

myself. The best learning opportunity of all in homeschooling, though, is for the adults. That is the opportunity to learn to trust one's

children, and to learn to be available as a guide and resource as we watch them learning *l'shema* — for the sake of learning itself.



* For more on learning without rewards, see Alfie Kohn, *Punished by Rewards*. Of course, this idea is contra-Rambam (*Perek Helek*), something I've decided to live with.

School Choices

Jason and Devora Kimelman-Block

“HOW COULD A RABBI choose to send his daughter to a non-Jewish preschool?” asked the principal of a Jewish preschool. The question rang in our ears and continues to bounce around our heads with colors of defensiveness, pride, and a touch of sadness. After narrowing our choices to schools that were affordable and conveniently located, we found ourselves pondering the proper balance between an environment that was “like home” and an encounter with different surroundings that supplement her home experience.

While a Jewish preschool would reinforce lessons we teach Esther at home — the importance of Shabbat, saying a *brakhah* before eating, eating kosher food — we were unable to find one that offered Hebrew immersion. And some values that are not exclusively Jewish might be better reinforced at non-Jewish schools.

Our interest in a particular preschool came from a question on its application: “How much time on average does your child spend... watching TV or videos, playing computer games? We ask that you consider your child’s media intake in light of the increasing evidence of its adverse effects on child development. Are you willing to change your child’s media intake if your teacher feels it would benefit your child?” We were impressed. It was not a question we had seen on any other application. At one Jewish preschool, the children occasionally watched videos *in school*.

We like the idea of unstructured downtime and relatively relaxed “uptime.” Most preschools seem to be selling themselves on their academic programming. On Mondays they have music, on Tuesdays, science, on Wednesdays... etc. For us, academics in preschool are *not* a selling point. In fact, we are planning only one after-school class (Hebrew) and reserving the rest of the week for unstructured play. Whatever happened to a time when children would just play? Sure, when they grow up they need to be competitive,

but so much intellectual, social, and physical development derives from playtime.

We learned about Esther’s school’s educational philosophy, which emphasizes the imagination, on a site visit. The classrooms have a good supply of basic materials such as driftwood, pine cones, and fabric that can become whatever the children imagine. The school’s philosophy stresses that too much technology diminishes imagination. Instead of battery-operated toys that pop and whistle, toys are better animated by children’s own voices (and pops and whistles). How do we develop the next generation of inventors if our children spend so much time “playing” with programmed technology rather than playing and thinking creatively?

We decided that, for now, rather than have Esther attend a Jewish preschool and learn (a little) Hebrew, watch (some) videos, and be in a highly programmed/scheduled school environment, she will attend a different school that focuses on technology-free imagination-building playtime. There are other ways to teach Esther Hebrew and reinforce the Jewish experiences and values we teach at home, but in this overly programmed world we’d better give her imagination a strong foundation. We hope to build on that foundation by sending her to a Jewish school after kindergarten where she will receive plenty of structured academic programming.

All choices require compromise and a degree of loss. One solution to our current dilemma: *aliyah*, and finding a Hebrew immersion school with an educational philosophy that we can support.

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