trusting that growth will come, but not always on a schedule. Indeed, holding onto the longer view means prioritizing long-term growth and well-being over immediate results or measurable outputs. (Clarke, 202, pp. 37–51).

In sum, Clarke's model illustrates how time itself becomes a pedagogical tool enabling child agency, authentic relationships and the capacity to be truly present with children, focusing on the current moment rather than always pushing toward a specific outcome. (Clarke, 2022).

Early Childhood Jewish Education

Early Childhood Jewish Education (ECJE) can be found wherever Jewish communities exist around the world. Educators in the field usually have clearly defined goals for their programs; yet, despite the autonomy of each program, there is remarkable consensus about the nature and purposes of this educational approach. Because the programs in Israel and in the diaspora are well articulated and documented, this description of ECJE will rely heavily on theory and practice in those parts of the world. While in Israel Jewish preschools and kindergartens are part of the public school system, in the diaspora they are typically under the aegis of private and not-for-profit organizations, such as day schools, synagogues, or Jewish community centers.

In Israel, preschools were opened at the end of the 19th century, long before the founding of the state. The original purpose of these pioneering endeavors to establish ECJE in Israel was to teach Hebrew to a linguistically diverse population, and later to instill in young children a national identity in the newly formed nation (Brody, 2023). In formulating this new identity, early childhood educators built on the rich traditions of the annual holiday cycle as a central feature of the curriculum, and this emphasis has remained until today (Brody, 2018). Thus, time becomes a core organizing principle for ECJE. Over the school year, there is at least one Jewish holiday in almost every month. Teaching about the holidays and preparing the children for home and synagogue experiences related to the holidays, has become a central focus of the national early childhood (EC) curriculum, both in the state religious, as well as the state secular schools in Israel (Aram & Ziv, 2018).

In a similar manner to the Israel ECJE model, American and British educators in the field have largely based their curriculum on the holiday cycle. As stated by Vogelstein et al. (2022, p.31) "For most programs, whether synagogue-affiliated or not, the curriculum was oriented around the Jewish calendar." This focus is echoed on the website of the Lauder Javne School in Budapest: "Our mission is to pass on Jewish holidays and traditions, to transmit Jewish culture, and to organize and celebrate family and kindergarten holidays together." (https://www.lauder.hu/index_en.html#oktatas/ovoda). Throughout the diaspora,

this holiday focus is reflected in professional handbooks for teachers. The commonly used handbook in the USA, *Jewish Every Day* (Handelman, 2000) dedicates 150 out of 324 pages to the holiday cycle. In this book, Handelman has created a curriculum web for each holiday that integrates holiday themes with language, science, math, art, music and movement, and explicates these themes developmentally for children of different ages. A similar handbook published for British ECJE practitioners integrates all content categories such as books, outdoor play, math, and storytelling with the holiday cycle (Caller and Hass, 2010).

It should be noted that in addition to the monthly holiday curriculum, there is a weekly time cycle around the Sabbath, (Shabbat, in Hebrew). Thus, the preschool and kindergarten week is punctuated with a Shabbat celebration each Friday, in anticipation of the family celebration on Friday night and Saturday, and this takes place in secular as well as religious preschool and kindergarten classrooms both in Israel and the USA (Handelman, 2000, pp. 105-130).

In conclusion, we can infer from these didactic materials as well as more scholarly treatments of ECJE in Israel and the diaspora that holiday teaching, preparation and celebration engage both educators and children throughout the year, both in terms of activities, classroom environment, and home-school communications around these topics.

Value Underpinnings

Both SP and ECJE are grounded on sets of values guiding their educational approach. Before delving into those value underpinnings in the ensuing sections, we will first explore the definition of values in broader educational settings and then examine values in ECEC. In his influential book entitled *Values in Education and Education in Values*, Halstead (2005) suggests that values are critical for theory and practice in education. Furthermore, he offers the following definition of values: “principles, fundamental convictions, ideals, standards or life stances which act as general guides to behaviour or as points of reference in decision-making for the evaluation of beliefs or action” (p. 5). This overall perspective on values serves as a basis to understand the significance of values in ECE. Attention to values in ECEC largely focuses on the principles put forth by Froebel two centuries ago and are widely accepted as the theoretical basis of educational work with young children. Among others, Froebel emphasized the following values: play as the foundation of learning, the value of childhood, as well as relationships and community (Bruce, 2021). Murray (2018) advocates that ECEC educators should engage with and use those values as a basis for their

work. Exploring separately the values of SP and those of ECJE creates a framework for comparing the two approaches, as well as searching for points of conflict and agreement.

The ideas of the universal and the particularistic are parsimonious tools for distinguishing between the sets of values used by SP and ECJE. A universal approach frames rules and principles that are coherent and objective and have the ability to transcend spatiotemporal dimensions. The particularistic approach addresses a particular cultural or spatial context contingent on times, people, and places. This approach frames norms appropriate to the context (Singh & Parihar, 2021).

In our investigation of SP and ECJE, we suggest that SP embraces a universal discourse while the emphasis on Jewish culture in ECJE emphasizes a particularistic perspective. Chung's (1999) insightfully states that: "Education is seldom neutral and generally takes cognizance of the hegemonic worldview in a country, both in its curricular content and in the relationships and processes that characterize its schools." Gor-Ziv (2016) expands on this lack of neutrality by examining the conflict between the universal and the particularistic in her analysis of holiday teaching in Israel's schools. She claims that particularistic Zionist values such as heroism dominate the holiday discourse, in an attempt to emphasize the particularistic needs of the society over more universal discourses such as feminism.

In light of the suggestion that SP is based on universal values whilst ECJE is founded on particularistic values, we now expand on this distinction in the ensuing sections. First, we address the values underlying SP and then those of ECJE.

Values in Slow Pedagogy

Based on universal values, SP promotes a child-centered, and process-oriented approach to teaching and learning. At the core of SP is a deep respect for child agency—the belief that children are capable, curious, and active participants in their own learning. As Froebelian philosophy (Tovey, 2020) suggests, young children are given time and space to develop their ideas, while educators offer support and encouragement, extending learning through dialogue, accommodation and reflection. John Dewey's concept of democratic education was based on empowering children with agency by encouraging children to make their own choices (Beatty, 2017). Child agency was also important to Piaget, who stressed the importance of children's active interaction with the world as a means of constructing

knowledge (Walsh, 2024). Following these fundamental theorists of early childhood development, Clarke (2022) supported nurturing children's sense of agency in their learning as well as empowering them to become active participants in their own educational growth. In fact, SP enhances children's agency by creating a learning climate and culture grounded in the choices, interests, and voices of the children. They exercise choice and control at their level of ability over aspects such as duration, pace, and location of activity. Moreover, SP allows children's curiosity to be seen and extended by adults. Conducive to this environment, educators become attentive, responsive partners in the children's learning rather than directors of the learning process.

Based on the Froebelian value of freedom with guidance, SP educators offer real life experiences to the children as well as observing and listening to them carefully. Indeed, educators act as guides, facilitators, and co-learners. Their relationship with the children is characterized by mutual respect, trust, and emotional connection. Additionally, they provide scaffolding, encouragement, and thoughtful provocation to extend children's thinking (Clarke, 2022). This value echoes Froebel's search for "a balance between freedom for children to explore and structured adult support, creating environments where children can pursue interests safely while being gently guided toward learning goals."

(<https://www.Froebel.org.uk>)

Additionally, SP challenges the prevalent culture of acceleration and outcome-driven schooling. Instead of constantly preparing young children for the next stage in their formal education, resisting the pressures of standardized outcomes and rigid timetables, SP appreciates the contribution of the here and now to the learning experience. Recognizing early childhood as a distinct and valuable period in its own right, SP creates opportunities for experimentation, creativity, and exploration. This freedom to innovate emphasizes valuing process over product along with welcoming the emergence of new ideas benefiting both children and practitioners (McNair et al., 2023).

Time is an important driver of pedagogy and often overlooked in the active atmosphere of an early childhood center (Farquhar, 2016). SP urges educators to consider time in early childhood education as an active, vital resource shaping the quality and depth of children's creative and relational experiences. Accordingly, creating an environment in which children know they have plenty of time in order to become fully immersed in activities is valued. In other words, this sense of timelessness allows children to experiment, make

mistakes, revisit ideas, and transform materials in novel ways. In reality, it enables children to get ‘lost in time’ often entering a “flow state” (Alameda et al., 2022) where their imagination and problem-solving abilities flourish (Clarke, 2022; McNair et al., 2023). To put it succinctly, the SP approach argues that by protecting and valuing time for play, exploration, and connection, educators and families provide the fertile ground necessary for significant learning and meaningful relationships to take root and flourish benefiting both the child and adult. Having delineated the underlying values of SP, we now turn to values in ECJE.

Values in ECJE

Teaching young children has been a hallowed tradition of the Jewish people since the Rabbinic Period two thousand years ago (Safrai, 1968; Hezser, 2010). Dasberg (2010) has documented how in more recent times, the community has shared the responsibility of helping parents socialize their children into Jewish peoplehood. This desire to socialize young children into Jewish traditions is based on core values widely held by Jewish parents and community stakeholders. Identifying the values that underlie the educational programs in ECJE is context specific. There is a lack of unanimity between the rationales written for ECJE programs in the Diaspora and for those within Israel, and even in Israel there are differences between the curricula of the religious and the secular sectors. This patchwork of values will be described below.

In the Diaspora, there is a conflation of educational and instrumental goals delineated by various stakeholders (Vogelstein, et al., 2003). Fostering Jewish identity is the major educational rationale offered for creating, maintaining, and supporting quality frameworks for ECJE. This approach is bolstered by Eade’s (2024) research on the formation of young children’s spiritual identity, as well as the influences of culture and educational experiences on identity development in early childhood. Vogelstein has written about the centrality of building Jewish identity through community supported ECE by suggesting that the Jewish community’s objective should be building Jewish identity through quality preschool education. (Vogelstein, 2008).

In her influential manual on ECJE for educators, Handleman (2000, p. 2) states unequivocally “A major goal of Jewish early childhood education is to nurture in children the development of a strong, positive, warm Jewish identity and a love for Judaism.” Thus, identity is seen by many as the central motivation for ECJE in the Diaspora. A second major goal for the children is a love of Israel. This can be ascertained through publicity on diaspora

school websites, such as the Mount Scopus School in Melbourne, Australia.

(<https://www.scopus.vic.edu.au/learning-and-life/early-learning/kinder-programs>).

Along with this notion of identity building, stakeholders articulate an instrumental goal, that of Jewish continuity. Strengthening children's Jewish identity is viewed as a pathway to bolstering their parent's Jewish identity. For example, Handleman (2000) adds to her emphasis on identity a look towards the future: These children will "grow into Jewish adults" and these frameworks will provide a "pathway into Jewish life for families" (p. 2). Further evidence of this conflation of educational and instrument values can be found in Ben-Avie et al.'s (2011) book on JECE where the authors hypothesize that "Jewish [preschool] education appears to impact not only the identity of the child, but also the Jewish identity of the parents" (p. 376). Empirical evidence to back up these claims was cited by Vogelstein (2002): "In a study commissioned by JECEPT, two-third of the families interviewed indicated that they are 'doing something different regarding their Jewish practice as a result of the preschool experience.... This includes an increase in synagogue membership" (p. 4).

This dual emphasis on identity formation and family involvement can be found in Jewish day schools throughout the Diaspora. For example, the mission statement of Scopus College in Melbourne includes: "The horizon we are reaching for [is] a future where our students are deeply connected to their Jewish identity." The document further adds that parents were actively involved in formulating the school's goals (<https://www.scopus.vic.edu.au/our-college/scopus-horizons>).

These two thrusts of rationales for ECJE in the Diaspora, identity formation and family involvement in Judaism appear together, as inextricable threads in a value-based argument. An additional thread with perhaps a minor voice is the teaching of Jewish values (Pinkenson and Goldsmith, 2002) and the experience and knowledge of Jewish prayer (Wachs, 2002). Albeit minor expressions, both of those elements for the imperative for ECJE are also justified by their likely impact for future Jewish identity.

In Israel, Jewish content in the education for young children is espoused primarily by the state religious schools. (Brody, Ackerman Simchovitch, & Hoshen Manzura, 2003). A fear of religious coercion has led to the weakening of Jewish content from the official curriculum of the state secular schools over the last twenty years (Esther Hatav, personal communication, June 18, 2025). Traditionally, the establishment and design of EC education

in Israel has been an outgrowth of ideological concern, and as such, the curriculum has been driven by various underlying values. The first Israeli kindergartens were established to promote the Zionist ideal and to inculcate the nascent Hebrew language. Other concerns followed, including the absorption of massive waves of immigrants in the 1950's and 1960's, thus placing the integration into Israeli society at the forefront of EC educational endeavors. With the growth and influence of the national religious movement over the last decades, the goals for that sector have focused on Zionism, religious practice, and heritage such as Bible stories (Brody, 2018). Other value-oriented goals have been specified by the national religious sector in a curriculum document: love of torah, proper behavior, belief in God, and connection to the people of Israel (Zaks, 2022). While holiday and Shabbat experiences and teaching have long been considered the aegis of all sectors, the goals related to holiday inclusion have been appropriated to each sector according to its own ideological requirements (Gor-Ziv, 2016; Yaffe and Rapoport, 2013; Hass et al., 2007).

We suggest that ECJE represents a particularistic perspective, emphasizing Jewish identity, Jewish knowledge and Jewish practice as its goals. As such, these values apply to Jewish peoplehood and Jewish culture in both the Diaspora and in Israel but are adapted to each sector according to its ideology and ethos. This discussion of the value foundations of JECE in both the diaspora and Israel will serve as a springboard for examining how these values align with those of SP, discussed in the previous section.

Comparing SP and ECJE

Comparing SP and ECJE requires a precise understanding of how each approach relates to the uniqueness of early childhood in human growth and development. The consequences of those understandings are found in their definitions of the task of educating the young child, their epistemology of how knowledge is acquired, their conceptualization of time, and their view of community. For both, early childhood is a distinct and critical period in children's lives. The proponents of SP claim that this unique period provides an opportunity for nurturing growth and self-development. Stakeholders in ECJE believe that this distinct period needs to be utilized to instill a strong Jewish identity whose parameters are determined by the larger community.

According to SP the essence of childhood is developing a strong sense of agency in the child. In contrast, ECJE requires teacher agency to accomplish the task of instilling Jewish identity within the young child. As an agent of socialization, the teacher's role is

critical to pass on the traditions, sense of peoplehood, and community. While in SP agency resides within the child, in ECJE agency resides within the educator. Using their personal agency ECJEs often foster child agency through inquiry methods of teaching.

The central task for each approach is determined by the underlying universal or particularistic binary. For SP, the task focuses on the child as a developing human being, revealing a universal perspective. This is accomplished by supporting the child's growth and learning through discovery and experimentation in a rich and stimulating environment. Decision making is encouraged by valuing the children's personal interests and considerations. In ECJE the task primarily emphasizes one specific aspect of the child's development - the cultural and religious identity, revealing a particularistic perspective. Jewish continuity is thus achieved through instilling in the child a corpus of stories, practices, activities, and values held by the teacher. To summarize, the child leads the learning experience in SP while the teacher leads the process in ECJE.

For each approach, the educational task is accomplished through using the learning habitus (Warwick et al., 2017) in different ways. Although the physical spaces and resources may be organized in a similar fashion, the pedagogic cultures characteristically reflect the universal or the particularistic outlook for each. In a SP learning environment, the child is empowered to act on, influence, and function with agency. Curiosity, experimentation, and discovery are means through which the child grows and develops. The outdoors is considered a crucial part of the learning habitat. In an ECJE learning environment, the child functions within a structured surrounding reflecting elements of Jewish culture. This can be seen both in the daily schedule as well as in teacher-initiated activities rooted in holiday symbols and ceremonies. Typically, children can choose how to implement those activities. Completion of these activities, attention to the holiday stories, and participation in rituals indicate to the educator that their task has been accomplished. These distinctions between SP and ECJE bring to the fore the significance of process and product for the manner in which each approach seeks to accomplish the educational task. For SP, process is the essence while in ECJE process is instrumental while the product is seen as the link to Jewish identity and continuity.

Both SP and ECJE understand knowledge in unique ways, each reflecting the universal-particularistic dichotomy. For SP, knowledge results from the unique temporal and spatial aspects of the children's experience in the here and now. Accordingly, knowledge

changes from group to group and year to year. In contrast, knowledge in ECJE is grounded in a corpus based on Jewish culture that includes facts, experiences, ceremonies, and stories. These are revisited each year with some variance according to immediate circumstances. This difference is related to how each approach sees the acquisition of knowledge. In SP the children acquire knowledge that is relevant to them through their own curiosity, exploration and experimentation. These process-related actions serve to deepen and enhance their knowledge and understanding of their personal world. In ECJE knowledge results from exposure to aspects of Jewish culture and repetitive actions deepening their socialization into the particular form of religious practice found in their school community.

The processes of knowledge acquisition in both SP and ECJE are grounded in time, each in its unique manner. For SP, time is a pedagogic tool to be utilized in order to support the child's growth. As such, time is seen as a resource in the hands of both educator and child. Time flows according to the needs of the child and mediated by the adult. In ECJE time is seen as a resource for the teacher to expose the child to a set body of knowledge. Time frames determine the curriculum content, the content in turn influences the framing of the daily, weekly, monthly, and annual schedule. Moreover, Jewish culture is bound up within particular time frames, e.g. daily prayer, weekly Sabbath celebration, the lunar month, and the repetition of seasonal holidays. Each of these aspects of Jewish time requires attention within the early childhood school experience. Consequently, the educator prioritizes these aspects of time in planning the class routine. This framing results from the community's agenda of maintaining Jewish identity, which is placed in the hands of the EC educator.

Community is conceptualized differently in SP and ECJE. For SP, community relates primarily to parents, educators, and children in each particular setting through listening and communicating (Green & Clarke, 2023). Parents are encouraged to implement "unhurried" principles at home, in order to support the educational endeavor. This can be accomplished by resisting social pressures of rushing through activities or focusing solely on measurable learning outcomes. Stressing the importance of interaction, the parental role is defined as partner, facilitator, and advocate through observing, and supporting their child's learning journey. In ECJE communication with parents is essential to achieve the goal of strengthening the child's Jewish identity. As in other high quality EC programs, ECJE educators share ongoing developmental information, projects, and programs. However, a unique aspect of ECJE is inviting parents to participate in frequent classroom holiday celebrations and activities. In this way the parents' own Jewish identity is thought to be

enhanced. Creating and feeling part of a wider cultural community is a central aim of ECJE. In ECJE the wider community is expected to support the educational enterprise. As we have shown, in each approach parents are acknowledged as essential to the success of the educational endeavor, albeit their roles differ as described above.

In both SP and ECJE, the educator plays a central role in the implementation of the pedagogy. The culture and climate of the classroom is created by daily, hourly, minute by minute decisions of the educator as they implement the educational values held most dearly to the approach. In fact, this role is aptly described by Clarke and Green (2023) as the educational leader. By examining specific roles played out in each approach, the leadership patterns revealed by each approach can be distinguished and appreciated as qualities of the program itself.

Patterns of leadership in SP are defined as “unhurried” (Green & Clarke, 2023). Because agency resides in the child, the educator steps aside in order to allow the child to determine the content, space, and pace of their learning. The educator’s role of respecting the child by listening to and observing their actions, models universal values about childhood and how children grow and learn (Bruce, 2021). Thus, teachers support child initiative as a central tenet of SP. In SP, the educator’s measure of professional success is found in their appreciation of the unhurried learning process as well as the personal meaning that learning takes on for the children. In SP the educator’s role is to enable children to grow at their own pace rather than to socialize the children into a particular culture.

The educator in ECJE is driven by particularistic values empowering her to lead the children on a predetermined path to strengthen their Jewish identity. They are proactive in guiding the content, space, and pace of the children’s learning. Their agentic role is characterized by conscientiously planning and implementing an educational program whose purpose is to inculcate Jewish culture and values. In line with this purpose, time is viewed as a resource for achieving concrete results. A dominant aspect of Jewish time is embedded in Sabbath and holiday ceremonies, some of which include inviting parents to join classroom community holiday celebrations. The educator’s mediation is expressed in the socialization role, which is viewed as a responsibility to the wider community. In ECJE, the educator measures her professional success through children’s bridging their learning between home and school, which is accomplished by performing songs, telling stories and producing artifacts created in the kindergarten in preparation for home holiday celebration.

Our discussion clearly highlights the universal and particularistic binary revealed in how each approach articulates a different educational mission. Singh and Parihar (2021) define the universal as framing coherent rules and principles that transcend spatiotemporal dimensions. Accordingly, SP embraces child-centered principles that apply regardless of culture, location, and time. In contrast Singh and Parihar, (2021) define the particularistic as a particular cultural or spatial context contingent on times, people, and places. Following this definition, we claim that ECJE is bound up within the Jewish culture of its own setting. As such, Jewish time becomes the salient framework within which the educator must function. Given this distinction between the particular and the universal, we wish to acknowledge that these categories are not mutually exclusive. In fact, ECJE programs may incorporate the universal aspects of SP; while high quality EC programs around the world may reflect particularistic features of their own local cultures. This nuanced perspective allows for a flow of ideas and concepts drawn from each of these major educational approaches.

Implications for practice

When considering the conflicting values of SP and ECJE, it could be concluded that the two approaches are incompatible, and that each is appropriate for different populations and circumstances. In fact, it might be said that each approach is based on underlying values that cannot mesh or even complement one another.

However, our thorough examination of the two approaches leads us in a different direction. As ECJE scholars and leaders, our positionality compels us to consider what we can learn from SP, and how that pedagogy might benefit our own endeavors in educating young Jewish children. It is beyond our scope to even wonder how ECJE might influence SP, and we will leave that question to be considered by others who might find that issue to be of interest.

We begin our search for meaning in the realm of SP by considering how a universal perspective might enhance the particularistic perspective of ECJE. Many Jewish early childhood educators correctly claim a child-centered approach. This can be clearly seen in public relations documents such as school websites, as well as observations in the best Jewish early childhood centers, both independent and those affiliated with day schools.

However, the concept of “child centered” can be broadly interpreted. Our study of SP compels us to ask ECJE educators who identify with a child-centered approach: To what extent is the child encouraged to follow their own interests, even if those interests conflict

with the current holiday focused agenda? Would teachers in those child-centered programs feel comfortable when a child chooses to build with blocks or play in the mud rather than completing holiday-related craft projects, resulting in fewer holiday artifacts to bring home?

Furthermore, we wonder if the amount of time and resources spent on holiday preparation is warranted in light of the fact that this same curriculum is repeated year after year. Could time as a resource be shared between teachers and children? For example, could time be freed up for children's own explorations by reducing the scope and depth of holiday preparation in favor of allocating more time for children's self-directed explorations? A further consideration is the acquisition of knowledge. While SP advocates inquiry as the central artery of knowledge acquisition, ECJE promotes transmitting cultural heritage through teaching and common experiences. We endorse the merits of active inquiry as a meaningful channel for Jewish children to learn about their own heritage. Educators could encourage children to ask questions about the upcoming holiday, and follow up those questions by encouraging exploration, nurturing curiosity, and celebrating discovery as alternatives to the teacher-initiated holiday curriculum.

These suggestions are based on a model of educational change that entails familiarizing ECJE leaders with SP. This would be followed by a second stage in which those leaders guide educators to consider a more universal approach. This would require the educators to feel confident to step back and offer more space for children to take an active role in their own Jewish education. It would mean relinquishing a part of their personal agency and transferring it to the children. A successful process would necessitate bringing to the fore the dilemmas which the universal approach of SP poses for the particularistic approach of ECJE.

The research literature on effective professional development highlights the benefits of exposing value dilemmas when educators are asked to consider their practice. For example, Yaffe and Maskit (2014) describe how teacher educators used pedagogical dilemmas in conducting self-study during interactive team meetings, thus examining their fundamental values. When tasked with encouraging teachers to reconsider their beliefs and practices, Crockett (2002) found that dealing with dilemmas of practice and values was particularly helpful in teacher inquiry groups. In fact, the activity-theoretical conceptualization of contradictions as sources of change among teachers was reported by Caspari-Gnann & Sevia (2022) in a multiple case study. They found that grappling with

conceptual contradictions in their practice and belief systems became a stimulus for teachers to rethink their practice.

Likewise, this process of reconsidering one's pedagogic practice could be adapted by the ECJE leaders in their professional development work addressing SP. A likely scenario for such a discussion would be the central question: What would be lost and what might be gained by adapting SP principles in ECJE? Clearly, the topic of time as a pedagogical resource would require thought and deliberation.

The model of educational change described above challenges teachers' personal and professional identities as Early Childhood Jewish educators. According to Beijgaard & Meijer (2017), because teaching is both personal and professional, their identities are formed through a complex interaction between their professional and personal selves. Furthermore, they argue that their growth occurs by reconciling conflicting aspects of the personal and the professional. In a study of Jewish educators, Herman (2020) found that the relationship between the personal and professional is unidirectional, as Jewish educators protect their religious identity from encroachment by professional demands. Typically, EC Jewish educators experience a strong sense of belonging in their professional settings and in their role as Jewish educators. Allen et al, (2025) noted that teachers' sense of belonging is associated both with an affinity to the teaching profession and their identity as an educator. The ECJE leaders interested in pursuing this change endeavor would be cognizant of identity challenges arising when educators examine conflicts between SP and their current accepted practice.

An additional challenge to the adaptation of SP in ECJE is the question of parental attitudes towards the acceptance of a slower paced learning environment that may entail a reduction in the quantity of holiday related artifacts that their children produce and bring home. In the Diaspora parents choose Jewish schools to help them acculturate their child into the tradition and to enhance their Jewish life as a family. In Israel parents do not choose a "Jewish" school; however, societal expectations require a curriculum based on the holiday cycle. Thus, convincing parents of the advantages of an unhurried approach might outweigh the product-oriented emphasis that is currently the norm. The success of the task of helping parents consider a slower teaching and learning environment for their child depends on educators who themselves have slowed down. Those teachers may form a cadre of leaders

who are willing to lead by example. It is reasonable to assume that as a result of this personal change, the teacher's professional identity would follow suit.

Conclusions

We have approached our recommendations in the conclusion section with an unbiased regard for the sensibilities of Jewish EC educators. As veteran Jewish EC educators and researchers, we find ourselves in a position to comfortably articulate our own views regarding the contributions of SP to the practice of ECJE both in Israel and in the Diaspora. We believe that the universalistic approach of SP could enhance the achievement of the major goals of ECJE - strengthening the Jewish identity of the child and family, continuity, and Jewish peoplehood. When diving deeply into their Jewish culture through personal exploration and discovery, children develop a personal connection to being Jewish. This opportunity contrasts with the exposure to Jewish peoplehood through a wide variety of hurried holiday preparations that are part and parcel of the current accepted practice in ECJE.

Our introduction to SP took place at an international ECE conference when Alison Clarke delivered a keynote address presenting her educational approach to an audience of researchers and practitioners. After reading her book, we formed a study group of EC Jewish researchers to slowly ponder the implications of SP in each participant's professional context. These fruitful deliberations enhanced our thinking in writing this article, and we express gratitude to the group for this contribution. We hope that this article will spark further discourse among Jewish EC leaders, researchers and educators regarding the interface between SP and ECJE. We believe that such deliberations would benefit Jewish young children who must formulate their own identities and belonging in a very hurried world with unlimited choices.

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