



Charlotte Jewish  
Preschool  
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## Charlotte Jewish Preschool Goes to Italy!

Written by: Brooke Amo, Executive Director, and Emily Snyder, Curriculum Coordinator

Mama Mia! This Spring we have an extraordinary opportunity to join international educators on a weeklong seminar in Reggio Emilia, Italy where the highly regarded early childhood educational philosophy was established. We will study under the leadership of Mara Bier and Sharon Sherry of the Jewish Federation of Greater Washington and Lisa Littman of PJ Goes to School (Harold Greenspoon Foundation). These dynamic professionals will challenge us to learn all about Reggio Emilia through a Jewish lens. This seminar will allow us to observe, hear from experts, and learn how to apply strategies that follow a Reggio Emilia approach within the Charlotte Jewish Preschool.

The Reggio Emilia approach was developed after World War II by Loris Malaguzzi and parents in the villages around Reggio Emilia, Italy, and derives its name from the city. Reggio Emilia is a student centered approach to Early Childhood education where children learn by experience, and the ability to express themselves in a variety of ways. Reggio Emilia philosophers believe that children are capable learners who deserve respect, real life experiences, authentic materials, and the allowance to tell their own story while exploring the world around them.

Over the past two years, we have been exploring the concepts of beautiful classroom environments, emergent curriculum, natural materials, the belief that children are capable learners and the impact this has had on the teachers, the children, and the families throughout the school. Teachers and children have more autonomy in what goes into what they are learning. Teachers and children are more proud of their learning environments including their materials. Teachers are talking less and listening more. Children are asking questions, driving their instruction, and are more engaged in the learning activities throughout the day. These positive results have left us hungry for more information. In Jewish tradition, we are encouraged to ask questions, continue to learn, and always strive to be our best selves, which led us to this unique opportunity with experts in the field.

We were asked by our Reggio facilitators what our hopes and goals are for this trip. This question encouraged us to think of specifically what we need to bring back to CJP with respect to our individual roles within our school:

**Brooke (Executive Director):** This year, one of our main initiatives at the Charlotte Jewish Preschool is to nurture a school culture that puts Judaic values in the forefront, while we work to provide young children with a secure and loving atmosphere in which to grow, develop a positive self-image, and learn the joy of Jewish life.

This year, all CJP stakeholders were asked “what are our values, what words, what actions, what habits, what values do we want for our children, families, and staff?”

These values are to be the very fabric of who we are, and how we want operate at CJP. They are to transcend and apply everywhere from a parent meeting, to the boardroom, to the way that Eli and Lucy work through a problem on the playground. Our work to repair the world is the responsibility of our whole community, from our youngest to our most senior stakeholders. We can all strive to make our world a better place.

With this initiative in mind, my main objective in Reggio Emilia is to explore ways that this curriculum and philosophical approach can foster a culture of values, and how I can, as a leader, inspire all that are a part of our preschool family to embrace and embody these values.

How do we inspire our community to be active learners?

How do we know we have “created a culture”? What does that look like, feel like?

**Emily (Curriculum Coordinator):** My job is to help teach and inspire teachers plan for instruction with a Judaic, Reggio, Early Childhood, and Value-Centric lens; all while helping teachers to maintain their individualism and creativity. While in Reggio I would like to gain a better understanding of how teachers in the Reggio region plan for and prepare for instruction.

My main objective as a participant in this study is to act as an ambassador for the classroom teachers and staff at CJP and other schools who are on similar journeys. I would like to create a vision for monthly team planning sessions as we think about where we want to go philosophically and practically in terms of Reggio Emilia. I look forward to learning more about what goes into creating, maintaining, and improving a Reggio Emilia school from teachers and administrators who are living it themselves in the region where it was born.

We are hopeful that our experience in Reggio Emilia Italy will strengthen our knowledge and philosophical beliefs about how children learn. As we gather more knowledge about the importance of the learning environment, the materials we use, the way we see and listen to children, we know we will be able to provide the best educational experience for our children, families, and stakeholders of CJP.

