



Keshar community retreat at Camp Grossman May 2009

There was a retreat last year and we saw a bear's cave and we hiked and played games and made name tags. The parents made a Sukkah on the grass at the Rosh HaShana picnic and we made decorations. It feels happy and like a community.

It feels nice to come after school to a nice and little place. We have fun and learn a different language.

-Abigail from Shorashim

Teacher Development—The Havruta Project by Allison Cook

As Keshar matures into its Chai (18th) year, we can be proud that it Keshar has created a model for innovation in Jewish education. Even more exciting—the Keshar model and the Keshar community continues to grow. This year, Keshar is partnering with Brandeis University's Mandel Center for Studies in Jewish Education as the first after-school site to participate in the Center's ongoing endeavor, The Beit Midrash Research Project. The "Beit Midrash," literally, "house of study/searching" is characterized by a traditional Jewish form of learning known as havruta study in which two colleagues sit together with a text and learn. Keshar's Beit Midrash for Teachers is an extension of the wonderful work of Orit Kent, who has extensively studied the practices of havruta learning, and its implications for teacher development and student learning. Orit and I are thrilled to be working with Rafi and the Keshar teachers along several dimensions of practice. Our hope is to enhance the teaching of Jewish text and student learning in havruta at Keshar, as well as to docu-

ment this effort to better understand how teachers translate this learning into their classrooms.

An onlooker to the Keshar Beit Midrash would observe teachers, paired into lively havrutot, deliberating over Jewish text. While exploring and sometimes disagreeing over the text's meaning, teachers are also keeping track of the nature of their discussion. What kinds of questions am I asking? How effectively am I listening to my partner's ideas or articulating my own? How are we helping one another build knowledge and understanding together? Through the examination of teachers' own havruta learning experiences, the teachers are then asked to make the leap to their classrooms. How can I help my students be better listeners and articulators? What kinds of questions do I mean to be asking my students to best access their ideas along side the big ideas of the content we are learning? These three dimensions of practice—content (text) learning; the pedagogy of cooperative learning in havruta; and applications to the classroom—constitute our many rich

discussions in the Keshar Beit Midrash.

In addition to transforming the Shorashim room into a Keshar Beit Midrash for teachers once a month, Orit and I will be working with a couple of Keshar classrooms in more depth during the second half of the school year. During this time we will be helping teachers build forms of cooperative text learning into their lessons and observe how the students work together to make sense of the texts and their relationship to them. Through video and note taking, we will work with the entire Keshar tzevet (staff) to observe teachers and students at work. We will further analyze the documents we collect in order to write about our efforts along with the outcomes in the Keshar classrooms.

As a long-time Keshar tzevet member myself, I am overjoyed to be returning to Keshar to work with Rafi, Orit, and the entire tzevet. Together, we are participating in the learning community that Keshar has become for its families, students, teachers, and for the greater field of Jewish education.