

BAR – ILAN UNIVERSITY

**The Educational Farm Program and its Effect on
Preschoolers' Perception of Agriculture, Factual
Knowledge and Emotional Aspects in their Drawings**

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Abstract

Educational farms are a known and common educational program in Israel but are scarce across the globe. Learning in educational farms has all the advantages of outdoor learning; the weekly trip to a familiar place enhances the experience and reduces alienation for the students. There are over 40 educational farms across Israel, with more opening yearly. However, the contribution and impact of educational farms on the student's cognitive and emotional aspects has yet to be examined both analytically and empirically, as well as the impact of such visits on the student's perceptions of his/her natural surrounding flora and fauna and their respective place among them.

The following study examined the impact of educational farm visits on preschool children (5-6 years of age) and the following two questions were addressed:

- How do farm visits affect young children's understanding of the term agriculture, their scientific knowledge and their knowledge regarding the origin of vegetables and other foods?
- How do farm visits affect young children's emotional aspects – their perceptions of themselves as a part of the natural environment and their emotions toward it?

Numerous studies have shown that nature excursion and interacting with the natural environment at preschool ages have profound impact on the child's development and perception of the world and continue to affect them into adulthood. However, scarce studies examined the effect of visits in educational/agriculture farm on young children. Therefore, the research sample of this study encompassed 93 preschoolers.

This study involved the following research tools: knowledge questionnaire (Pre-Post), observations, interviews with preschool teachers and the farm staff and analysis of the participating children's drawings (Pre-Post). All data derived from the various research tools, was used to triangulate the results and increase their reliability.

Two preschool classes who attended as an extra-curricular activity are considered the intervention group. These classes visited the educational farm four times a year. These visits were planned so the children will experience different seasons and learn about summer and winter cultivation: planting, seeding, tilling; learning and practicing breadmaking, picking, canning and food preparation.