

## **Top Chinese Educators Partner with Oranim in Early Childhood Education**

*Leaders in the Chinese educational system turned to Oranim to learn about creativity and innovation in early childhood education. Oranim faculty visited China in November 2017 and again in November 2018, following the successful visit of a delegation of educational leaders from China to Oranim in January 2018.*



### **Chinese Initiative for Early Childhood Education**

In China, leaders in education are focusing on an initiative to improve early childhood education throughout the country, and particularly in underdeveloped, rural areas. As part of this initiative, a group of Oranim faculty was invited to lead a conference in November 2017 on early childhood education in Guizhou, a remote region of China. In January 2018, a delegation of top Chinese educators visited Oranim to learn more about Israel's innovations in early childhood education. Following this successful visit, Oranim faculty returned to China in November 2018 to lecture at two conferences on early childhood education, and we plan to continue the partnership in the future.

Guy Almog, CEO of I. C. Global Connections, works together with Oranim to help the college develop partnerships with China.

The early childhood education system in China is the largest in the world, with over forty million children and two million educators. The system, however, faces many challenges, particularly in rural areas, including insufficient government funds, non-academic training for early childhood educators, low salaries for educators, and lack of people interested in the profession. In response to these challenges, in 2010, the government of China developed a nationwide initiative focusing on early childhood education and allocated significant funds to the initiative. Guizhou, China's poorest region, is one target of this initiative, as well as being a region designated for investment and development in other areas.

### **International Conference in Bijie**

In this context, Bijie Pre-School Educational College in Guizhou hosted a delegation of Oranim faculty in November 2017 in order to learn from them about innovations in early childhood education. The college

is devoted exclusively to early childhood education, with 3,500 students. It was founded in 1916, and since then has grown and become professionalized.

As part of their visit, Bijie, a city of over 6.6 million people, hosted an international conference on early childhood education where Oranim faculty were the keynote speakers. Oranim faculty presented Oranim's approach to training early childhood educators in Israel. Five hundred students and faculty members attended the conference, as well as the Guizhou regional director of education, heads of preschools, and representatives of other colleges and universities. In addition, Oranim faculty speeches were broadcast to other colleges in the area, reaching approximately 2,000 people.

Lectures discussed the idea of Israel as a start-up nation and what that means for early childhood education, including how Israeli educators encourage creativity, initiative, and independence. They also explored how to integrate art, nature, and free play into early childhood education.

In addition, Oranim faculty visited preschools in the area, with 1,000 students per school. Their Chinese hosts welcomed Oranim faculty with warmth and generous hospitality, both at the colleges and the preschools. They were enthusiastic and curious to learn more about Israel and early childhood education there.

Oranim faculty who visited China in November 2017 included: Professor Yaarah Bar-On, President of Oranim College; Dr. Roberta Bell-Kligler, Director of Oranim International School; Dr. Orit Dror, Chair of Early Childhood Education at Oranim; and Dr. Gail Suskin, Head of Creative Arts in Education Program at Oranim.

### **Delegation from China to Oranim**

Following up on the Oranim delegation to China in November 2017, a delegation of national leaders in early childhood education from China visited Oranim in January 2018. They attended workshops by Oranim faculty on movement, animals, and literature in early childhood education. They also visited a range of innovative early childhood centers in the area, including urban, kibbutz, and a center on the sea that incorporates the sea in education. In addition, they celebrated a Tu Bishvat seder to gain an understanding of including holidays in educational settings.

### **November 2018 Oranim Faculty Visit to China**

Following the educators from China's successful visit to Oranim, Oranim faculty from the Early Childhood Education department were invited to return to China. Dr. Shai Shafir, Chair of the Department of Natural Science and Environmental Education, and Dr. Gail Suskin visited China in November 2018 to lecture at two conferences on early childhood education.

The visit developed connections that will be expanded in the future between Early Childhood Education at Oranim and colleges and early childhood education frameworks in China. Oranim faculty see the partnership with China as a wonderful opportunity to define their own educational approach better; to travel and learn from another culture; and to develop research projects building on the partnership.



*Dr. Shai Shafir of Oranim during November 2018 visit to China*



*Dr. Shai Shafir and Dr. Gail Suskin with partners from China, November 2018*