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The Faculty of Psychology and Education Science

Ph.D. Thesis

Reorganization of the Private Kindergarten
According to Teaching Strategies Addressing Attention Span of Toddlers
Aged One to Two Years

ABSTRACT

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Cluj-Napoca

2012

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I. INTRODUCTION

Key Words: kindergarten, 1-2 years old toddlers, attention span, teaching strategies, group learning sessions (GLS)

During their first two years of life, toddlers need warmth, love, eye contact and personal attention in order to have their personal needs fulfilled. However, in the past few years, we are witnessing a phenomenon that keeps developing among the parents of toddlers in Israel, who, for a variety of reasons have their toddlers placed at an educational / care-giving setting outside the home starting at a very young age (Koren-Kari & Sagi, 2000). These settings did not establish a didactic-pedagogical program and they did not have planned learning sessions since the Ministry of Education is obligated to provide education to children in Israel starting only at the age of three years and up (Dovrat et al, 2005, The inspection law – 1965, Rosenthal, 2000). However, few of the educational settings for toddlers in Israel conduct group learning sessions as early as the age of twelve months.

Group Learning Sessions (GLS) mean, in this study, learning activities conducted by a kindergarten teacher with small groups of toddlers, sitting, listening to her, acting with her, imitating her, creating with her movements and following her instructions. In this sense, the reality is that there seems to be a lack of knowledge, training, strategies and general educational guidance that can inform those educational systems in general, and group learning sessions in particular. It can be said, then, that a gap in knowledge exists, which this study aims to fill in the area of toddlers' education and learning.

Learning occurs due to the students' basic skills and through the use of these skills (Ricklin, 2001). According to research, one of the basic skills required for learning is the ability to focus and maintain an appropriate attention span for an extended period of time (Shargal, 1991).

This study was conducted following a problem that was revealed in kindergartens intended for toddlers. In some kindergartens which applies group learning sessions there was relatively long attention span observed and in some a total inattention observed. This problem was observed and revealed by the researcher for approximately twenty five years since working and directing in public and in private educational systems, as a teacher, as a director of a municipality's education department for early childhood and as a chairperson, CEO and spokeswoman of the Private Kindergarten Organization of Israel including approximately one thousand kindergarten classes throughout Israel serving thirty thousand toddlers at the age of three months to four years.

I.1 The research goals

1. To reveal kindergarten teachers' perceptions regarding toddlers' attention span during group learning sessions.
2. To add an applicable knowledge to educational practice in kindergartens in relation to the teaching strategies in order to extend the toddlers' attention span during group learning sessions.
3. To make a reorganization of the daily agenda in the private kindergarten according to teaching strategies addressing toddlers' attention span during group learning sessions.
4. To develop insights for designing future syllabuses intended for toddlers one to two years old in order to extend their attention span during group learning sessions.

I.2 The research aims

1. To expose the types of teaching strategies used by kindergarten teachers during group learning sessions in regard to the attention span of toddlers one to two years old.
2. To provide an educational strategy model for increasing the attention span of toddlers during group learning sessions.

I.3 The research questions

1. Which types of teaching strategies are used during group learning sessions in a kindergarten for extending one to two years old toddlers' attention span?
2. What are the perceptions of kindergarten teachers in regard to the attention span of toddlers aged one to two years during group learning sessions?
3. What are the perceptions of kindergarten teachers in regard to teaching strategies related to the attention span of toddlers at the age of one to two years during group learning sessions?

I.4 The research general hypotheses

As long as a multiplicity of appropriate teaching strategies will be used by kindergarten teachers so will be the toddlers' attention span extended during group learning sessions.

I.5 The research specific hypotheses

1. Regarding the general hypothesis, we assume that there are a few specific teaching strategies that can be used during GLS, like music, singing, and storytelling. We presume to find a correlation between using these strategies and extending toddlers' attention span.
2. There is no consensus among kindergarten teachers about toddlers' attention span during group learning sessions but we presume to find a correlation between the kindergarten teachers' perceptions and extending toddlers' attention span during GLS.
3. Using appropriate teaching strategies during GLS, like music, singing, and storytelling, we presume that KGTs will find and develop other new strategies using more than three and up to seven new strategies in order to extend toddlers' attention span during GLS.

I.6 The variables of the research

This research contains three variables: Kindergarten teachers' perceptions, Teaching Strategies, and Toddlers' Attention Span. Since the research is about expanding toddlers' attention span we defined it as a dependent variable. The teaching strategies are the tools used in order to extend the toddlers' attention span, therefore it is defined as an independent variable. There was a discussion about the third variable; we tried to define the kindergarten teachers' perceptions as a dependent variable but since the kindergarten teachers in this research didn't change their perceptions and stayed in their position, we decided to define it as an independent variable. This decision is based on the fact that this research did not affect the kindergarten teachers' perceptions but revealed them.

Hence, following the research variable;

Independent variable 1: KGTs' perceptions regarding toddlers' attention span during group learning sessions;

Independent variable 2: KGTs' teaching strategies in order to extend toddlers' attention span during group learning sessions.

Dependent variable: Toddlers' range of attention span during group learning sessions. Table 1 delineates the variables by methods and tools.

Table 1: Variable by Methods and Tools

	Variable	Method	Tool
I	<p>Independent variable 1:</p> <p>KGTs' perceptions regarding toddlers' attention span during group learning sessions</p>	<p>-Observation</p> <p>-Interviews</p> <p>-Documentary analysis</p>	<p>-Protocol of observation</p> <p>-Interview questions and recordings</p> <p>-Curricular document analysis</p>
	<p>Dependent variable :</p> <p>Toddlers' attention span during group learning sessions</p>	<p>-Observation</p> <p>-Interviews</p> <p>-Documentary analysis</p>	<p>-Protocol of observation</p> <p>-Interview questions and recordings</p> <p>-Curricular document analysis,</p>
II	<p>Independent variable 2:</p> <p>KGTs' teaching strategies in order to extend toddlers' attention span during group learning sessions.</p>	<p>-Observation</p> <p>-Interviews</p> <p>-Documentary analysis</p>	<p>-Protocol of observation</p> <p>-Interview questions and recordings</p> <p>-Curricular document analysis</p>
	<p>Dependent variable :</p> <p>Toddlers' attention span during group learning sessions</p>	<p>-Observation</p> <p>-Interviews</p> <p>-Documentary analysis</p>	<p>-Protocol of observation</p> <p>-Interview questions and recordings</p> <p>-Curricular document analysis,</p>

I. 7 The unique population of this research

The research population included six toddlers, four kindergarten teachers and a director of an education department. It was a qualitative research including a small quantitative portion, and a case study (Yin 1989). The data were collected through observations, interviews and curricular document analysis. The data were analyzed using content analysis methods (Shkedi, 2004). The research was conducted during the summer semester at a private kindergarten.

I.8 The importance of the research

Reviewing the literature, it was found that the attention span of toddlers during group learning sessions in private kindergartens has not yet been researched. Moreover, operational activity plans for group sessions of toddlers aged one to two years have still not been written. In addition, even at institutions of teacher training, there was still no emphasis on group learning sessions for toddlers one to two years old. The kindergarten teachers leave the academic world moving directly into the field while they have still not received adequate training that would help them conduct sessions of this kind in order to extend the toddlers' attention span. Our study intends to fill this gap of knowledge.

This abstract presents a brief summary of the thesis chapters. First, theoretical perspectives that underpinned this study are discussed. Then the methodology chosen for this research is presented. Following are the findings that emerged from the various research tools are presented, and finally, conclusions are drawn and recommendations are suggested for further research.

II. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

II.1 Existing definitions in educational research

The research aims and questions, and the issues under his study led to choosing an educational research as a framework for this study. Research is an investigation of an issue for the aim of adding knowledge (Ross, 2005). An educational research is defined as a type of human interaction, and involves the establishment of networks of relationships between the researcher, the participants of the research, the researched environment, and the research educational problem (Bocoş, 2007).

Moreover, the need for an educational research stems from the reality of school systems, in which constant change requires evaluation processes that will ensure the necessity as well as the efficiency of those changes (Ross, 2005). For example, research may be needed in order to examine the utility of newly implemented textbooks or programs, teaching modes or methods, newly suggested resources, such as libraries or technological supplies. An assessment of the level of improvement, or worsening, brought about by those changes can inform the system and guide its practice.

In our research, the interactions that were investigated involved a network of relationship between the researcher, the kindergarten teachers and toddlers, and the environment of the kindergarten in order to research educational issues of toddlers' attention span during group learning sessions.

According to Ross (2005) the educational case study research generally relates to an in-depth study of particular student, classroom or school for finding a nuanced description of the cultural settings that affect education, and a report of the interactions that take place between students in a single class. Hence, our research was conducted by the case study approach in order to study a particular kindergarten with the purpose of producing a new description of kindergarten teachers' teaching strategies that affect toddlers' attention span during group learning sessions, and leading to reorganization of the daily agenda within kindergartens in Israel..

On a critical note, one of the main concerns involved in conducting an educational research is choosing the right methods that will fit the purpose of the study. A research method in educational research refers to a range of approaches utilized to collect data which are to be used for interpretation, explanation, and conceptualization of the investigated phenomenon. Another concern associated with conducting an educational research in the social sciences is associated with ethical practices.

Ethical issues can place researchers in the midst of moral dilemmas that might obstruct the research process in the sense that the data gathered cannot be used. Therefore, great care was given by the researcher regarding attaining informed consent from the participants, preserving anonymity and privacy, avoiding harm done to participants, or discriminating participants (Cohen et al, 2001). In this study, those ethical issues were carefully observed.

Since this research addressed the attention span of toddlers at the age of one to two years, the appropriate teaching strategies used in a kindergarten, and the reorganization of kindergarten agenda that these strategies produced, the theories chosen were learning and development theories, as well as educational change theories.

II.2 Changes in educational organizations

Organizational change is a long and complex process (Schwartz, 1996). A change in education means that educational patterns within the educational institution are replaced by new and different behavioral patterns. Change is intended to assist the school achieve its goals effectively, improve and develop itself and its elements according to its needs and policy. The purpose of educational change is most probably to help educational frameworks achieve their goals effectively by replacing some agendas or practice with better ones (Fullan, 1982). However, despite the significance of educational change for school effectiveness, care needs to be given to the difficulties it may entail.

Obviously, Fullan (1994) maintains that change is often needed in order to obtain certain educational goals, and in order to accommodate for a need when the existing practices are no longer appropriate. Evidently, change is inherent in school practices, because of rapid changes in the world, which in turn causes change in the perception of the role of teaching nowadays. At the same time, it was argued that schools do not react well to change, and the outcome may be resistance to the proposed change. In other words, education systems will have to attend to the dichotomy inherent in the need for change on the one hand, and the resistance to change on the other hand.

Additionally, change is required against the background of the accelerated technological, social and scientific development characterizing our times (Fox, 1995). According to Hargreaves (2000), economic changes and the advancement of science and technology have a great impact on education, and therefore teachers are required to change, since the goal of school is to provide a service that is compatible with the period of time, such as flexibility, direct individuals in different directions of self-actualization, entrepreneurship, responsibility and the ability to work in a team, as well as train the students to succeed under complex situations of uncertainty in a changing world.

With the need for change, thought needs to be put into implementing the process successfully. Gibton (2003) claims that the key to succeed in reorganization exists on two levels: what should be done about reorganization within the educational framework, and what the educational framework does with the resources in order to change the organizational culture. In this sense, successful educational change requires deep consideration and careful facilitation and management.

Fullan (1982) maintained that the success of change processes often depends on the ways by which it is facilitated. According Bridges (1991), change is a process rather than an event. As such, both authors advocate that change has to be facilitated by articulation of difficulties and concerns, and by discussing ways of planning, implementation, and evaluation of the process. In this sense, change processes require time management. In any case, after change is introduced, there will be a new balance in which the change would become part of the organization's new situation (Lewin, 1961).

According to Fullan (1994), despite the advantage to innovations initiated by the field, the latter are unlikely to succeed. Furthermore, authorities alone may not be able to succeed in enforcing kindergartens to change, because without the support of the change makers - the kindergarten teachers - no innovations persist. Therefore, he advocates for a simultaneous top-down and bottom-up forces to carry out the innovation successfully. In other words, integrative change processes are more likely to bring about success in implementing change in kindergartens in particular and in schools in general.

II.3 Changes in early childhood educational settings

Since this research focuses on kindergartens for toddlers, then the changes in early education settings needs to be discussed here. The world of toddlers during early childhood is shaped according to the environment in which he/she lives and develops. This means that society should be committed to making it possible for each child to learn under human conditions in which he/she would be able to utilize his/her potential in the best possible way (Mevorach, 2007). In the following paragraphs, we will discuss the importance of toddlers' participation in pre-school activities.

In the past few years, the world has started to acknowledge the importance of early childhood education. The notion that early childhood, starting from birth, is a time of life that is very significant for the individual's development throughout his/her adulthood has gained reinforcement.

The conclusions of public committees in many countries around the world were published regarding the status of early childhood education and its significance. The

conclusions and recommendations of these committees and studies are unequivocal. They support the idea that high-quality educational settings for toddlers starting from the age of two years onwards are very important and that they serve as a great contribution to the children. However, despite the fact that kindergartens have been in operation for more than 150 years, there have been only few studies that examined the kindergarten organizational structure and functioning (Mevorach, 2007).

In the past century, a lot of professional knowledge in the field of early childhood education and development has accumulated worldwide and in the State of Israel. This knowledge was at the basis of the activity of kindergartens serving as educational institutions, having accepted the children of all of Israel's residents throughout the years – Jews and Arabs.

In a longitudinal study that examined the condition of the pre-school educational system in Great Britain during the years 1997 – 2004 (Sure Start, 2004) among 3,000 students aged 3-7 years who were educated in 130 nursery schools and among 300 students of the same age that were taken care of within a family setting, it was found that the school achievements in the subjects of language and Mathematics for 7-year-old children who attended early childhood institutions prior to entering school, were better than their peers who had been taken care of at their parents' home during this period of time.

Moreover, it was found that a supportive environment and early attendance at the educational system have a significant contribution to the development of children, which is manifested upon their entrance into school. Furthermore, it was proved that attendance in a high-quality pre-school educational system makes a greater contribution to children growing in a weak home environment more than to their peers who come from wealthier families. This means that quality early education has considerable effect on children's further schooling.

It has been further found that the most influential factor on the effectiveness of pre-school educational institutions regarding the advancement of children is the high quality of the teaching staff, which is manifested among other things in the presence of certified teachers possessing pedagogical knowledge and expressing a warm and loving attitude towards the children, the teachers' expertise in the development of children during early childhood age and the teachers' familiarity with the curriculum.

The highest achievements were observed in institutions that attribute a similar amount of significance to the cognitive development as well as the social and emotional development of the children. These institutions focus on high-quality teaching in the areas of language, mathematics and science (Sure Start, 2004). In other words, it is the high quality of the early education input that determines further success in children's schooling.

In summary, early childhood is a critical age for advancing the child's cognition in the future towards adulthood. The quality of the educational staff at the kindergarten, its training and its adjustment to work with early childhood age is very significant.

These findings support our study whose main hypothesis was that if the kindergarten teachers will be more professional and will use teaching strategies that are suitable for the children's age and are more diverse, the toddlers' personal potential will be better realized as well as their cognitive skills, such as their attention span during learning sessions, will expand. This emphasizes the need for reorganization of the agenda in kindergartens, as well as the notion that the purpose of educational change is most probably to help educational frameworks achieve their goals more effectively by replacing some agendas or practices with better ones (Fullan, 1982). The next section addresses private kindergartens in Israel.

II.4 Private kindergartens in Israel and the specific problems

A discussion of private kindergartens is needed here as this was the arena in which the research was conducted. A system of private kindergartens has developed alongside the system of the municipal kindergartens, the state system and the formal system. The notion of a private kindergarten is that it is managed usually by a certified kindergarten teacher who owns the education setting. The private system is serving toddlers and children aged 3 months to 5 years. Certified kindergarten teachers trained by the Ministry of education work with the classes of the 3-year-olds (Rosenthal, 2000). The private kindergartens are currently serving approximately 120,000 infants, toddlers and early childhood children. It usually runs along a full day until afternoon hours.

The private kindergartens usually operate with a smaller number of children than in the formal kindergartens. The ratio of staff per child at the private kindergartens is 1:6 or 1:9 compared to 1:17.5 at the formal kindergartens (Rozenal, 2000). However, there are private kindergartens where there are many children, but then the ratio between the staff and the children is maintained so that when the number of children is higher, so does the number of staff members (educators and caregivers) increase in accordance with the number of children. Private kindergartens operate for many hours throughout the day – 07:00 am up to 4:00 pm, up to 5:00 or even later, in order to accommodate for the parents' long working hours. In this sense, the private kindergarten were established as a result to cater for a need for an alternative day care system for parents whose jobs requires long work days.

The result is that toddlers spend most of their waking hours at the kindergarten. Waking hours are the hours when learning and experiencing take place, and this is why the kindergarten is very important for the toddlers and their families, from the care-giving as well

as the educational aspects. This fact clarifies the need to promote unique teaching strategies that are compatible with the children's age so that children would realize their potential in all developmental areas, namely, the cognitive-linguistic, social, emotional and motor areas.

II.5 Learning and Development Theories

This research addresses toddlers' attention span, therefore, a discussion of learning and development theories are needed here. According to Malitz & Malitz (1993), learning takes place through thinking. The quality of a person's learning is a function of his/her quality of thinking. Ziv & Ziv (2010) add that learning is an internal process of a relatively permanent change in behavior. The initial learning is perceptual. It is learned through the senses as part of a cognitive process of forming a connection between a stimulus and the reaction to it as well as the organization and attribution of meaning to sensory information by the toddler alone and to himself/herself. The toddler uses different types of perceptions: movement, touch, visual and auditory perceptions. Perception is explained in physiological, neurological and psychological terms. Cognitive learning is an active process of re-organization of existing contents forming a new behavior. (Ratzon, 2006). There are many theories about learning but this research is underpinned mainly on three of them:

The Cognitive Learning Theory of Piaget (1962) was focused on the inner cognitive structure. It examined the learning process from the perspective of achieving a transformation within these cognitive structures. From the pedagogical point of view, this theory deals with the processing and transmission of information through communication, explanations and interpretations, a new combination of the components, contrasting, inferences and problem solving (Wenger, 1998). Furthermore, Piaget (1962) identified six stages in what he called the sensory-motor stages in cognitive development. He claimed that these stages are fixed – all children go through them in the same order even if the pace of each child might be different. The key guidelines in Piaget's comprehensive theory in the field of cognitive development are that children are actively involved in building their understanding of the world and that the cognitive abilities at each stage are limited by the type of cognitive structures that are already developed in the child. The children's understanding of the world is limited to what they are capable of knowing through the perceptive skills and motor actions. Piaget emphasized the toddler's role as a beginning scientist who grows from the cognitive aspect through active exploration of the world and building his/her understanding step by step. However, Vigotzky (1978) claimed the role that other people fill when they transfer knowledge or help the toddler explore by himself for knowledge that is already available to the older members of society (Saroff, 2004).

The critics of Piaget disagree with his concept of the wide-range and fixed developmental stages. In addition, they claimed that he did not pay enough attention to the social context and knowledge transferred through society, since the development of different toddlers is not always uniform in all areas (Mussen et al., 1998). Despite the criticism made on this theory, Piaget's six developmental stages embody an umbrella for understanding children's development and growth, and for constructing learning theories, such as Vygotsky's cognitive learning theory.

The Cognitive Learning Theory of Vygotsky (1978) agreed with Piaget's views that the infant is an active learner. He claimed, however, that attention should be dedicated to the social context and the knowledge transferred by society since the development of different toddlers is not always uniform in all areas. Vygotsky, (1978) claimed that children learn while interacting with others who are on a close developmental zone. This area defines the gap between what the child is capable of achieving (the child's developmental level) and what he/she is still unable to do on his/her own, but is capable to do it with the assistance of an adult. Vygotsky emphasized the fact that development depends on learning and that teaching is a tool that promotes the child's development.

In contrast to Piaget, the adult is a person serving as an active and conscious mediator between the environment and the child (Feuerstein, 1980). Despite the obvious differences between the two approaches, their purpose is generally to bring the child to a higher level of cognitive activity and to achieve higher skill in the execution of a specific task (Klein, 1985). Thus, Feuerstein's mediated learning theory is an extension of Vygotsky's cognitive theory.

The Mediated Learning Theory of Feuerstein. This theory assumes that mediation is an instructional behavior based upon the adult's intention to transmit information to the child, make the child focus his/her attention, provide explanations, clarify connections, make him/her take part in emotional experiences and encourage him/her to develop values and a philosophy of the world (Klein, 2008).

The Mediated Learning theory's main goal is not only to raise the activity level but also to lead to learning flexibility, readiness towards learning and the ability to change while making new contacts with the environment (Klein, 1985). In this sense, the kindergarten teachers provide the mediation needed for learning processes to occur, hence their significance in implementing good teaching strategies in their teaching.

II.6 Early Childhood Development Characteristics

In the process of teaching toddlers, the developmental characteristics need to be considered in order to ensure effective learning within the kindergarten.

The Cognitive Characteristics in the Development of Toddlers

The cognitive area involves the processes of information processing that include perception, learning, comprehension and language production, memory and thinking of different types as well as the development of intelligence. The infant possess the ability to distinguish between stimuli as well as the ability to learn and remember. Their abilities keep improving every day as a result of maturation and experience in the environment (Bar-El, 1996).

The Language Characteristics in the Development of Toddlers

At the age of birth to six years, children undergo complex processes in communication and language development, starting from the first cry up to the ability to maintain conversation with young people and with adults and tell about events that have taken place one after another. Children acquire the grammatical rules required for phrasing correct language structures and at the same time they acquire communicative knowledge regarding the appropriate language that fits the circumstances. The language acquisition process occurs in all children in the same sequence of stages and during similar time intervals. However, there are differences between groups of children who speak different languages due to the structural characteristics of the target language, as well as differences between children who speak the same language. These differences are manifested in the pace of development and in the strategy of transition from one stage to another (Berman, 1997). Language develops at the same time with other developmental systems: the cognitive system, the motor system, the social system and the emotional system (Rom et al., 2005).

The Motor Characteristics in the Development of Toddlers

A person's most basic functioning is related to complex activities that include the involvement of gross and fine motor movements. Motor learning is the basis for motor planning, which is the ability to choose the goal of an action that relies on previous knowledge, understand the action process and choose the appropriate strategy to achieve the goal Ratzon (2006).

The Social-Emotional Characteristics in the Development of Toddlers

Human beings are social-emotional creatures. Children reveal emotional and social abilities starting at an early age, allowing them to form relationships with the environment (Klein & Sobelman, 2010). The emotional system makes it possible to absorb process and express emotional experiences (Ratzon,2006). During the first years, the toddler becomes more independent of his/her parents (Saroff et al., 2004). The socialization process is shaped with the help of the peer group. This process includes the acquisition of the basic skills of social norms and acceptable behaviors, the development of complex emotions and logical

thinking. The basic social skills that are acquired in early childhood enable children to maintain coordinated social interactions that include play, conversation and joint problem solving and conflict resolution. Social interaction with peers enable the child reduce his/her dependence on the adult that takes care of him/her, thus contributing to the development of the child's independence. Peers serve as role models in their aggressive behavior as well as in pro-social behavior. As part of the dynamics existing in social and play interactions, children receive positive reinforcement for good behavior as well as criticism for inappropriate behavior. When toddlers understand the social relationship system, they learn to make their behavior more flexible and adjust it to the social environment in order to integrate well (Klein & Sobelman, 2010).

Thus this section shows that the cognitive, language, motor, and social-emotional systems are interrelated and need to develop simultaneously to ensure stability and independence of the child. In the next section the attention span is discussed within the context of toddlers' learning processes.

II.7 The Mechanism of Attention

According to Ratzon (2006), attention is a prerequisite to any conscious action. Effective performance in any kind of function requires that the person attends to the aspects of the stimulus situations that are relevant of that particular person. In other words, attention is a mechanism that makes it possible to focus consciousness on specific stimuli while preventing stimuli that are irrelevant to be distracting.

The physical manifestation of attention in toddlers:

- Control over the consistent action of the eyes when following and focusing on another person or following objects that are being used (Ratzon, 2006).
- General tension of the body muscles, especially the facial muscles: frowning, open mouth, staring at some object or at a person speaking.
- Being interested in a new stimulus (Mahler, 1964).
- Preparedness, tension (Bermetz, 2006).

During the first months of life, infants learn how to regulate themselves so that they would be able to calm themselves in their environment which is loaded with stimuli. In the midst of all the surrounding stimuli, they learn to focus on the things that are relaxing and interesting to them, such as significant figures, voices, touch and smell. This is how infants develop attention towards humans as well as the sensory and emotional stimuli in their environment. All of these serve as a basis for building emotional, social and cognitive skills that help them develop relationships and survive in a world filled with stimuli (Klein & Sobelman, 2010).

Attention span emerges from this discussion as a central capability in any learning process of toddlers.

II.8 Perspectives of Teaching Strategies

A teaching strategy, like a learning strategy, is defined as the various activities intended to achieve a teaching goal in the most optimal way considering the type of task and the learner's characteristics. The most effective learning/teaching strategies are the ones that have the greatest impact on thinking processes (Malitz & Malitz, 1993). The goals of teaching are to motivate and reach balance with the environment. The goal of the 'behaviorists' is to feel enjoyment and avoid pain. The goals of the 'mediation approach' are to make it possible for the child to acquire the tools in each experience that would make it easier to better handle future experiences (Saroff et al., 2004).

Teaching Strategies Integrating Special Tactics for Early Childhood

The strategies used in early childhood educational settings during the interaction with toddlers take into account their cognitive, social and motor needs (Levin, 1999; Saroff et al, 2004; Bar-el, 1996). A review of the teaching strategies that had been identified in this study as contributing to extend the attention span of toddlers is as follows:

Teaching vocabulary Through Recitations and short Stories (Kozminsky, 2002), Creating (Ziv, & Ziv, 2010; Shafir, 2003), Asking Questions (Stoppard, 1992, Malitz & Malitz, 1993) Repetition and Rhyming (Rivlin, 1995), Music (Ron, 2003; Turel, 2008) and Movement Including the Use of Accessories.(Witkover-Friedman,1970; Baucher, 1988).

According to Klein & Sobelman (2010) the best type of learning occurs when children and adults are engaged in an activity together. The activity should be enjoyable and interesting for the children. It should also be appropriate for the educational goals set by the adult caring for the child and suitable, natural and worthy for the child. These strategies seem to be appropriate for the educational goals in toddlers' education. The following section presents the conceptual framework of this study, and addresses the methodological choices made to achieve the goals of this research.

III. THE DESCRIPTION OF THE PRACTICAL PEDAGOGICAL RESEARCH

III.1 The Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework addresses the reorganization of the private kindergarten agenda in accordance with kindergarten teachers' perceptions regarding teaching strategies that are related to attention span of toddlers one to two years old during group learning sessions. The conceptual framework includes characteristics of toddlers' development, kindergarten teachers' perceptions, teaching strategies, attention span, and group learning sessions. A visual representation of the conceptual framework is provided in Figure 1.

Figure1 : The Conceptual Framework of the Study

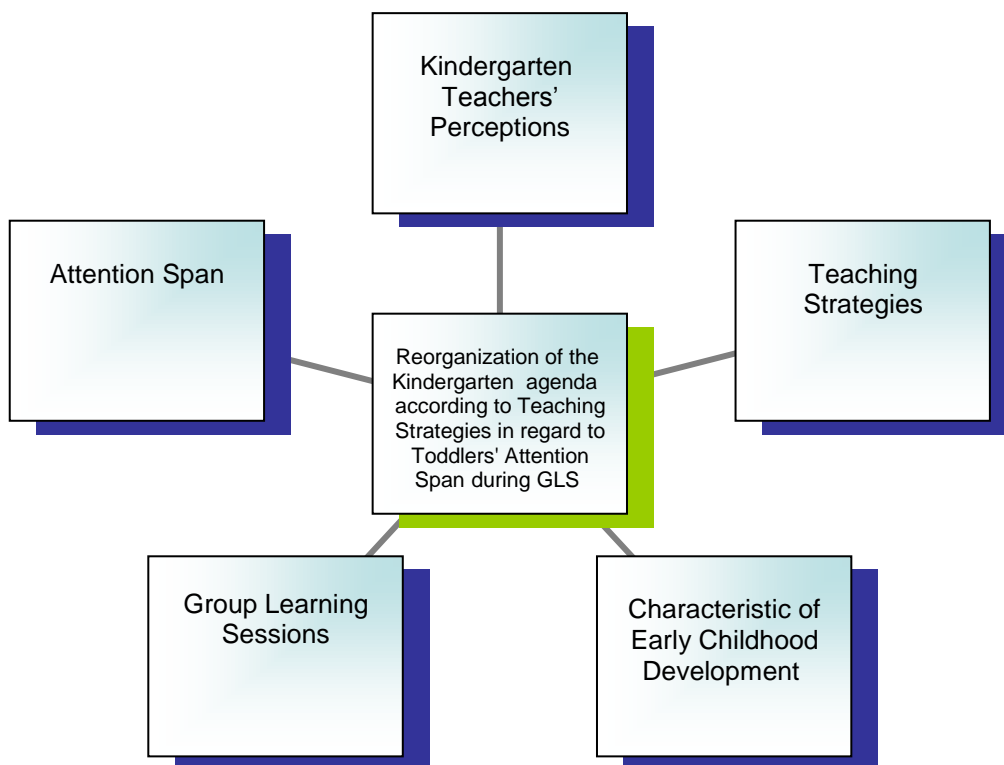


Figure1 shows that kindergartens' agenda should be reorganized according to teachers' perception that are related to teaching strategies regarding toddlers' attention span during group learning session. Kindergarten teachers' perceptions usually guide their practice, therefore it relates to the teaching strategies that they use during group learning sessions in accordance with the attention span of the toddlers.

This study sought to examine the kindergarten teachers' perceptions in accordance with the teaching strategies they used and in how the strategies affected the toddlers' attention

span during group learning sessions. The investigation of all these concepts in the research field led to the term of 'reorganization' in regard to the kindergarten agenda for teaching toddlers and for increasing their attention span.

III.2 The Research Rationale

The quantitative research approach including all of its types did not provide an answer to all the needs of this research since research according to this approach requires a large-scale sampling, makes use of structured measuring tools and its goal is to examine the relationship between variables, confirm or disprove hypotheses (Tzabar, 1997) as well as evaluate and measure human behavior with accuracy, validity and reliability with the help of statistical tools (Hamersley & Atkinson, 1995).

Therefore, the research approach chosen for performing this research was the qualitative approach, including a small portion of quantitative findings. The qualitative research was chosen as the approach suitable for this research since it is descriptive. The data were collected in the form verbal descriptions. The qualitative research excels in openness and flexibility. It came out of the field and obtained its data from the natural surroundings. This made it possible to reach in-depth understanding and describe the entire situation as it was actually being observed. Revealing the perceptions of the kindergarten teachers and decision makers enabled the understanding of internal processes first hand, since the sensitivity, ability to absorb, openness and insight in regard to the occurrences in the field being researched was the main tool in this type of research (Tzabar, 1997).

Hence, our research was conducted according to the case study strategy since the research goal was to examine human behavior, which was made up of fixed patterns, to understand the reality which was investigated including all of its aspects, to understand the processes and their meaning as well as the interpretation given by the subjects to this reality (Yosifon, 2006).

In sum, this research was conducted mainly according to the qualitative research approach, because most of the data collected was in the form of verbal descriptions. Yet, the dependent variable was measured quantitatively in terms of time (minutes). Furthermore, the independent variable 'teaching strategies' was examined qualitatively, namely, types of strategies and their appropriateness to toddlers' age characteristics. At the same time, the teaching strategies were examined quantitatively in terms of the number of teaching strategies employed during GLSs.

III.3 The Research Procedure

The research field is a private kindergarten in Israel's Central Region. The research was focused on the toddlers group. This group included twenty four students aged one to two years who were educated by a team of a certified kindergarten teacher and three caregivers. One of the caregivers served as the person in charge of the classroom during afternoon hours and on the kindergarten's teacher day off. The kindergarten teacher worked part time (half a day) until noon and two long days until the afternoon hours. The researcher is the owner of the kindergarten chain, which has been in operation for the past 17 years. The researcher serves as the principal in this chain. Table 2 presents the data collection methods used according to the research population.

Table 2 : The methods of the data-collection according to studied population by research stage

STAGE	THE METHODS	THE PARTICIPANTS	THE GOAL
1	Open Observation no. 1	2 kindergarten educators (a head caregiver and an aid) 2 groups of 6 toddlers 1-2 years old in group learning sessions	To capture everything occurred within the environment of the group and to find the categories
2	2 Semi-Structured Interviews	* 2 kindergarten teachers	To reveal the educators' perceptions regarding the toddlers' attention span and teaching strategies used during GLS
	1 Semi – structured Interview	* A director of an education department at the municipality	
3	Open Observation no. 2	A kindergarten teacher and another group of 12 toddlers	To collect additional data for the response of the research questions
	Open Observation no. 3	A kindergarten aide and another group of 12 toddlers	
4	Curricular documents analyse	-----	To validate the data by triangulation

IV. THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

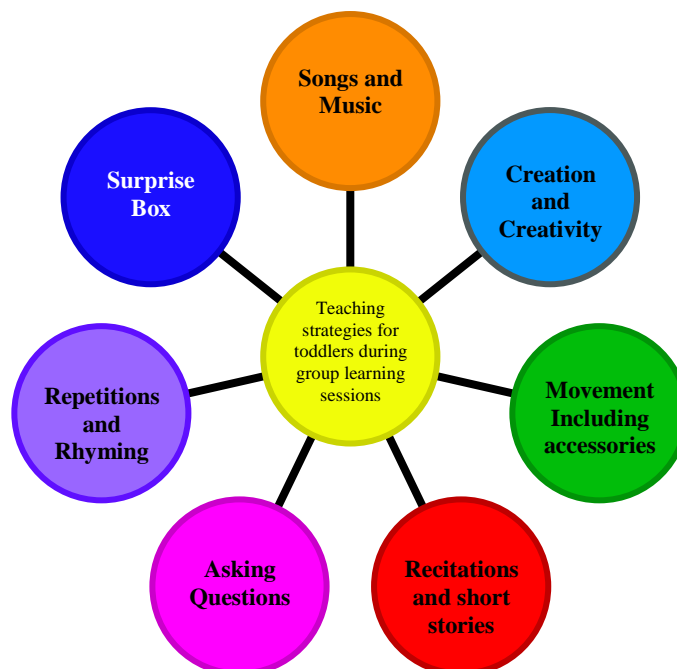
This study addressed the perceptions of kindergarten teachers in regard to the attention span of toddlers aged one to two years during group learning sessions as well as the teaching strategies used during these sessions. In order to examine this issue, the study focused on a group learning session as well as on a group creativity session, which were a sample of the daily activities that took place at the kindergarten as the starting point for examining these questions.

In the findings collected through interviews, observations and the document, there were elements that were outstanding, important, interesting and repetitive. These elements were defined as categories of analysis (Tzabar Ben Yehoshua, 1997). The findings that emerged from the content analysis are presented according to the research questions.

IV.1 Findings Emerging from Research Question No. 1

The content analysis revealed a variety of strategies: 'Recitations and Short Stories', 'Repetition and Rhyming' 'Asking Questions' 'Music' 'Movement including the use of Accessories' 'The Surprise Box' 'Creation and Creativity'. In other words, the integration of multiple teaching strategies was revealed as a strategy to maintain and extend toddlers' attention span during group learning sessions. Figure 2 presents a visual representation of the various teaching strategies as they emerged from the findings. These strategies are presented in **Figure2** as the model of *It's (Integrated Teaching Strategies) Always Play*.

Figure2 : Teaching Strategies Used By Kindergarten Teachers With Toddlers During Group Learning Sessions (The 'It's Always Play' Model)

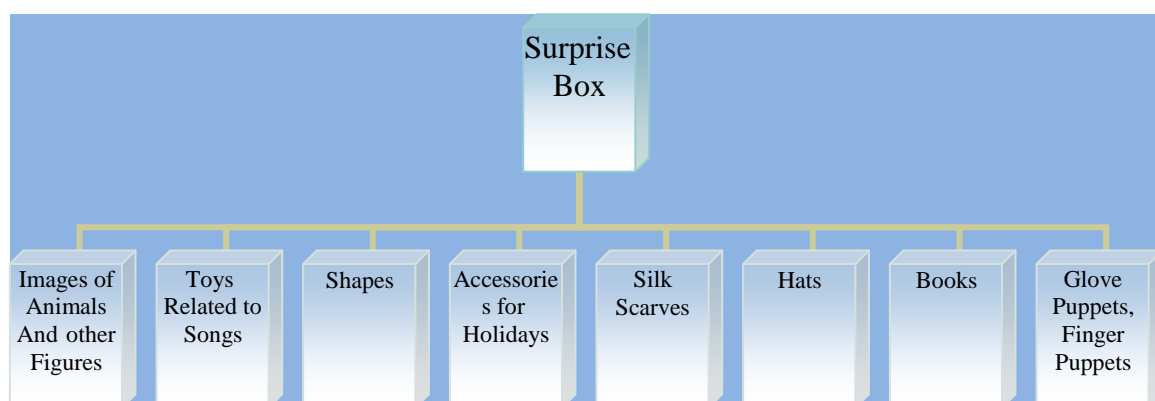


'Always Play' is an acronym in Hebrew, while each letter represents the initial of one of the seven strategies (Bismanovsky & Bocos, 2011). The *'IT'S Always Play'* model is an implication of mediated learning (Klein, 1985; Feuerstein & Egozi, 1987) by mediated teaching for toddlers. It emphasizes that learning in early childhood occurs while the toddlers play and experience things. Learning in groups should integrate a variety of strategies in order to make learning meaningful and enjoyable for the toddlers and in order to extend their attention span. This finding is reinforced by the literature saying that there are attempts leading to creating teaching aides intended to improve or preserve cognitive skills. (Klein & Yablon, 2008), one of which is attention that is considered as a prerequisite to any conscious action (Ratzon, 2006). This model added an implementation knowledge to the studies claiming that an environment possessed of playful character including linguistic experiences promote the toddler's development. (Klein & Yablon, 2008)

Moreover, one of the strategies revealed as a very unique and original one is the 'Surprise Box' strategy.

The surprise box helped in maintaining the toddlers' interest and encouraged them to be mentally involved during the session. The finding showed also that the accessories that came out of the box (see Figure3) demonstrated visually concepts and made previous abstract ideas and terms concrete. Therefore, the surprise box emerged as a teaching strategy for teaching vocabulary and for retaining and raising toddlers' attention during group learning sessions. **Figure3** shows kinds of accessories that were found in some boxes at the kindergarten investigated.

Figure3 : Accessories found in the kindergarten teachers' surprise boxes



The kindergarten teachers testified that the accessories in the boxes are replaced during the week or month accordance with the changing issues and their goals. This finding can be explained in terms of the toddlers' age characteristics. The surprise element is

appropriate to this age group because of toddlers' tendency to cling to objects and not to let go. Thus, the surprise box can be associated with a magic box that contains different objects appearing periodically and maintaining the toddlers' interest and attention. The constant ritual of objects appearing and reappearing relates directly to toddlers' age characteristics in clinging to the familiar as perceiving it as a place of safety and confidence.

IV.2 Findings Emerging from Research Question No. 2

Qualitative findings

The findings of the second question showed that:

- The attention span exhibited by the toddlers during group learning sessions with the kindergarten teachers was approximately thirty minutes.
- Some of the educators perceived that the toddlers' attention span is limited and cannot be extendable for more than ten minutes when some kindergarten teachers perceived that the toddlers' attention span is a mechanism that can be extended.
- The kindergarten teachers' beliefs in the toddlers' capabilities is a pre-requisite for success in extending the toddlers' attention span during group learning sessions.
- The kindergartens perceived that when the right tools are used, then the attention span of toddlers during group learning sessions could be multiplied by three to six times.

Quantitative findings

Quantitative data were collected through the observations. The data relates to the following:

1. The minutes during the session during which there was a change and switching of the teaching strategies.
2. The minutes during the session during which there was a change in the number of toddlers who demonstrated full attention.

Figure 4 includes the quantitative data that were collected during the three observations.

Figure4 : Measurement of Toddlers' Attention Span during GLS (comparison of observations)

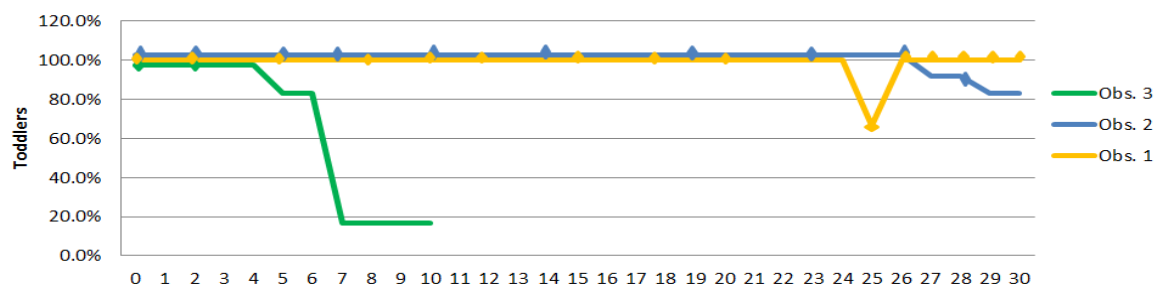


Figure 4 shows the range of the toddlers' attention span during three observations on group learning sessions. Observation No. 1 is represented by the yellow line. Observation No.2 is represented by the blue line and observation No. 3 is represented by the green line. The dots represent the changes of strategies during the sessions in accordance with the time (minutes) the strategy was changed.

By comparing the data from the three observations, we can see that even the use of a large number of strategies (4-7) during group learning sessions is insufficient, even if they are suitable for early childhood. However, the frequency of changing the strategies is critical for maintaining the toddlers' attention span, since without the change of strategies throughout the session it would be difficult if not impossible to maintain the attention span of toddlers aged 1-2 years for just 5 minutes.

In addition, it can also be seen that each change of strategy is made every 3 minutes on the average. The mere change of strategies makes it possible for the kindergarten teacher to maintain the toddlers' attention span up to the 24th minute of the session. Moreover, starting from the 25th minute of the session, some children start losing their attention for some reason, thus affecting the group attention. In order to resume the attention that is lost and in order to maintain the attention of the majority of the toddlers within the group, or of the vast majority of them, it is necessary to change the strategy every minute or every two minutes up to the end of the session.

One could conclude that kindergarten teachers that would be interested in continuing the session up to 30 minutes would have to change the teaching strategy every one-to-two minutes starting from the 24th minute up to the 30th minute. However, the question is whether this extension would be effective, since despite the fact that the session was extended to 30 minutes in general, the toddlers' attention span between the strategy changes was cut off from 3 minutes on the average to 1-2 minutes on the average.

One of the goals of early childhood education and teaching is the extension of the toddlers' attention span as a basic skill that could help in the thinking process as well as in learning. To reach the point that 100% of the toddlers would experience success, i.e. would succeed in sustaining their attention up to the end of the group session, it would be desirable to end the session after 25 minutes. This is due to the fact that during the last 5 minutes of the session, some toddlers would pay the price by experiencing a shorter attention span between the changes in strategies, and it would make them feel frustrated.

In addition, it became evident that the kindergarten teachers as well pay a higher price in the level of effort that they would invest during the last 5 minutes of the session compared to the first 25 minutes of the session. In a 30-minute session – the kindergarten teachers

change their strategy every 3 minutes on the average up to the 25th minute, whereas during the last 5 minutes of the session, they change their strategies every 1-2 minutes on the average.

However, we can clearly see that 80% of the toddlers succeeded anyway to maintain their full attention up to the end of the 30-minute session, which emphasizes the ability of the majority of the children to achieve this task. Therefore, kindergarten teachers that are interested in having 30-minute sessions, would be able to do so if during the last 5 minutes of the session, they would switch strategies every 2 minutes on the average.

IV.3 Findings Emerging From Research Question No. 3

The findings of the third research showed that:

- Specific strategies were used in accordance with specific principles for maintaining the attention span of toddlers during group learning sessions.
- The perceptions of kindergarten teachers in regard to teaching strategies that are related to the attention span of toddlers were manifested in the actual choice of the specific strategies and in the way that they were used during the sessions.
- The caregiver did not have enough teaching strategies that could help her getting the children to concentrate and focus their attention
- The 'surprise box' was perceived as a teaching strategy to be employed during group learning sessions with toddlers. The 'surprise box' strategy was accompanied by a ritual, including an opening chant, putting the accessory back into the box, and ending with waving a good bye gesture.
- There is reorganization in the daily agenda at the kindergarten for toddlers according to the kindergarten perceptions. Much of the agenda includes group learning sessions.
- A unique principle was found during the observation on the activity with the 'surprise box' in the learning session, the "**one-one-one**" principle. According to this principle the kindergarten teacher who acted with the 'surprise box' while integrating a word with an image, used each time one accessory (image) used for each child. **Figure5** presents the 'One One One' principle.

Figure5 : The 'One One One' principle as it appeared during activation with the 'surprise box'

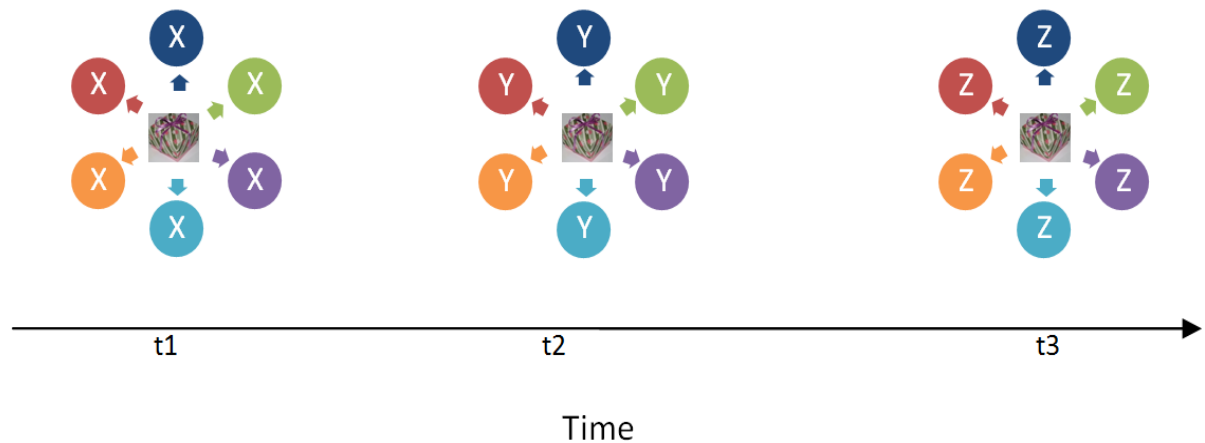


Figure 5 shows a part of a group learning session when the 'surprise box' strategy was activated. The activity described took place three times each time with a different accessory (x, y or z). The whole activity took approximately ten minutes. The six color circles represent the six toddlers participated the session. The letters inside the circles represent the kind of accessories that were given to each child (like: butterflies on sticks, fish puppet, silk scarves). The time of the session is represented by t1, t2, t3. Each time six similar or identical images went out of the box and all the toddlers activated with them on the music sounds. After two or three songs and recitations with the accessory it "went to sleep" in the box and another six similar images appeared. It can be concluded that the principles of "one, one, one", pace, sequence and continuity emerged as important for success of employing this strategy in particular and the *'It's Always play strategy'* in general. This is done in order to extend and maintaining the attention span of the toddlers during group learning sessions.

V. CONCLUSIONS

The focus of this research was on the attention span of toddlers during group learning session. The goals and aims of this research were to fill the gap in knowledge regarding the teaching strategies that can be used in order to extend the attention span of toddlers during group learning sessions, to recommend a reorganization in kindergarten teachers' perceptions according with the toddlers' attention span and to offer a reorganization in the private kindergartens' daily agenda in order to increase the toddlers' attention span. The goals and aims of the research were achieved. This chapter presents partial conclusions drawn from the discussion of the findings in the order of the research questions.

V.1 Factual Conclusions

Conclusions in Accordance with Research Question No. 1

- Seven specific strategies are used by kindergarten teachers as a tool for teaching toddlers' world wide knowledge and new vocabulary and especially for increasing their involvement and extending the toddlers' attention span during group learning sessions.
- An integration of multiple teaching strategies is a new model of teaching strategy for extending toddlers' attention span during group learning sessions. This new model is called: '*It's Always Play*'.
- A new teaching strategy was found: "*The Surprise Box*".

Conclusions in Accordance with Research Question No. 2

In order to extend toddlers attention span during group learning sessions the kindergarten teachers should believe in the toddlers' capabilities and should have positive perceptions in regard to the toddlers' attention span.

Figure6 and **Figure7** show the effects of the kindergarten teachers' perceptions on toddlers' attention span during GLSs.

Figure6 : The Virtuous Circle: The Effect of Negative Perceptions of Kindergarten Teachers on the Attention Span of Toddlers during Group Learning Sessions

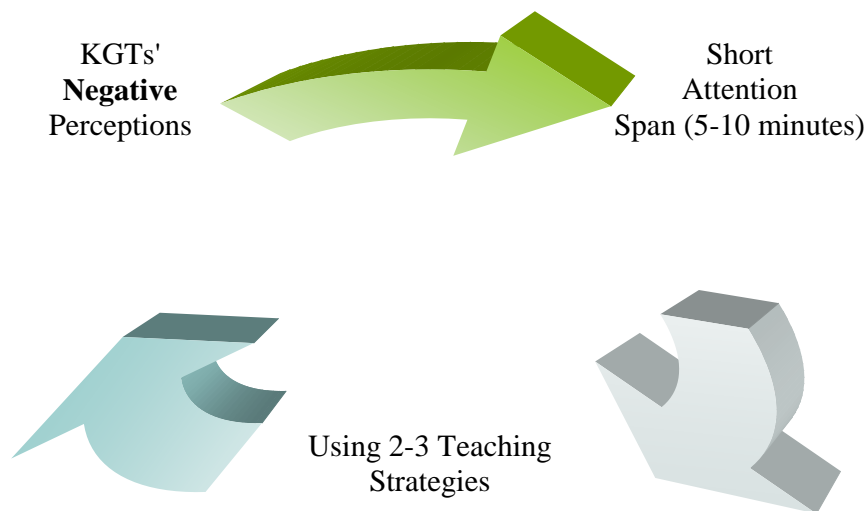


Figure7 : The Virtuous Circle: The Effect of Positive Perceptions of Kindergarten Teachers on the Attention Span of Toddlers during Group Learning Sessions

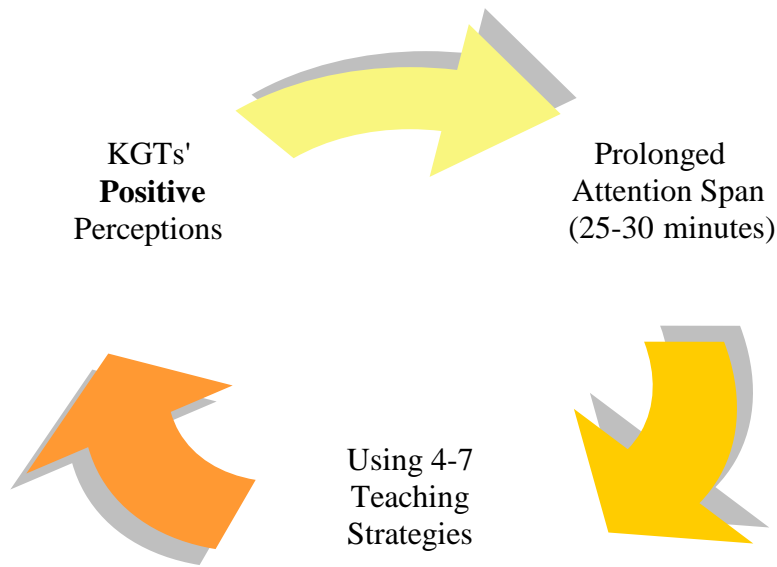


Figure 6 and **Figure 7** show that whenever the kindergarten teachers thought that it was impossible to extend the attention span of toddlers to more than ten minutes – this way of thinking guided their behavior and actions. They used only two or three strategies during the group learning sessions. Thus the toddlers' attention span was short. Then, while they found that the toddlers' attention span was short they believed they could not extend it any more so the next session they used again only 2-3 strategies and so forth. (Figure 6)

On the other hand, whenever the kindergarten teachers thought that it was possible to extend the attention span of toddlers to more than ten minutes – this way of thinking guided their behavior and actions and they succeeded to extend the toddlers' attention span up to more than thirty minutes by using more strategies of the *'It's Always Play'* model (Figure 7). Thus, contrary to the literature, it is indeed possible to extend the attention span of toddlers aged one to two years during group learning sessions. It can be concluded that kindergarten teachers' perceptions affect the ability of toddlers in extending their attention span during group learning sessions.

Moreover, the kindergarten teachers assigned significance to the number of strategies used when talked about the attention span of toddlers during group learning sessions.

Figure 8 presents the range of the toddlers' attention span according to number of strategies used by the kindergarten teachers during the group learning sessions.

Figure8 : Attention Span of Toddlers in Relation to the Number of Strategies Used during GLS

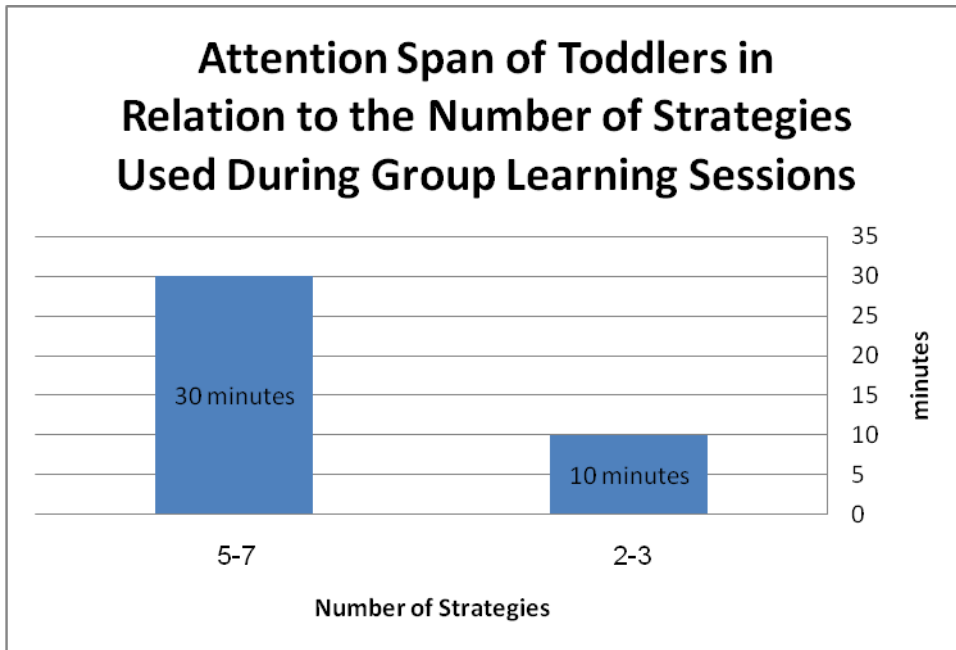


Figure8 shows that through the use of the "Integrated Teaching Strategy" it was possible to extend the attention span of toddlers during group learning sessions since the more strategies were used so will it be possible to maintain a longer attention span among the toddlers.

Another interesting conclusion drawn from the findings relates to reorganization of the kindergarten daily agenda. The daily agenda must include many group learning sessions for extending the toddlers attention span. Figure 9 describes the layout of the group learning sessions during the daily agenda.

Figure9 : A layout of Group Learning Sessions (GLS) During the Daily Agenda in a Private Kindergarten as Emerged from the Curricular Document (personal proposal)

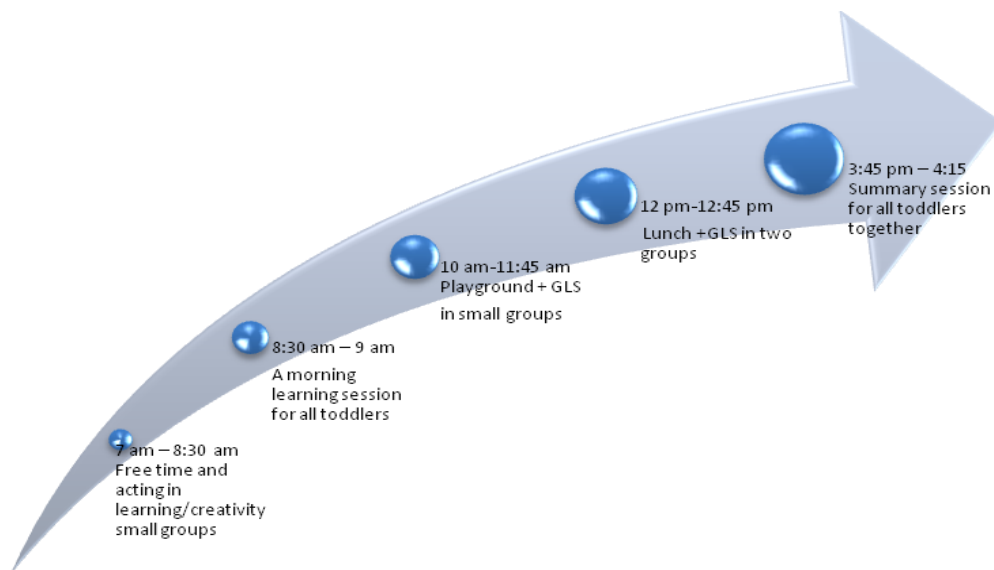


Figure 9 shows that in the private kindergarten there are five sessions that took place during the day although the schedule can be changed from one kindergarten to the other.

Conclusions in Accordance with Research Question No. 3

The duration of the attention span of toddlers during group learning sessions depends on the number of appropriate strategies the kindergarten teachers use during the group learning sessions. The learning in groups with toddlers should integrate at least four different strategies from the *It's Always Play model* in order to make learning meaningful and enjoyable for the toddlers and in order to extend their attention span up to thirty minutes in one learning session.

Moreover, kindergartens' perceptions in accordance with toddlers attention span affect the selections of strategies as presented at figure 10 that shows the relationship between the kindergarten teachers' perceptions regarding the attention span and the selection of teaching strategies as well as between the teaching strategies used during a learning session and the attention span of toddlers during the group learning sessions. It can be further concluded that kindergarten teachers whose perceptions was negative in regard to the attention span of toddlers during group learning sessions chose to use two or three teaching strategies and prepared a short session for the attention span that could be expected according to their opinion. This was also how the outcome of their decision emerged.

Figure10 : The Effect of the Kindergarten Teachers' Perceptions on the Selection of Teaching Strategies From the 'It's always play' model as well As the Session Process and Its Outcomes

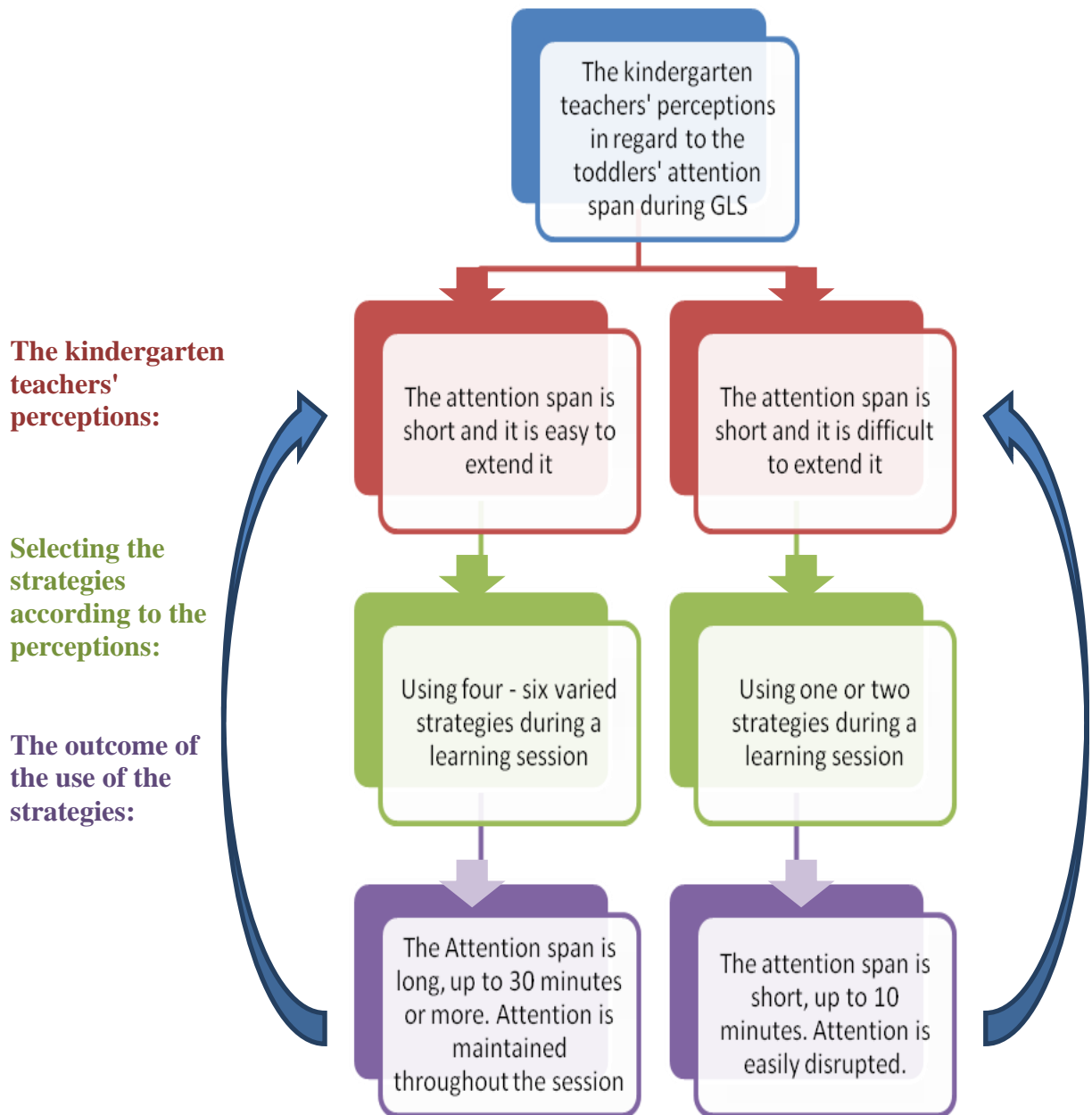


Figure10 shows the circular effect between the variables. The figure shows that there was a relationship between the kindergarten teachers' perceptions regarding the toddlers' attention span and the selection of teaching strategies out of the model *'It's Always Play'* as well as between the teaching strategies used practically during the group learning sessions and the toddlers' attention span.

As the caregiver expected, the session ended after only ten minutes. However, kindergarten teachers whose perceptions in regard to the attention span was positive, chose to act through the use of a large number of varied strategies, which helped them succeed in maintaining the attention of toddlers during sessions that last up to 30 minutes or more.

V.2 Theoretical Conclusions

On the theoretical level, the evidence shows that toddlers one to two years old can learn during group learning sessions. In the kindergarten there are group learning sessions that take place several times along the day. During those sessions there is a way to increase the attention span of toddlers.

Moreover, the children's attention is like a rope that tends to get loose and is expected to occasionally be stretched by the kindergarten teacher through the use of unique techniques. The kindergarten teacher for early childhood is somewhat of a magician taking a different rabbit out of his/her hat each time, like a surprise box for example.

Furthermore, the communication with a group of early childhood children has to be "juicy" and include a variety of strategies, rather than dry and boring. "Dry" communication during a session makes the attention span shorter and as a result it makes the session last for a shorter period of time, while "juicy" communication which is more varied helps achieve a longer attention span and extend the learning session with the toddlers. The toddlers' attention is a flexible system that can be extended during group learning sessions when multiple teaching strategies are used by skilled and knowledgeable kindergarten teachers.

Finally, this research introduces a reorganization of the perception of the literature and the ministry of education in Israel, by revealing the need of including many groups learning sessions in kindergartens' daily agenda for toddlers aged one to two years in order to increase their attention span.

V.3 The Contribution to Knowledge

The theoretical contribution of this study is in expanding the knowledge in early childhood education and teaching during group learning sessions. This new knowledge is also a practical addition to Piaget, Vygotsky and Feuerstein's theories from the aspect of early childhood education. This new knowledge can serve as a strategy for change, improvement and promotion of educational processes in early childhood like toddlers' attention span during group learning sessions.

In summary, an image of a magician taking a rabbit out of his hat was chosen to describe the new model 'It's always play', coming out of the "hat" of the development and learning theories.

Figure11 : An image of the 'It's Always Play' model



Our new model 'It's Always Play' is a product developed as an integrated teaching strategy based on the sensory-motor stage in cognitive development of Piaget, the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) theory of Vygotsky and the mediated learning of Feuerstein.

The model "It's Always Play" contributes to the expansion of knowledge by implementation-educational knowledge aspect at the kindergarten in relation to the teaching strategies that could extend the attention span among toddlers one to two years old during group learning sessions in kindergartens. This new model can help new kindergarten teachers who work with intervention programs to succeed teaching toddlers and extending their attention span in group learning sessions from their first days in toddlers' education.

This study contributes to writers of syllabi for kindergarten teachers' training programs, in their search for alternative ways to educate the next generation and have it

equipped with the best tools for effectively coping with the challenges of tomorrow's education world (Passig, 2000).

V.4 Research Innovation

This study is innovative from several aspects:

First and foremost, the subject investigated is new in the literature. Not enough studies were found in this area of teaching strategies for a group of toddlers in regard with their attention span, since the attention span of toddlers is usually investigated in relation to special education with lack of attention and concentration, but not in relation to normal developmental toddlers.

In addition, a new type of population was investigated: a group of six and twelve toddlers one to two years old during group learning sessions in a kindergarten.

Moreover, a new way of teaching toddlers in kindergartens was revealed by a new model: *"Integrated Teaching Strategy (It's) Always Play"* for teaching toddlers, improving and extending their attention span during group learning sessions. This way, a new theoretical knowledge was revealed about the ability of kindergarten teachers to increase the attention span of toddlers during group learning sessions.

Furthermore, this topic of conducting learning sessions in groups as early as the age of twelve months is a breakthrough, especially when it is presented against the perceptions of the Israeli Ministry of Education and the decision makers at the municipalities who believe that it is possible to teach toddlers in groups within educational settings starting only from the age of three years.

Finally, a new teaching strategy was revealed: *'The Surprise Box'* found in the field investigated as a unique strategy for increasing toddlers' attention span during group learning sessions and was not found as such in the literature (Bismanovsky & Bocos, 2011). But the most important innovation is the addition to the perceptions in the literature that was done in accordance with the capability of toddlers aged one to two years to extend their attention span during group learning sessions up to thirty minutes and more.

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