

**Jewish Early Childhood Educators
Take the Lead in Their Own Growth: A Leadership Intensive
10th Annual ECE-RJ Conference**

I (we) had the good fortune of joining forty-nine educators from URJ congregations across the United States for the tenth annual conference of Early Childhood Educators of Reform Judaism (ECE-RJ), *Take the Lead In Your Own Growth: A Leadership Intensive*, held March 7-9, 2010 in Dallas Texas.

For two and a half inspiring days, the group focused on how early childhood centers within the Reform movement discover and express their core ideals and values in many areas of early childhood administration, from building a vision of community to the importance of the budget process. We also considered challenges and issues in our field and studied innovative program ideas. The conference scholar-in-residence was Lyndall Miller, Director of Jewish Early Childhood Education and the Legacy Heritage Institute for Jewish Early Childhood Educators, at Gratz College in Elkins Park, PA.

The intensive began Sunday afternoon with a gathering to welcome *Panim Chadoshot* (New Faces) after which we immediately immersed ourselves into an enriching session considering the topic, “How can *Havdalah* help us understand the various aspects that go into being a leader in a Jewish early childhood program?” Temple Shalom welcomed us on Monday. The inspiring discussion began with “directing the light of the Jewish image of the child,” and continued with the consideration of how environments impact young children. Temple Emanu-El was our host on Tuesday. We engaged in discussions about the importance of directors as members of the professional staff of our synagogues. In addition we explored the concept of teaming with teachers and parents as we deepened our understanding of the integral roles we play as directors. Our closing ceremony was filled with *ruach* as we reflected on the wealth of information and introspection we had obtained with our colleagues.

I am (we are) very fortunate to be a member(s) of the Early Childhood Educators of Reform Judaism (ECE-RJ), the newest professional affiliate of the Union for Reform Judaism. ECE-RJ represents professionals in all fields of Reform Jewish early childhood education, serving as a voice for educators, guiding synagogue leaders by offering them the most current information about the benefits of early childhood education and engagement for congregations and young families. In addition ECE-RJ in partnership with the URJ, provides useful guidelines for its members and their extended communities about salaries, contracts, benefits, and opportunities for lifelong learning. ECE-RJ sponsors an annual opportunity for professional growth and development open to directors, teachers and others who are dedicated to the vision of early childhood education.