

# **Governmental Policy Regarding Early Childhood**

**Education:**

**A Suggested Model of Implementation**

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**Ph. D. Thesis**

**Submitted to the Senate of Bar-Ilan University**

**Ramat-Gan, Israel**

**May 2015**

# ABSTRACT

In Israel, the government policy regarding infants and toddlers is inconsistent because of divisions of authority, lack of coordination and power struggles between the different bodies who determine the accessibility and quality of services and frameworks for early childhood education. Maternity leave for parents is also relatively short and is not adequately correlated with the stages of their infants' development. Hence many infants are placed in frameworks outside the home, such as pre-nursery play groups and day-care centers, before they are one-year old. Research has shown that an educational policy that explicates structural-organizational standards that ensure qualitative education and care in early childhood frameworks makes a positive contribution to the relationship between toddlers and care-givers, to their experiences in the frameworks and to their emotional, social and cognitive development.

Most of the frameworks outside the home are privately run and not supervised by the State. Nevertheless, even in some of the frameworks that are recognized by the State, the standards fall below those recommended abroad and they are sorely deficient. Research has shown that this may cause the toddlers developmental problems and have negative implications as they mature.

In the light of the above, a central objective was decided upon in this research:

examination of a model that proposes an efficient and appropriate policy for early childhood education (from one to three-year olds) in pre-nursery play groups and day-care centers in Israel, with the model under examination meeting the emotional, social and cognitive needs of the children.

Hence a model was constructed that examines the connections between the independent variables (the age of the toddler, the frequency of supervision, the care-giver-toddler ratio, the size of the group, the education of the care-giver, the care-giver's training and the educational program) and the dependent variables which relate to the emotional, social and cognitive adjustment of the toddlers in the educational framework via mediated variables that relate to the emotional, social and cognitive attention the care-giver gives the toddlers.

The theoretical framework of the research is based on a combination of theories from the fields of education, psychology, organization, management and economics. Hence Bowlby's "Attachment Theory" was presented which places the mother-child relationship as the significant human attachment responsible for the child's development. Feuerstein's theory of "Human Modifiable Ability" relating to "mediated learning" which takes place via an adult who mediates between the environmental stimuli and the toddler was also presented. Bronfenbrenner's model of "ecological systems" was also introduced as well as a reference to Pianta's work which examines the long-term effect of adult attitudes on toddlers' development. In addition, organizational and economic theories, such as Adam Smith's "Human Capital" theory were included along with the psycho-pedagogical

aspects. Together with all these, the early childhood educational policy in Israel was examined along with the structural variables in some of the OECD countries.

199 care-givers and 54 coordinators who work in pre-nursery play groups and day care centers in the Community Centers' Association in 58 Jewish locations in Israel participated in the research. The participants (all women) responded to 413 questionnaires. In addition, 1,329 toddlers who attend these frameworks were examined. Initially, the coordinators and care-givers, individually, answered the background information questions and questions that relate to the structural and organizational aspects of the educational framework. Subsequently the coordinators answered questions that related to the care-givers' behavior within the frameworks. At a later stage the care-givers answered questions that related to themselves and the toddlers under their care. In addition, observations were carried out along with 17 interviews which largely confirmed the quantitative method.

A perusal of the differences between pre-nursery play groups and day-care centers shows that the care-givers at the day care centers paid more attention to the emotional and social needs of the toddlers than the care-givers at the pre-nursery play groups. However, there was no difference in toddlers' adjustment between the two frameworks.

In both the pre-nursery play groups and the day care centers it was found that care for the toddlers coupled with a well-structured educational program will lead to the toddlers' better adjustment. On the other hand, the more highly-educated the care-givers are, the lower the level of toddlers' adjustment in both frameworks.

In the pre-nursery play groups it is important to maintain a small group, however, improving the care-givers' training and increasing the frequency of supervision lead to a lower level of emotional adjustment.

In the day care centers, frequent supervision, maintaining a low care-giver-toddler ratio which mainly aids the toddlers' social adjustment as well as improving the care-givers' training are important.

These findings were discussed at length in the discussion section and the theoretical, methodological and implications for implementation of the research that related mainly to the consolidation of an organized qualitative policy for early childhood education in Israel were presented.