Letter From the Editors

Dear Reader,

It is with great *Hakarat HaTov* (gratitude) to Hashem that we have launched this first ever *Journal of Jewish Early Childhood Education*. About five years ago, I was asked to contribute ideas for initiatives a donor might sponsor in the field of Jewish early childhood education. I can still recall the exact moment that the idea for a high quality, peer reviewed academic journal for Jewish Early Childhood Education took root. As the chair of an undergraduate department of education with an early childhood program, I had grown accustomed to defending the value of the field. When asked to imagine a wish list, it became clear to me that a peer reviewed journal would help elevate the status of the field, bring like-minded scholars together, and contribute meaningfully to the discipline.

We are deeply grateful and appreciative to Anita Zucker, a passionate champion for early childhood education, who has made this publication possible. Thank you for understanding the importance of this endeavor. May G-d bless you and your family and may your kindness and support of this journal bring infinite blessings and much joy and nachas to you. We share your commitment to Jewish early childhood education, and we hope that our work together makes a difference in the lives of the next generation and their descendants.

My SCW colleague and friend, Dr. Chaya Gorsetman, A"H, once quipped that I needed to meet Dr. Meir Muller and work with him on something. This journal is, in many ways, the result of that suggestion and the meaningful partnership that followed. With his guidance and the trust of a strong network of scholars who shared their work with us, thank G-d, we have brought the first edition of the *Journal of Jewish Early Childhood Education* to life.

In this inaugural edition, you will find diverse, timely, and significant scholarship that advances thinking, inspires inquiry, promotes deeper problem-solving, and supports educators and institutions in strengthening their work with young children. We are pleased to present the following contributions:

- Orna Siegel examines the professional identity and motivation of educators of other faiths (EOFs) teaching Judaic content in early childhood Jewish education. Given persistent early childhood workforce shortages, this scholarship raises important questions and offers concrete interventions to support EOFs within the Jewish early childhood context.

- Marina Umaschi Bers examines how the teaching of coding, robotics, and computational thinking can cultivate relational pedagogy. The author explores how Buber's (1923) "I-Thou" and "I-It" relationships illuminate pedagogic possibilities and Jewish values in coding playgrounds.

- Sharon Kaplan Berkley and David Brody expose the conflict between principles of "Slow Pedagogy" and the typical Jewish holiday centered curriculum in Jewish Early Childhood Education. Drawing on the work of Alison Clarke (2022) "Slow Knowledge and the Unhurried Child," the authors raise and resolve questions that divide the pedagogic orientations.

- In *Portrayals of Africa and Africans in Stories with Jewish Characters: Reflections from Black and Jewish Educator*s, Meir Muller, Gloria Butte, Michal Avera Samuel, and Shahanna W. McKinney-Baldon present original research examining portrayals of Africa and African Jewish communities in Jewish-themed picture books. The study examines cultural assumptions, power dynamics, and identity construction.

- Shulamit Hoshen Manzura and Sigal Achituv question the roots of collective identity in Haredi Jewish Early Childhood Schooling in Israel. They consider how religious identity and "Othering" attitudes begin at an early age within the dichotomous school systems.

We are also delighted to share a submission in the "Voices from the Field" section, which presents firsthand narrative pieces from practitioners:

- Allie Baylson and Miriam Kalmar describe the Reggio-Emilia inspired journey that transformed their pedagogic practices and school environment. Using vivid pictures and authentic language they share the emergent child centered approach that transformed the hallwayscapes and community engagement of the Jewish early learning center.

One of the enduring challenges in our field is the gap between research and practice. This journal aims to serve as a bridge, bringing rigorous scholarship into meaningful conversation with the lived realities of educators, leaders, and communities. The authors may present different perspectives that confront our sensitivities or world views. However, our hope is that the work presented here deepens thinking and supports decision-making and practice in meaningful ways.

We are especially grateful to our peer reviewers whose time and expertise strengthened this issue. Specifically, we would like to thank:

Sigal Achituv

Tamar Andrews

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Howie Deitcher

Alana Rifkin Gelnick

Sylvia Kamaowitz-Hareven

Ilana Dvorin Friedman

Sharon Kaplan

Suzy Shapiro

Lastly, this journal would not have been possible without the vision and guidance of Hao Zeng, Head of Library Technology at Yeshiva University. His work behind the scenes was instrumental in the creation, design, and user interface of the online journal. His patience with our learning curve throughout this process is deeply appreciated.

On behalf of both of us, we hope this inaugural issue encourages continued scholarship, dialogue, and contribution. We invite you to engage with the work, submit your own, and help shape the future of Jewish early childhood education.

Warmly,

Miriam Hirsch and Meir Muller

