

# DOWNTOWNDESK

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## INSPIRING CURIOSITY

Science as a Way of Knowing [pg 1](#)

## HONOURING DIVERSITY

Diversity and the Brain — A LEAD Team in Action [pg 2](#)

## CREATING COMMUNITY

Jewish Mosaic Museum [pg 3](#)

## LIVING DOWNTOWN

Structures are Everywhere! [pg 4](#)

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## SCIENCE AS A WAY OF KNOWING

At Paul Penna Downtown Jewish Day School, integrated units replace what is traditionally science or social studies class. By starting with the Ontario Ministry of Education's curriculum, and then finding a "Big Idea" — that is a meaningful, enduring understanding about humans and our world — we integrate science, social studies, Language Arts, Judaics, the arts, as well as other disciplines, whichever best fit the "Big Idea".

One fascinating Grade Five unit is not only about scientific knowledge, it is actually about knowing about scientific knowledge, about science being a special way of knowing about the world. Kate Sable, Grade Five teacher, Science LEAD teacher, and Yale University graduate, explains that she designed the unit based on the most current research into science education.

Rather than focusing exclusively on scientific content, such as exploring the difference between a physical change and a chemical change, or identifying the four states of matter, she asks students to step back from each science-based activity and analyze which of the four defining features of "science as a way of knowing" a particular activity contains.

Exceptionally intriguing and unique is the way in which "science as a way of knowing" is applied in language arts through a novel

study of *When You Reach Me* by Rebecca Stead, which involves time travel. Time travel is an example of how scientific knowledge is durable but not absolute, in that modern science asserts that time dilation has actually been "proven". Sable's students are tasked with applying the scientific model



to the novel. They must try to answer a specific question using terminology such as formulating hypotheses, gathering data, making inferences, and drawing conclusions.

Equally compelling is how the visual arts are also used to explore the difference between observation and inference, two ways of knowing which are so related in our minds that they are often conflated. Monet's canvases covered in green dabs are observed as a green expanse, then inferred to be a field of wild grass. Understanding of art and media is expanded by applying the concepts behind scientific knowledge.

Deep, provocative, challenging, and fun! Wouldn't you like to be a fifth-grader again?



Paul Penna Downtown Jewish Day School

INSPIRING CURIOSITY HONOURING DIVERSITY CREATING COMMUNITY

# DIVERSITY AND THE BRAIN – A LEAD TEAM IN ACTION



Honouring diversity is at the heart of Paul Penna DJDS. Passionately adhering to this school pillar plays

individual characteristics. What we share and what is specific changes dependent on what is being discussed.

brains, with an understanding that there are aspects that we all share (universality) and aspects that make each of our brains special (individuality/specificity).



As in all our LEAD programs, Professional Development was provided for our staff. First, the team presented the results of their research; they then helped the staff explore the discomfort we each might feel, accepting the full range of opinions and practices that is embraced by this approach. Next, the teachers were guided in determining how to keep diversity front and centre in our pedagogy and curriculum, starting

In addition to visitors to the class speaking of what made their brains special, students reflected on their own brains, with their special attributes and strengths. They designed posters and wrote paragraphs to support their ideas, putting their design, arts and language skills to good use. Finally, they shared their personal understandings with the class, creating a stronger and more empathetic classroom community.

a significant role in shaping our community. This past spring, our Grade two class had the remarkable experience of learning how diversity plays a major role not just in our hearts, but in our brains.

with Paul Penna DJDS' signature integrated units.

Exploring the concept of diversity as well as the complexities of our unique brains has been a fascinating journey, taking us not only into the heart of contemporary cultural values, but also deep into our own hearts and minds. We look forward to using this knowledge to take our students on their own explorations of diversity.

Our Diversity LEAD team did extensive reading of academic and educational materials to familiarize themselves with the various models used to address diversity. The model adopted by the team centres on the concepts of universality and specificity/individuality. It assumes that in certain ways we share characteristics with all others, and in certain other ways we have

Shira Wolch, Diversity LEAD team leader and thereby a natural “early adopter”, put the new model into action during Brain Week in her Grade Two class. Interestingly, the original Brain Week plan was based on the model of a baseline of a healthy brain, with guests who had a diagnosed condition – a “difference” such as autism or ADHD – coming in to talk to the students. As research and professional development proceeded, Wolch reframed her Brain Week to look at all our

***In June 2012, a study of Paul Penna DJDS's approach to diversity was launched. A Diversity LEAD team was struck, and this dedicated group tightened the broad topic by focusing on diversity in relation to curriculum and its delivery.***

**For even our very youngest students, art opens up avenues to both understand and express a response to the world and its inhabitants. By studying the approaches of famous Western artists of the last two centuries, with a focus on their use of colour, line and perspective, students discovered new ways of observing the familiar.**



Paul Klee made geometry, a building block of design, an integral aspect of his drawings, as does this Grade One student.



Georgia O'Keeffe's up-close perspective on the natural world guided our students to look intensely at the natural world they had been studying in their integrated unit on the inter-relationship of plants, soils and living creatures, aptly named *We Are All in this Together*.



Pablo Picasso's cubist theory infuses this self-portrait in the guise of Purim's Queen Esther.



Claude Monet's acute observations of the changing quality of natural light as we cycle through the days and seasons added depth and perspective to the *Cycles in Our Lives* integrated unit.



# JEWISH MOSAIC MUSEUM

In partnership with the Ontario Jewish Archives, Paul Penna Downtown Jewish Day School had the wonderful opportunity to contribute to the Archives' knowledge of downtown Jewish life in the 21st century by hosting a Jewish Mosaic Museum, a pop-up museum that displayed artifacts of contemporary Jewish life. Our students were asked to provide the personally meaningful artifacts, which ranged from the traditional, such as candlesticks and wine cups, to the more eclectic, such as chicken hand puppets that accompany a song about chicken soup, a cookbook of Jewish recipes and a wooden sword, to the cerebral or conceptual, such as a verse from the Torah, a picture of a beloved Jewish family member or a photo of communing with one's Jewish friends. Each artifact was described in writing by the student, which brought us the delightful writing of our youngest students, filled with inventive spelling, to the deep, self-reflective insights penned by our older students. Grandparents and special friends were given a tour by their beloved grandchildren and special little friends. Together, they learned of the broad and rich understanding of Judaism that is embedded so fully in our students' downtown lives.



My artifact is a **Pushka**. It belongs to my grandpa. On Shabbat I take it around.  
—Bobby, Senior Kindergarten

For my artifact I chose the **Second Helpings Please cookbook**. A Montrealer wrote the cookbook and it was published in 1960. Second Helpings Please belonged to my Bubbe and she passed it down to my family. In it (among other things) there is the prize winning recipe for Challah. Everything about the Challah is amazing — from the smell of it baking to seeing it on the dining room table to biting into it, to the after taste. It connects me to Judaism because most people eat Challah on Shabbat.  
—Noa Irene, Grade 4



We can't imagine having Shabbat without our **toy chickens**. It is a Shabbat tradition. The tradition started in S.K. because that's when Morah Janice taught it to us. First, our grandfather started moving his finger like a chicken. Soon, it was our whole family moving our fingers like chickens and singing. Then, we had paper ones, then felt ones that we made with our grandparents, and now we have 31 chickens! We have an awesome time when we use the Shabbat chickens.  
—Kyra, Grade 2 and Jessie, Grade 5



My **mitzvah tree** reminds me of being Jewish because it's important to be a good person, and do good deeds — mitzvot. I used to get a 'mitzvah leaf' whenever I did something thoughtful, helpful or nice, but now I just have it as a reminder. I was three when I made it and my mom helped me. —Grace, Grade 1



In the **Pasuks** that I brought, Joseph has a dream. In the dream there were eleven bunches of wheat. The bunches of wheat were all bowing to a big bunch of wheat. That big bunch of wheat was Joseph. I chose those Pasuks because they remind me that things that seem little can mean very big things. The Pasuks are special to me because they are from the Torah.  
—Gabriel, Grade 4

שבע פרות הטבת, שבע שנים הנה, ושבע השבליים  
הטבת, שבע שנים הנה: חלום, אחד הוא. כו  
ושבע הפרות הרקות והרעות העלת אחריהן, שבע  
שנים הנה, ושבע השבליים הרקות, שדמות  
הקדים--היו, שבע שני רעב. כח הוא הדבר, אשר  
דברתי אל-פרעה: אשר האלהים עשה, הראה  
את-פרעה. כט הנה שבע שנים, באות--שבע גדול,  
בכל-ארץ מצרים. ל וקמו שבע שני רעב, אחריהן,  
ושבע כל-השבע, בארץ מצרים; וכלה הרעב, את-  
הארץ. לא ולא ינודע השבע בארץ, מפני הרעב  
ההוא אחרי-כן: כי-כבד הוא, מאד.

My Jewish artifact is **my Zaide's kippah**. My Zaide had a bad illness. He died before I was born. The kippah is special to me because it was my Zaide's kippah and it reminds my mom's family about him. He wore the kippah a lot. When my Zaide died, my grandmother gave his kippah to my mom and after a while she passed in on to my dad. My dad's first time wearing the kippah was at my bris. My mom thought it was a big honour for my dad wearing the kippah to my bris and says it is going to be a bigger honour of my wearing it on my Bar Mitzvah. That is my Jewish artifact. —Evan, Grade 3



This **figurine** was given to my Bubbie by her mother, and my Bubbie then gave it to me. The reason I chose this item was because I feel most Jewish when I am around my family, and the "little lady" was given to me by one of my most loved family members. —Chloe-Violet, Grade 6



My Jewish artifact is a **pocket watch** that my grandfather had while he was a prisoner of war for six years. He kept that pocket watch for all through the war. The reason why this pocket watch is so important to me is because he was my only grandfather that I ever knew and therefore my only Jewish grandfather.  
—Jake, Middle School





## STRUCTURES ARE EVERYWHERE!

At Paul Penna DJDS, all integrated units share a certain structure. They are designed around a Big Idea, that is, a large concept that addresses something worth learning, not only for a specific grade



Stylized chair at the Design Exchange

level or even for childhood, but a concept one can carry onward through life. The Big Ideas are cross-disciplinary, often pulling together science and/or social studies, language arts, Judaic studies, the arts, and a related field trip. They are based on Ontario Ministry guidelines in order to be sure that our students are acquiring the required skills, knowledge and understandings.

You can see that our units have a plan (the design), parts (the various disciplines), and a purpose (meeting Ontario curricular expectations). They form a fitting example of the concept that “Structures are

everywhere”, the Big Idea behind the Grade One Structures unit. The students explored the structures that abound in their world, both natural and human made, through in-class discipline-based study, two field trips, the

arts worlds of photography and design, the science and craft of construction, and the opportunity to learn together with their parents.

In class, students evaluated the form and function of everyday objects, including the

Judaic items that are so much a part of their school lives. They used their writing skills to record their observations and conclusions. They went for a downtown community walk and photographed structures, then re-examined the structures for parts, purpose and plan by careful observation and analysis of their photos. They also visited



Building bridges at Family Education session



Model community designed and built by Grade 1 students

the Design Exchange for a sophisticated workshop on the components of design, where they were able to apply their knowledge from class and from the museum tour to design their own highly stylized chairs.

Finally, parents came in for a Family Education program where, along with their children, they engaged in a culminating design activity. Students lead the way by first developing, without their parents, a design of a model bridge and determining the optimal materials to be used. Then parents joined at the construction phase, where they could help both with assessing and reassessing the design, both before and during construction, as well as handle the all-important glue gun! Finally, students reflected on the process, reevaluated their designs, and wrote up the entire process, to later be shared with their classmates and parents.

This integrated unit is a typical example of the challenging, rich and multi-faceted units in which our students regularly engage. Learning really can be fun!

