

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH DOCUMENTATION

Processes of Change Undergone by Educators in the Haredi Community

(Comparing men and women)

With Reference to the Challenged Child

as a Result of the

“Active Nurturing Playground” Project

Submitted by

The Children’s Division, EZER MIZION

Simone Wolfson, Developmental Occupational Therapist, MA

Malka Stoler, Developmental Physiotherapist, MA

Sponsored by the Bernard Van Leer Foundation

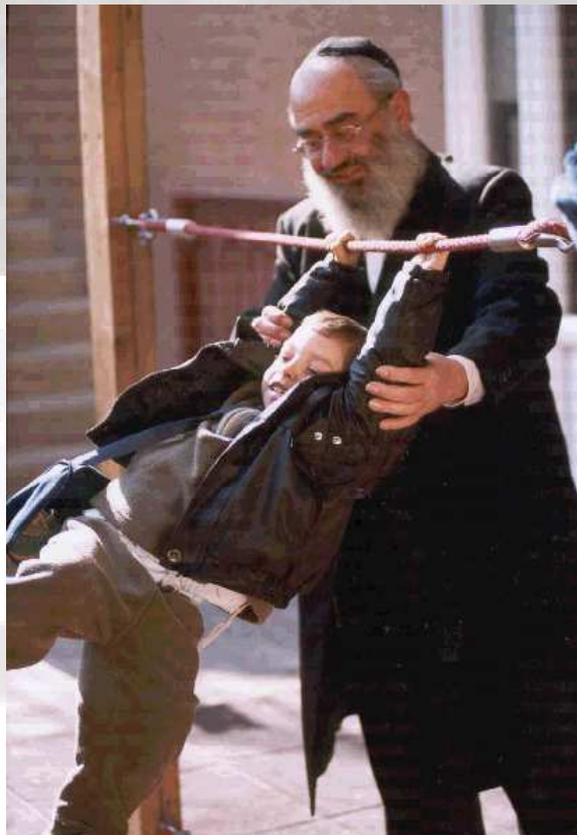


Table of Contents

Abstract.....	5
Personal Introduction.....	7
Literature Review	11
1. The Haredi Community	13
1.1 The Haredi Community as a “Learning Society	13
1.2 The Haredi Community as a "Learning society" from a Historical Perspective.....	14
1.3 Haredi Women and Men in the Current Family-Education Context.....	17
1.4 The Torah Educational System - Kindergartens	21
2. Processes of Change	29
2.1 Processes of Change in Educational Frameworks and in Educators.....	29
2.2 Processes of Change in Haredi Society	36
2.3 Educators Attitudes towards Children with Difficulties	41
2.4 Culture-Sensitive Intervention Programs as an Impetus for Processes of Change	48
2.5 The “Active Nurturing Playground” Project	54
Methodology	61
I. Research Method	61
II. Research Field	63
III. Research Tool.....	65
IV. Research Significance in Relation to Gender.....	65
V. Research Significance in Other Realms	66
VI. Research Limitations	67

Findings and Discussion.....	69
1. Profile of the Challenged Child from the Educator’s Perspective.....	69
1.1 Characteristics of the Challenged Child (before the Intervention Program).....	70
1.2 Beliefs, Perceptions and Feelings concerning the Challenged Child (before the intervention program).....	75
1.3 Means of Coping with Challenged Children (before the Intervention Program).....	82
1.4 Characteristics of the Challenged Child (during the Intervention Program).....	87
1.5 Beliefs, perceptions and feelings concerning the challenged child (during the intervention program)	90
1.6 Means of coping with challenged children (during the intervention program).....	93
Section Summary	97
2. Perception of Professional Capabilities of Educators	99
3. Empowerment.....	103
3.1 Self-empowerment of the Educators (men and women)	103
3.2 Empowerment With Reference to the Challenged Child	108
3.3 Empowerment with Reference to the Parents of Challenged Children.....	109
3.4 Empowerment with Reference to Working with all the Kindergarten Children.....	112
Section Summary	113
Summary.....	115
Bibliography	123
Appendix.....	131
A. Questionnaires	
B. Brookdale Research Institute Interview Questions	
C. Contact Information, Mission Statement	
D. Photo Montage of senso-motor activities from the project	

© 2007 All rights reserved by Ezer Mizion. Reproduction only with permission from copyright holder.

Abstract

The current research examined processes of change reported by kindergarten educators in the Haredi (ultra-orthodox) community, (women in contrast to men) with reference to the developmentally challenged child, observed following participation in “The Active Nurturing Playground” - an early intervention program. In addition, the research investigated the gender orientation and cultural context of these processes.

The chosen research method is a qualitative research method called Action Research in Education and Ethnographic Research, utilizing both an open-ended and a partially structured questionnaire that was constructed and distributed among 60 educators - kindergarten teachers, assistants and “melamdim” (male teachers in the Haredi community). The anonymous questionnaires were distributed at two points in time during the course of the intervention program: approximately half a year after its inception and towards the end of the program’s second year.

Findings indicate the existence of two main processes in the educators. Firstly, the perception of the child with difficulties as a “poor” child who would not realize his potential in a community changed into a perception of a child presenting a challenge. Secondly, a process of professional empowerment took place among both women and men, in reference to themselves, the developmentally challenged child’s parents and kindergarten children in general. In addition to professional empowerment, both “melamdim” and assistants acquired a more clearly defined professional identity.

Nonetheless, there were essential differences in the process undergone by women as compared men, mainly influenced by the cultural-gender roles of men and women in the Haredi community. The research indicates that following the intervention program, the female kindergarten teachers recognized the attributes of feminine network surrounding them (other teachers, assistants and mothers) and enlisted their aid in promoting the challenged children in

their kindergarten. They saw the training program as part of a specialization process rendering them more sensitive and empathetic to the challenged child and his parents. However, their approach continued to be practical and achievement-oriented. The “melamdim”, in comparison, referred to the training program as a turning point. Like the women, they reported the formulation and implementation of a practical approach in their work with developmentally challenged children and their parents. However, they did not lose sight of the emotional dimension of their attitudes towards the children that had existed to begin with.

This research is a pioneer in its attempt to expose the perceptions, beliefs and emotions of Haredi educators towards developmentally challenged children, raise awareness and promote issues pertaining to the challenged child. This study can also serve as the basis for researching culture-sensitive intervention programs that will promote processes of change in educators, in general, and in educators in traditional communities, in particular.

Personal Introduction

The children's division of Ezer Mizion is staffed by four women who are developmental therapists. We share a room and a joint practice and constitute somewhat of a secular island in the ultra orthodox organization of Ezer-Mizion. In addition to our work as project directors, the four of us have taught four courses for developmental assistants within the community. We train them and supervise the quality of their work. We counsel families and health, educational and special education professionals and we also teach in teacher seminaries.

Over the years we – the researchers - have noticed that boys with minor signs of developmental challenges were referred to the children's division for developmental treatment only at the age of 6-8. In contrast, it was easily discernable that girls were being sent to the center at the age of compulsory kindergarten. The knowledge that within the Haredi educational frameworks for boys there was no infrastructure to assist in the identification of kindergarten aged boys with slight difficulties, led us to think about a possible solution to the problem. Our past developmental experience, the professional insights that we had obtained and the unique characteristics of the community from a cultural, educational and ideological perspective gave birth to the first "Active Nurturing Playground" - an early intervention program.

The current format of the nation-wide program was preceded by a "pilot" project in the city of Bnei Brak and an even earlier "mini-pilot" in the Tel-Stone Talmud Torah, headed by Rabbi Label. Rabbi Label allowed us to implement the program on a volunteer basis in his institution's kindergarten. The educational staff was comprised of both female and male (melamdim) kindergarten teachers.

Both before the "mini-pilot" and following it, we did extensive preparation work for five years with the management level of Ezer Mizion and with various highly acclaimed rabbinical leaders, from different sectors in the Haredi community, in order for the project to be accepted.

Many questions were raised about the project and eventually the process was endorsed and blessed by them and by Rabbi Steinman, the highest Torah authority in the community.

The process was long but fascinating. When one door opened, two others closed. A large dose of patience and forbearance was required to survive the process. At first, the overall project met with grave reservations. This came both from Ezer Mizion management, who balked at leading a nearly revolutionary maneuver in the Haredi community and from Rabbis who feared the introduction of developmental therapists, and women at that, into the educational autonomy of the Talmud Torah system.

Despite the fact that in personal and group meetings, the directors and the esteemed Rabbis expressed their belief in the need for an infrastructure that would help identify and reduce developmental difficulties, no Talmud Torah director wanted to be the first to open the gates of his institution to the project. In actual fact, there are approximately 3-4 children at developmental risk in each kindergarten in the overall population. Taking care of them in secret, if they have been identified, was one thing. Declaring their existence by the light of day was another. The transition from one position to the other was a process of change that required its own time to ripen.

It was important to understand that we were part of a world that we would perhaps never fully understand. This understanding and the passage of the years nourished the humility warranted from a person working in a community different from his/her own and the ability to observe without rushing to judge.

Following the success of the “mini-pilot”, we were able to convince the heads of the education department in Bnei Brak to take part in the project and to allocate a budget for playground equipment to be installed in the yards of the kindergartens that would participate in the project and the training program in Bnei Brak. This paved the way for several Talmud Torah’s to join the project. They understood the importance of the project in creating a developmental

environment that would enrich all of the children as well as grant tools to identify and reduce the developmental difficulties of children at risk. However, at this stage, suspicions were still high and many other institutions abstained from joining the initiative. It is only now, six years after the project took off that there are many applications from the field requesting permission to join the project.

When we look back at the process of building the training process, we can easily recognize its open message of providing a relevant developmental body of knowledge. However, much emphasis had been placed on creating a non-judgmental learning environment and on developing observation and description skills, as opposed to the ability to diagnose and define children's difficulties professionally. This climate was necessary, in our opinion, in order to foster processes of change and to establish non-judgmental attitudes regarding the importance of movement and play in early childhood; in particular for children exhibiting minor difficulties.

In addition, when we chose developmental professionals to teach the educational staff, we deemed it important to choose people who were able to work in a community different than their own; people sufficiently open to dare cope with the stereotypes that would emerge in their encounter with the Haredi community; people with the ability to teach after having “placed their own personal baggage aside”.

Over the years the project has been running, many more playgrounds have sprung up at the instigation of the municipality. Many projects involved in meeting the needs of children with developmental difficulties have been added on at various Talmud Torahs. Many articles have been written in this context in the Haredi press. We do not presume to accredit all these changes to the "Active Nurturing Playground" project. Nonetheless, the project undoubtedly has proven a catalyst for coping with issues that were previously hidden or of which there was little awareness.

Whereas in the past we would receive letters from Talmud Torah directors that “thank G-d there are no such problems in our institution and therefore, we are not in need of instruction”, we currently receive many letters thanking us and saying “how moved we were by the process of saving tender lives”.

Over the years, the project has flourished and grown, changed directions and taken on expected and unexpected dimensions to such an extent that, at times, it seems to be out of our hands.

Sometimes there are rough patches when it seems like everything is on the verge of collapse; a sudden “pothole” that we fall into, usually due to a religious-ideological misunderstanding on our part or the part of the teaching staff. Then surprisingly, the pothole disappears and a door opens even wider than before.

At times, it seems we are being led by a force way beyond ourselves; a force that checks us, places obstacles in our path and then allows us through. In any case, the project as a whole, this documentation included, are part of our journey that can no longer be stopped. To us, it is no longer just a project that we are directing; it has become part of who we are and not only our part of our professional selves. We feel very blessed to be a part of it.

Literature Review

In the past decade, there have been many studies in the field of education, health and the humanities that stress the importance of early intervention, placing an emphasis on the child and his/her family and on the community as the service provider (Guralnick, Conor & Hammond, 1995; Shonokoff, 1996). The literature also emphasizes the formulation of intervention programs that match the needs of the child; his/her culture and agents of change, meaning his/her family and educators (Stephenson & Mckey, 1991; Klien, 1996).

In light of the importance of creating an intervention program suited to the culture of the child and his/her agents of change, it is important to address the cultural context in which the early intervention "Active Nurturing Playground" program is implemented. This context is the Haredi community. Therefore, it is well advised to detail the roots of its value system; its men and the women, in a family-education context and the educators (the "melamed"/kindergarten teacher") who staff its kindergartens in the Talmud Torahs (primary orthodox school system for boys) in which the intervention program is actually implemented.

The research question examines from a gender perspective the different processes of change undergone by male and female Haredi educators following the project conducted in kindergartens, with reference to the child with developmental difficulties. It also refers to processes of change and resistance to change; to processes of change in educators and the principles of early culture-sensitive early childhood intervention programs, including the "Active Nurturing Playground", as the impetus for a process of change.

1. The Haredi Community

1.1 The Haredi Community as a “Learning Society”

The Haredi community exists within the multi-colored tapestry of the Israeli society, its name derived from the Hebrew word “hared” (fearful) not in the sense of fear, but in the sense of pedantic observation of the word of G-d (Friedman, 1991). Haredi society is characterized by a unique dress code, residence in primarily Haredi areas, independent educational institutions, leadership and a legal system apart from the national one. These external characteristics distinguish the community from secular society. However, along with these characteristics, there are more essential ones defining a society in which most of the men continue learning in Yeshivot (rabbinical college) for many years after they have married. This has created a society of “scholars” that differentiates them from the other orthodox-Jewish communities in Israel and abroad (El-Or, 1992). Friedman (1995) who has studied the community for many years has termed this phenomenon the “learning society”, explaining that Haredi society is a “learning society” in which the decisive majority of men study in Yeshivot and “Kollelim” (Yeshiva for married men) and whose women study in teachers seminaries, which will enable them to support a family in addition to their traditional roles. El-Or (1995) who has studied the lives of women in the Hassidic Gur community, expands the term “learning society” to include women learners as well. Though women are not obligated to study Gemara (Talmud), the education they acquire in the seminary and all through their lives in incessant “sheurim” (classes) qualify them as learners as well

Paradoxically, this model of a learning society has been made possible by the change in status of the Haredi woman both in education and in occupations outside the home. This change occurred after the WWII with the establishment of women’s study groups that began in 1917 and continues to date. Moreover, this change could only have occurred as it did within the

context of the developments in secular society during that period of time (Friedman, 1995; El-Or, 1998).

1.2 The Haredi Community as a "Learning society" from a Historical Perspective

WWI and the Soviet Revolution, on the one hand, and the Balfour Declaration, on the other, influenced the younger generation in Eastern Europe as it undermined traditional lifestyles. In addition, social and economic changes, bringing modernization and industrialization, disrupted the economic status of part of the Jewish population and forced even young women to enter the labor market and help with the family livelihood. These women who went to work were exposed to the activities of the Jewish labor parties, revolutionary ideas, general education and European culture. This led to them internalizing their rights to formal education, in contrast to the boys who studied in “Batei Midrash” (house of study) and were detached from the local language, culture and from revolutionary ideas. This created a situation in which the young man learning Torah became less knowledgeable in these realms in relation to the 'educated' woman. A similar situation existed in the settlement of the Land of Israel. The young women looked down upon the Yeshiva students as being less equal than them (Friedman, 1999). The distance that the women took from the values of religion and tradition made the rabbinical leaders realize that women should be given education within a Jewish framework in order not to lose them to foreign attractions. The religious party that saw itself as the natural patron of this movement found it easier to allow a broader-based education to women than to grant the rights to secular study to the young men studying Torah. The first teacher's seminary, which taught both religious and secular subjects, was established in Poland at the beginning of the last century. Following the Aliyah to Israel from Germany and Poland, “Beit Yaakov” (The House of Jacob – Teaching Seminars for Haredi Women) schools were opened in Israel teaching a wide range of subjects in Hebrew. However, these were private schools, as Agudat Yisrael (a

religious party) did not have the funds to support them. After the establishment of the state there was a turning point in the Haredi educational system, with the state recognizing them and allocating funding for them (Stoler, 1997). The elementary schools of “Beit Yaakov” (for girls) and “Talmud Torah” (for boys) were included for the first time within the framework of the new state budgeting of the Free Education Law. This fact enabled parents to send their girls for further education in high school and teachers seminaries. It also had a decisive influence on the number and status of the Yeshivot and of the seminaries for female teachers and women kindergarten teachers. Following the waves of Aliyah from Europe, after the Holocaust, and from the Islamic countries, a need emerged for training many male teachers (melamdim) and kindergarten teachers to teach in the various educational institutions (Friedman, 1995). The new reality that included educated women with the capacity to earn a regular salary thus supporting their families did not yet ensure their willingness to marry a "Talmid-Chacham" (learned bible scholar). It was necessary to find an ideological infrastructure that would prompt women to choose a scholar as a spouse along with the hard life that went along with this choice. This lifestyle meant that a woman undertook the livelihood of the family and the raising of the children, while her husband focused exclusively on studying Torah. The necessity of presenting marriage to a Bible scholar as an ideological goal further increased in the reality of Israel at the time of its establishment. This reality was characterized by the pioneering ideal and the devotion exhibited by secular youths reflected at all levels of life: in settlement, on the Kibbutz, and in underground movements. This reality attracted Haredi youth because it involved dimensions of self-sacrifice and making due with little. This phenomenon caused many religious youngsters to abandon religion and others to have doubts about their path. In response, Rabbis persuaded Haredi youths to return to religion, while Rabbi Wolf – the director of the Beit Yaakov seminary in Bnei Brak implored women to marry scholars, to raise a generation of "Talmidey-Chachamim" and to undertake the burdens of making a living. This

call to women enlisted the help of one of the basic tenets of Jewish religious culture: the partnership between Yissaschar and Zevulun (two of the sons of Jacob). Just as Zevulun supported the scholar Yissaschar and thereby enjoyed the fruits of his scholarship in this world and in the next, the young woman would be entitled to the benefits of her husband's scholarship in this world and in the world to come (Friedman, 1999). It is interesting to see that choosing such a life implies a clear empowered message whereby the young Haredi woman desires to reap benefits from Torah scholarship equal to those of her husband. The model of a marriage between a Torah scholar who continues his studies in a "Kollel" and the graduate of a Beit Yaakov seminary, who raises the children according to the precepts of Torah, has become an established model of marriage in the Haredi community in Israel and abroad. (Friedman, 1995).

The model of a woman teacher, who makes a living and a husband who studies Torah is sought after, but not as plausible as it was in the past. A woman who finds employment as a teacher is considered lucky. This job is valued for its share in educating the next generation to Torah and good deeds.

To a certain extent, the "men's learning society" that was dependent in the past on the "women's learning society" for its very existence, no longer embraces it. The institutionalization of education for women that includes the possibility for change and is open to new professional avenues for women, threatens and creates tension in the "learning society". When the religious leadership senses that the community is endangered by secular influences, discourse turns against the phenomena of women learners. When the heads of the community feel it is immune from such influence, the censure of it lessens (El-Or, 1989).

1.3 Haredi Women and Men in the Current Family-Education Context

The “learning society” is now 45 years old and the men and women living within this framework continue to live out its guiding values and to fulfill all their roles. The woman is the mother and the provider and the man is, by and large, the Torah scholar. The current situation of such a family is more difficult than in the past. The reasons for this are a higher fertility rate (now 8-10 children as opposed to 5 in the past) and a reduction in the number and quality of jobs available for women as teachers. Despite this, the “learning society” is considered stable, as opposed to its parallel in the secular population (Friedman, 1995).

- a. The community structure in which the family lives is characterized by a more efficient social control system.
- b. The large number of children contributes to the unity of the family.
- c. There is a displacement of the conflict “who sacrifices and who contributes” from the personal realm to the ideological-religious dimension in which the man and the woman are partners in fulfilling the commandments of learning Torah and raising children in the ways of Torah. This moderates interpersonal conflicts and makes young couples more willing to cope with the hardships of life (Levi, 1989).

Additional explanations for the stability of the “learning society” and the individuals therein can be found in the existence of strict educational frameworks and the fear of straying from norms of behavior.

Haredi women and men assimilate the values of their society from the time they are born in strict educational systems both at home and in schools (Levi, 1989). The frameworks in which boys learn are rigorously supervised by Rabbis; those of the girls by principals and teachers. The objective of these frameworks is to instill the central values of the community: marriage and the family is the bastion of Jewish tradition; the family’s unity is supreme; harmonious

functioning, the birth of children and their education are the central purpose of married life (Frishman, 1979).

The research of Gumbo & Schwartz (1984) that examined the value system of young Haredi women in comparison to secular women upheld Frishman's (1979) findings. It was found that the differences between Haredi women and secular women are significant, both as far as the different importance assigned to values and as far as the influence of religion on their prioritization of these values. Haredi women granted greater importance to collective social values such as conformity, restraint, family security and social morality than to values of self development. In comparison, secular women stressed the importance of personal values such as self-direction, pleasure and ambition. The value system characteristic of Haredi women, as reflected in the research, is the one accepted by the entire Haredi community. It fortifies additional values of modesty, the respect of parents and teachers and philanthropy.

Haredi men and women are quite conservative about deviating from the social norms with the understanding that this entails harsh implications for their social status and matchmaking opportunities for their children. An example of accepted values in Haredi society and of the price of deviating from them can be found in the book "The Oasis of Choice" given to the young woman about to be married. This book explains the Haredi ideal of how a woman must function, her obligations to her husband and her children and what will happen to her if these are not fulfilled (Levi, 1989, 58). Young men will receive a book called "A Man and his Home" by Eliyahu Ki-Tov, that will explain how to behave towards his wife and children. These books prepare the young couple for their marriage and the education of their children. The implementation is also influenced by the personalities of the specific husband and the wife, but mainly by the sector of Haredi society to which they belong (Levi, 1989).

The ideal guiding the young couple is a lifestyle of Torah learning and practicing the commandments in order to uphold the hierarchic structure of the family. Each one of the

couple has a unique status with defined rights and obligations (Laufer, 1988; Stoler, 1997). The man and the woman are not considered part of the community individually. They receive this status only when they have established a family. The family is the foundation; its fortitude influences the rest of the community.

In research inquiring into the issue of children with special needs in Haredi families it was found that among the problems that worry the parents of a child with special needs (such as learning or physical disabilities) the gender of the child (male) considerably raises the level of the parents' pressure and the stigma. This fact stems from a system of roles and expectations for Haredi men in the realms of family and community (Stoler, 1997). The man is suited to occupy himself with Torah and religious affairs outside the home, whereas the woman and her abundant wisdom are more suited to raising children, supporting her husband's studies and managing the household by working for a livelihood outside the home (Levi, 1989).

Citing a social worker in the community, Levi (1989) says that the fulfillment of women is achieved through her husband's achievements in The Torah and through her children's achievements in their studies. These achievements win her status, success and meaning, whereas her work is only a means to achieving these goals. El-Or (1998) adds and further fortifies this claim: for men, proficiency in the texts and scholarship build their status in the community and grant them power and domination.

Haredi men and women consider a large family as an ideal and a Mitzvah (commandment). A significant part of the couple's life is invested in "educating the children", both at home and in the choice of a learning institution that most suits the values of the home. Family and domesticity and educating the children to Torah and good deeds are of the highest value, more valuable by far than developing a prestigious career of either of one of the couple (Laufer, 1988).

Educating the children, particularly boys, to follow the path of Torah, is the major axis of the Haredi family. The most exalted goals of the man and the woman in the community is to be a parent. Through parenting, the individual fulfills the commandments of the Torah and instills its values in his children. The birth of a child, according to Carmel (1997) is a gift entrusted to the parents, who are endowed with the powers and the skills to raise the children properly in the ways of Torah.

The education of children according to the Torah perspective starts from the moment the child is born. He or she is a blank slate that can easily absorb the accepted values in his/her cultural environment. These values are instilled by the personal example of the parent and are termed “Derech Eretz” (desired mode of behavior). Derech Eretz includes loving ones neighbor and strangers, consideration of others, modesty and truth-telling. It precedes proficiency in the Torah, as it has been written “Derech Eretz takes precedence over The Torah” (Appelbaum, 2000).

In addition, the guiding principle in education is educating the spirit of the child rather than his/her body. It is the child’s soul that will determine his/her essence and behavior. Therefore, parents emphasize the importance of self restraint, the ability to delay satisfactions, making due with little, modesty and the powers of the spirit in overcoming urges (Sharet, 1996). Though the child is not obliged to carry out Mitzvot, according to the cabalists “if he will do many Mitzvot and good deeds, keep his eyes from seeing evil and not look at women and at abominable pictures, his soul will be sacred”. Hence, come the day that he is obliged to obey the commandments, his deeds and his soul will be that much the purer (Appelbaum, 2000). To internalize these deeds, the parents will use morality stories, the imitation of pious men, the learning and memorizing of prayers and religious texts. The mother is mainly responsible for education in the home during the early years and through Bar Mitzvah age (13 for boys). She emphasizes the cognitive development of her children. Therefore, from an early age many

resources are invested in encouraging this development, with the understanding that this will improve their language capacities, their reading and Torah-learning skills, both in the home and at school (Goshen-Gottenstein, 1984).

In light of the above, the parents' mission in the education of their children in general, and boys, in particular, is to impart a practical way of life that combines "Derech Eretz" with the knowledge of Torah. To complement this education, the parents carefully choose, both for girls and for boys, the appropriate educational framework that matches their values and the Haredi sector to which they belong. In this sense, the educational tasks of the home and those of the school merge into one educational mission. In order to understand the full picture we must therefore consider the unique nature of the Torah-learning system and the values that guide the educators who people the system.

1.4 The Torah Educational System - Kindergartens

The Torah educational system is based on the complete separation of the sexes from an early age. Girls and boys learn in different educational settings that, in addition to their parents, train them for the gender role required of them (Zadok, 1997). The girls are subject to the supervision of the Ministry of Education and taught by a female staff of teacher's seminary graduates and kindergarten teachers. Unlike the boys, they have a shortened school day that includes secular topics, though not of the same scope as in secular schools. Educational frameworks for girls, from kindergarten and upwards, are rich in programming. They include Torah education, prayer, practical housekeeping skills, languages, computers, mathematics and the sciences. However, the purpose of their education, according to the rabbinical leadership, is to instill in them the value of "the respect of a king's daughter facing inwards". In other words, the education they are given should cause them to resemble their mothers who were not

educated and who placed their emphasis and wisdom within the walls of their home (El-Or, 1995; El-Or, 1998).

The boys study in Talmud Torah's or "Chederim" (study rooms) – an independent educational framework without state supervision. The origin of the word "Cheder" comes from the time that the room being used for study was adjacent to the synagogue and students came there directly after prayers. The name was given to distinguish between the sacred area of the synagogue and the less sacred area adjoining it. Nowadays the "Cheder" as an educational setting has become sacred in its own right, because of the importance of the activity held there. (Todor, 2006).

The kindergartens on the premises of the "Cheder" are very crowded with 30-40 pupils, learning the basics of reading from the early age of three. In addition to reading, they recite the morning prayers; they hear stories about pious men, the weekly Torah portion and Torah stories. The learning method is based on a great deal of memorization. It has not changed or been updated, due to the communal "I believe" that "not even the minutest detail" should change the style of learning Torah. However, in kindergartens of the Lithuanian sector, predominated by female kindergarten teachers, lessons have been added in crafts, rhythmic and play, with contents matching the values of the community (Levi, 1997).

Studies in the first grade are of two years duration, during which the boys begin to learn the Bible. When the boys advance a grade, the level of difficulty increases and additional lessons in Bible, Rashi (Bible interpretation) Mishnah and Talmud (Oral law) and other issues in Gemara. According to the particular Haredi sector, other secular topics are added on to the religious ones, mainly Hebrew language and grammar. As the boys are educated to intentional "ignorance", meaning that the Torah should be known thoroughly but other fields of knowledge should be neglected, this constitutes an obstacle should they try to enter the work force. However, parents are aware of this and are willing to pay this price for their son to

become a scholar and a Torah prodigy (Applebaum, 2000). More so, the educational system as a whole and particularly the kindergartens are not only geared to impart knowledge. Their intention is to foster an internalization of Torah as a lifestyle that can be practically implemented. This lifestyle includes the assimilation of the proper deeds, values and commandments between man and G-d and between man and his fellow man. As the sages of blessed memory have said “using Torah is more important than studying it” (Brachot, 7B). Community writings, of the past, show that the “melamed” was considered a “holy instrument”; entitled to the respect given to the Torah. Besides his work with the boys, he played an important role in the community. Parents would consult him; he would give a class on the Sabbath, interpret it to respected community elders and carry out commandments on behalf of the community. Though his work did not require certification, an examination or preparation, he was considered a “Shaliach Tzibur” – (representative of the community) entrusted with the existence and fate of the people of Israel by transmitting Torah and good deeds to the boys. Due to his important role, the sages considered him “elevated from the people” and the people in the community were expected to treat him accordingly (Todor, 2006).

Additional commentators from the community report on a change in this attitude at present. The lack of requirements for accreditation and examination has led to professional stagnation over the past few generations, with anyone able to present himself as a candidate for teaching, even if he encountered difficulties in his own studies or whether he was doing it just for his livelihood. Even now, the position of the “melamed” in the hierarchy of educators in the “Chederim” is relatively low level. In comparison, the female kindergarten teacher is presented in community literature as the bearer of an accreditation certificate, thus meriting a well deserved professional status (Levi, 1997). However, mixed in with the varied topics of study provided by the seminaries and detailed in program brochures for kindergarten and Beit

Yaakov teachers (female) is the message that the (female) teacher must not forget what is truly important and what is not. Their studies are only truly fruitful if they devote themselves to teaching their students respect for G-d and good deeds (Rabbi Cheranski, 2006). Rabbi Levi (1997) in his book “Educational Trends” reinforces this position and expresses reservations about the continuing educational programs that the (female) teachers attend and their subsequent adoption of values unsuited to the community. In addition, he claims that the (female) teacher must take a critical approach to what she learns in these programs, as the only material that is suited to the Jewish kindergarten is Jewish material formulated by people within the community.

As opposed to the research literature available on the Torah education system, there is no secular literature that describes the role of educators within the Haredi community or the values that guide them in educating boys. However, there are collections of articles and books on education, written by Rabbis and school directors within the community itself. A review of these collections presents a united front glorifying the role and importance of the (male) educator (melamed) in educating boys, despite the negative attitudes towards them in the community nowadays. Only a smattering of the literature written by Rabbis and school directors refers to the importance of the (female) educators in boys’ kindergartens, as this is a relatively new phenomenon, limited to the Lithuanian sector alone. The Gemara says that the “melamedim” teaching tender children by “enabling the many - are like eternal stars” (BB 8). In other words, the qualities and work of the “melamedim” who teach the little ones may seem like little stars but are, in truth, enormous, as the influence of their education extends way beyond the actual child who sits before him. It goes on all his life and continues to influence the generations to come.

According to the literature, the necessary conditions for the success of the (male) educator as well as for the (female) kindergarten teacher are: the prayer of the educator for his/her success,

foresight, his/her qualities and attributes and, more than all else, the personal example s/he sets as a result of these qualities. Thus, it has been said “let your eyes behold those who would teach you”, meaning that the child absorbs the educators behavior more than any high words or well-turned phrases. The male/female educator is required to work at improving his/her own deeds, to renew his/her store of knowledge and to be moral in his/her work. S/he must guide the child “according to his/her needs” (Rabbi Miski, 1981; Levi, 1997; Rabbi Friedlander, 1992).

The responsibility of the male/female educator is not only towards the child and his/her parents. It is also to previous generations and mainly towards G-d, to whom s/he owes this job. A good teacher is one who understands that education is not only a profession and an occupation, it is an important challenge. S/he has been entrusted with the heritage of previous generations. The male/female educators’ role is to discover the image of G-d in every child, even if the child has arrived as raw material or a wild foal. The educator must imbue the child’s personality with a spirit from an early age, so that the child will not stray from the path of Torah as an adult. Education does not only entail commanding the child to form good habits. Commands and habits are merely the tools used by the educator, over and beyond the personal example of “living up to one’s principles”, to educate the child to follow the path of the Torah and continue to do so willingly when he grows up and becomes a parent himself (Greenwald, 2006).

As part of the ideological writing of Rabbis on the education of boys in the community, references are also made to children whose behavior deviates from the norm. The literature for “melamdim” in this context is different from that geared to (female) kindergarten teachers working with boys. The literature for (male) educators refers to these children as problem children or those with a problematical upbringing. Their difficulties are seen as an outcome of bad deeds, illness, stubbornness, dangerous desires, lying, and rebelliousness and so on.

According to this perspective, the source of these problems is conflicts and frustrations. Therefore, the educator must treat the child as a doctor who has been entrusted with a sick child whom he must heal. Moreover, the problematic child may grow up to be a great Torah scholar, precisely because of his problematical nature, therefore the educator must not despair of healing him. For example, a stubborn child is likely to obey the commandments when he becomes an adult with precision and will not stray from their proper execution (Admor, Shlita, 1991). Other rabbis add that the “melamdin” must successfully rise to the challenge of dealing with the problematic child. A “melamed” must not G-d forbid despair of the child so as not to flaw him even further and lose his precious spirit (Rabbi Friedlander, 1992).

The writings of the Rabbis to (female) kindergarten teachers in this context also define children with flaws and vague sensitivities, though their observations are a bit more reflective and are not linked to good deeds. Rabbi Levi (1997) expands upon this topic and details the reasons for possible flaws, such as mental limitations. He emphasizes that (female) teachers must be aware of these phenomena, track any deviant behavior and refer to doctors if necessary. Coupled with this nearly therapeutic observation, Levi (1997) emphasizes that the (female) teacher must construct the child in order to save him from frustration and misery for many years to come. In summary, the Rabbinical-educational literature refers to the important roles of educators (female kindergarten teachers and ‘melamdin’). Most of the literature refers to the regular education of boys. A mere handful refers to children whose behavior presents a difficulty to their educators. The ideological significance of coping with a “problematical” child is identical in both groups. However, understanding and defining the phenomenon changes according to the target audience (“melamdin” or female kindergarten teachers) in light of their gender roles and educational background.

In light of the above, one can assume that any process of change in educators will be colored both by the cultural context and by their gender. First, however, it is necessary to define what

constitutes a process of change in an educational institution and, in particular amongst educators; what is the attitude to change in the Haredi community; educators' attitudes towards problem children and how a culture-sensitive intervention program can serve as the impetus for implementing these changes.

2. Processes of Change

2.1 Processes of Change in Educational Frameworks and in Educators

The formal definition of “change” is the exchange/replacement/transformation of a certain situation into a different situation or different conditions. A “situation” includes the sum of activities, behaviors, attitudes, emotions or physical surroundings present in a specific context that no longer exists (Zefroni, 2001).

Fuchs (1998) also defines change as the exchange of one situation for another, but links the change to the subjective observation of the individual thus limiting this extensive definition. In his view, not every exchange of one situation for another will lead to change. Change will only be defined as thus if it includes a number of criteria:

- The new situation is not a natural and gradual product of passing time.
- The new situation has a direct influence on the life of the individual.
- The difference between what exists and what occurs after the change are noticeable enough to be absorbed by an individual’s senses.

In contrast, Fuchs (1995) states that over and beyond the individual’s subjective perceptions every process of change is marked by shared objective characteristics inherent in the process of change itself. These characteristics are linked to the process of change, the course of change and the characteristics linked to the individual.

The characteristic process of change is dynamic and circular. It contains periods of enthusiasm, initiative and movement as well as periods of stagnation and regression.

The characteristics of a course of change include four stages – preparation, implementation, establishment and outcome, in which the results of the change are examined and evaluated.

Characteristics connected to the individual refer to the fact that change is obtained by the individuals participating in the process. The perception of and response to change differ, just as people differ from one another. Change is also accompanied by professional growth in which

the individual expands his/her knowledge, learns new skills and utilizes behaviors not previously used. On the other hand, it raises speculations regarding past knowledge, opinions, beliefs and previous behavior. An additional characteristic connected to the individual is the fact that change influences not only those directly involved, but also the individuals and populations connected to the person actively participating in the process (Fuchs, 1995; 1998). Zefroni (2001) refers specifically to the school system, stating that it is an open system with reciprocal relations with the external/cultural environment and made up of mutually dependent sub-systems. Hence, any change in one component of the school system will necessarily affect the other components with which it shares a dialogue. In light of the interdependency between school components and between the school and its environment, Zefroni, like Fuchs (1989), claims that it is hard to isolate and delineate the influences of change. He says that a change will lead to further change, even if at first the change planned to focus only on a limited field or a group of people. In due course, the range of its influence will expand, just as a stone thrown in a pool creates ever widening ripples. In this process, therefore, the change will be linked to additional fields and people in varying intensities.

In addition to shared objective characteristics inherent in the process of change, many researchers divide “change” into a variety of types. Some divide it according to the level of planning and its goals (Zefroni, 2001). Some divide it according to the depth of change elicited (Watzlawick, Weakland & Fisch, 1979; Fuchs, 1995; Zefroni, 2001) and others divide it according to internal and external focuses of changes (Fuchs, 1998; Lazarowitz, 2002).

Fuchs (1998) links the process of change to an individual’s subjective perspective and also recognizes the importance of the environment as a decisive factor influencing the individual. He distinguishes between internal and external focuses of change. Fuchs (1998) mentions seven types of external changes that can influence an individual’s internal changes: changes in physical conditions, changes in work conditions, changes in the human, cultural environment,

changes in structure and in the political environment, changes in procedure and policy and cultural/ideological changes and finally – changes in occupation. Fuchs considers changes in occupation as changes to the content, essence and exchange in knowledge involved in work.

According to this researcher, internal changes include the cognitive level, the emotional level and the behavioral level of participants in the process of change (Fuchs, 1998; Fuchs 1995).

The cognitive/perceptual component refers to the sum of an individual's perceptions, beliefs, opinions, thoughts, judgments and evaluations (of beauty, of worthiness, of size, etc.)

The emotional component is the sum of an individual's emotions, feelings, moods, positions towards him/herself and towards other people, objects or ideas.

The behavioral component is the sum of all the reactions an individual will express in his/her speech, actions and movements. However, the behavioral component also includes decision making in the practical dimension, such as learning a new skill or making a transition from frontal learning to experiential learning. According to Fuchs (1998) the behavioral component of change is the most obvious component to the observer and analyst.

The three components – cognitive, emotional and behavioral – are separate categories.

However, they are mutually interdependent, each component likely to cause change in another; though this is not always necessarily the case. Therefore, a change in the emotional component will not necessarily lead to a change in perception or behavior (Fuchs, 1998). Moreover, according to Sharan and Yishai (1994) changes in perception as a result of acquired knowledge do not have the power to instigate change in behavioral or emotional dimensions.

In contrast, an additional researcher (Fuchs, 1995; Shade et.al. 2001) claims that knowledge can evoke change in action and subsequently change elements of the emotional dimension, particularly opinions. In addition, according to Fuchs (1995) though the change in the emotional dimension is usually very slow, the more profound the changes are in other dimensions, the more likely they are to be expressed in emotional aspects. These aspects

include changes such as the desire to cooperate, being open to change, enthusiasm and a sense of satisfaction with the process.

Fuchs (1998), who divided change into external and internal realms, claims that external changes of one kind will lead to internal changes on a certain level, rather than on other levels. For example, changes in occupation will engender changes especially in the behavioral dimension.

These changes that an individual experiences trigger various reactions that occur on a sequence ranging from enthusiastically enlisting one's powers to incorporating the change, through apathy or lack of interest to extreme resistance and opposition, intending to restore the previous situation. Therefore, according to (Watzlawick, Weakland & Fisch, 1974) investigation of the topic of change processes must simultaneously examine the process of change and the process of resistance it facilitates. According to them, the process of change and resistance it triggers are one dialectical, complementary process rather than two separate processes.

Resistance can counter various dimensions of the change: its goals, its stages, its characteristics, its conduct and its implementation. It can be overt or concealed as reflected in the case where an individual verbally supports a change but expresses his/her opposition through action or inaction (Zefroni, 2001; Winger, 1995).

According to Zlatman and Duncan (1997) there are four major reasons for opposing a process of change:

- Cultural factors that include beliefs and values to which the change seems to stand in opposition.
- Social factors such as conformity norms that are threatened by the change.
- Organizational factors such as the lack of support for the change by the organization's or system's administration.

- Psychological/personality factors such as the individual's need for stability, while the prospect of change evokes a sense of anxiety, uncertainty and the loss of control (Drom, 1989; Fuchs, 1998; Winger, 1995; Sharan & Yishai, 1994). Fuchs (1995) also states that during stages of introducing change opposition can lead to the exhibition of aggression, pressure and anxiety.

Researchers examining processes of change amongst educators sketch a number of models that help understand the process of resistance to change on a personal basis:

- The Power Model – In this model resistance will occur only if the change threatens the power and influence of the individual in the system.
- The Expediency Model – In this model resistance to change will occur to the extent that the individual expects no personal benefit, such as a raise in salary or a material incentive.
- The Role Model – In this model, resistance is to the execution of tasks not formerly included in the individual's job description. In addition, acquiring new skills, both in knowledge and in behavior, trigger resistance and a lack of desire on the part of "learners" as a sense of personal and professional inadequacy floats to the surface. This model also includes the norms of educators and community workers that usually dictate "autonomous" work that remains hidden from colleagues, administration and the public. If the change includes cooperation with other teachers, it may seem to infringe upon the teacher's privacy.
- A model connected to the worker's personality: low level of intelligence, rigidity and inferiority will increase the likelihood of resistance to change (Winger, 1995; Sharan & Yishai, 1994).

In their research on school re-organization, Dreyfus and his colleagues (Dreyfus et. al. 1989) expand upon this approach and claim that resistance to change is directly connected to the personality structure of the educator. Researchers identified different types of personalities including types who are active, anti-leaders, conservatives or helpless fatalists; types who lack

in motivation, are impulsive and lack patience; types who are devoted to the process and those who remain apathetic to it. They claim that these personality traits will lead to an individual taking an active or passive stance or being oriented towards the self or the task during the process of change or in opposing it.

In addition to educators' resistance to change due to personal reasons, there is resistance due to practical reasons that are linked to the school as a system:

- Changes are perceived as ignoring habits, norms and customs that have been previously developed by the school.
- Prediction of the results is vague, adventurous or perceived as dangerous.
- The system has been conformist to such an extent that change is perceived as an exceptional act in the existing organizational climate.
- The style of management is authoritarian and has not previously allowed much independence to its employees.

Nonetheless, personal objections to change are much more decisive than resistance stemming from institutional considerations (Zefroni, 2001, Sharan & Yishai, 1994, Winger, 1995).

According to Zefroni (2001) resistance to change appears in the self same components that are undergoing change. Just as the process of change is expressed by the individuals involved in cognitive, emotional or behavioral arenas, the resistance to change will also appear in these dimensions.

Expressions of cognitive resistance include: the enlistment of claims against change and presenting a rationale for preserving what exists; presenting the weaknesses of the change and its negative influences; denial of information indicating the need for implementing a change; emphasizing possible damages to weak or challenged populations within the educational institution likely to occur as a result of the change and making excuses for not implementing

the change such as: “there isn’t enough time” or “when others change, I’ll change too” and so on.

Emotional resistance includes: anger towards the program instigators or any other party acting to implement it; psychosomatic symptoms of fatigue, high blood pressure, sweating, breathing difficulties; psychological symptoms such as tension, pressure, anxiety, attention difficulties, depression, etc.

Behavioral resistance can be divided into active and passive categories.

“Active” behavioral resistance includes: enlisting opponents to the change, denigrating the management and the agents of change; abstaining from implementing and practicing skills involved in implementing the change. In contrast, “passive” behavioral resistance includes silence, agreement to the change but not implementing it, endless theoretical discussions regarding the change with a request for further details before it can be implemented (Fuchs, 1998; Winger, 1995; Efroni, 2001).

Many researchers emphasize the importance of expressions of resistance to change, in general, and by educators, in particular. They do not consider these expressions as something to be prevented or concealed. On the contrary, the signs of cognitive, emotional or behavioral resistance come as warning signals to prevent mistaken maneuvers, to re-examine the suggested program and to introduce a more efficacious dialogue between the agents of change and “his/her clients” at the school. They should also be used to help integrate various parties in the educational setting, such as school principals, supervisors and educators who are trying to implement the change (Samuel, 1990; Zefroni, 2001), Fuchs, 1995).

In summary: processes of change and resistance to these processes, in general, and by educators, in particular, are a product of personality factors interacting with external, environmental factors. In addition, processes of change and resistance to them are divided in research literature according to characteristics, stages and types. No matter what kind of

division is made, reference to the process or to the resistance it creates usually falls into three major categories: the cognitive, the emotional and the behavioral. This broad ranging picture is also reflected in the process of change and the resistance to the process undergone by educators in their work with challenged children. In order to understand this intricate process occurring in educators and, more specifically, in educators in the Haredi community, it is first important to grasp what processes of change the Haredi community has undergone. It is further important to consider how this community refers to changes, particularly in light of its tendency to “seclusion” in order to preserve its existing order.

2.2 Processes of Change in Haredi Society

Profound religious beliefs contradict attempts to implement social change. Initiated change stands in opposition to the statement “the new is forbidden by the Torah”, implying that anything dictated by the divine must not be changed (Fuchs, 1998). The word “Haredi” is taken from the book Isaiah (66, 5) “Hear the word of Hashem (G-d) ye that tremble at his word”. This phrase expresses the awe felt by a believer in upholding the laws of the Torah exactly as they have been written, down to “the minutest detail”. Nonetheless, the Haredi community is subject to the influence of the modern external environment surrounding it and is forced to cope with the influences of modernity, either by drawing them closer or by putting them at a distance (Leshem, 2004).

According to Friedman (1991) Haredi society is becoming neo-traditional. It does not completely reject all signs of modernity, only those that it perceives as threatening its ideological-spiritual world. The community employs supervisory mechanisms that allow some elements of modernity to enter and rejects other cultural-ideological elements that could cause cultural-social changes (Leshem, 2004). Sheleg (1998), in his article “The New Haredi” counters Friedman’s claim and says that the main process that has fostered an internalization of

“the modern” in the Haredi world is the change in the Haredi world itself. In his opinion, demographic and political growth has led to a new sense of self confidence vis a vis the external secular world. The ideological weakening of the secular world has further augmented a sense of security and pushed aside inferiority feelings present in the Haredi community that was present at the time of the establishment of the State of Israel. Nowadays the Haredi individual considers the secular world “an empty wagon”. This view allows them to adopt useful elements of the modern world, both technological innovations and leisure activities, without feeling threatened that Haredi identity and its values will be compromised. The adoption of technological and consumption patterns by the Haredi community is a fundamental change in their lifestyle, however the change is marginal at best. They have not accepted any of its accompanying values nor is there any threat to the basic Haredi identity. In cases where the spiritual leadership or extremist sectors feel that these patterns pose a threat to their traditional life style, they declare a rejection of certain specific elements. This decree alerts the public of the existence of a process that can endanger their traditional lifestyle and that it is imperative to return to more isolationist life patterns and the Haredi public acts accordingly (Sheleg, 2000). The turning point in the Haredi community with reference to professional training also reflects the way the community copes with change. Similar to the adoption of “the modern”, a number of important dimensions join in, influencing the process. On the one hand, the process begins with the distress of the community that is influenced by wider processes in secular Israeli society. On the other hand, the spiritual leadership plays a significant role in influencing the community's state of mind, but is also guided by the atmosphere that exists within the community. In this process as well, there is no adoption of dimensions that can endanger the religious-social values of the community (Aviram, 2002).

According to Friedman, the strengthening of the Haredi community as a “learning society”, with most of the men learning and the women earning a living, is responsible for the processes

of change that the community is forced to cope with. The fact that men follow a course that does not allow them to enter the job market and are exempt from army service, creates a “poverty trap” in which many women must earn a living at work places they had previously not frequented.

Lupu (2003) also claims that as a result of the dire economic distress experienced by a “learning society”, women work for a living in the general job market, where they have internalized the importance of economic progress and the acquisition of an education to achieve economic advancement. This has led to a turning point prompting the Haredi public to request permission for educational training, not only for women, but for those men unsuited to “learning Torah” alone. The response of the leadership was divided: some support exclusive “Torah learning” and others back “Talmud Torah with Derech Eretz”, meaning combined with work. Following a complex process, permission was finally granted by the spiritual leadership to allow educational training for men. However, exaggerated publicity and wider processes in secular society (the Supreme Court debate on canceling the draft exemption of Yeshiva students) were received as threats to put an end to the world of Torah and its values. The rift in the Haredi camp between extremists and moderates led the Rabbis to cancel their “declared” support of educational training. This led to a relatively static state of affairs, in which approval of training was “hidden and concealed” and granted by the Rabbis separately to each specific case. Nevertheless, training for women beyond the field of teaching has continued to expand into new fields such as social work, law, para-medical professions and so on. These studies are conducted and strictly supervised in places approved by the Rabbis, separate from institutions where men and women study jointly. (Aviram, 2002; Lupu, 2003; Kaplan, 2003).

Kaplan (2003) and Lupu (2003) both see the “relative standstill” as one of the ways the community and its leadership uses to supervise the process of change. Thus they can ensure that it will not get out of hand or introduce foreign values into the community that would

undermine their traditional lifestyle. Kaplan (2003) defines this process as “integration without assimilation”.

An examination of the process of change with reference to children in the Haredi sector with developmental disabilities also indicates a similar model. Here too, the process began from the public level desperate for solutions. The number of families with children with special needs has grown to such dimensions that they can no longer be hidden. These children often deteriorated to such an extent that they turned to roaming the streets or when slightly older, engaged in criminal activities (Ilan, 2000). Greenblum (1996) adds that during this time, there was a wide gap between theory and practice. While the religious laws preached warm and just support, compassion and social integration for the child with difficulties, the actual practice in the community was of ostracism, distancing and shame for the family.

In addition to the pressure exerted by families to instigate a change in their child’s situation, extensive changes in Israeli society further accelerated the process. These changes allowed for the representation of the Haredi public in various agencies and in the Knesset (Israeli Parliament). These representatives lobbied for the creation of suitable services for challenged children within the community (Sikrun, 2004). Globman and Lipshitz (2005) add that approximately six years ago, a special supervisor was appointed to the Haredi sector in the Special Education Dept. of the Ministry of Education. His job was to act on behalf of the community, promoting the above mentioned process. Lipshitz & Glukman (2001), in a comprehensive research of the changes that have occurred in the treatment of developmental disabilities in the Haredi sector, state that in this process as well, the spiritual leadership played a decisive role in forming public opinion. At the beginning of the eighties, the attitude was not to accept children with special needs into Talmud Torahs or Yeshivot lest the educational level of the institution be affected for the worse. These institutions feared harm to their reputation and subsequently, therefore, so would their registration. In due time, the leadership, under the

duress of the public, became an agent of positive change in favor of accepting these children in the community. The Rabbis approved the establishment of educational settings for children with special needs; supported the parents' requests for admission to relevant treatment centers and encouraged the establishment of additional treatment centers that matched the values of the community (Globman & Lipshitz, 2004). In addition, Lipshitz and Globman (2004) state that the Rabbis approved the introduction of special education courses in Beit-Yaakov Seminars and even created special classes for retarded girls.

The writings and speeches in which Rabbi Friedlander (of blessed memory) (2001) addressed the community show evidence of his favorable attitudes towards children with disabilities, which in turn affected the state of mind of the community towards such children. The "special needs" child, according to his analysis of religious law, has a special role in creation. S/he is a tool, spurring others on to improve their manners, as has been written "more than the rich man makes the poor man, the poor man makes the rich man" and brings him the benefit of an improved spiritual life by the assistance he grants him in order to "love thy neighbor as thyself".

In summary: the processes of changing attitudes to educational training and the change in reference to children with special needs are indicative of the processes of change currently facing the Haredi community. A description of the community, as one that closes its eyes to innovations and developments occurring in the wider society, does not reflect current reality nor, apparently, previous reality. These processes all exhibit a dialectic discourse of openness to external influences from the wider Israeli society coupled with seclusion and devotion to the ways of Torah (Bilu & Goodman, 1997). Ravitzky (1993) fortifies this position and claims that the adaptation of products, knowledge and services from the wider secular community to fit the needs of the Haredi community and supposedly to fortify it, actually changes it indirectly.

As the changes occur in a social arena in which one of the main values is preserving what exists, extreme expressions of resistance to change can also be seen. The process of resistance serves as a supervisory stoplight to prevent an erosion of basic Haredi identity and the values that guide this lifestyle. The educational system is one of the main supervisory mechanisms via which the community preserves its mode of living. Any attempt to change it will be received as an attempt to change the traditional lifestyle. However, educators can also become “agents of change” with reference to children with difficulties in educational institutions and in the community at large. Therefore, the next section will survey general attitudes of educators to children with difficulties and, in particular, the attitudes to these children on the part of Haredi educators (men and women) in the Torah education system.

2.3 Educators Attitudes towards Children with Difficulties

Most of the literature on the topic of children with difficulties refers to the inclusion and work with children with special needs and learning disabilities. There is little mention of children with “developmental difficulties” who, as opposed to children with special needs or learning disabilities, have slight problems in functioning, adjustment and behavior. In addition, these children are also at risk for learning disabilities, if they are not viewed with attitudes or given teaching methods suited to their personal needs (Lipshitz, Elad & Kwaler, 1996). However, there is an analogy between the attitudes expressed by educators regarding the inclusion and work with children with learning disabilities and slight difficulties and the attitudes of educators to kindergarten aged children with “developmental difficulties”.

Research literature shows that (female) kindergarten teachers are more positive about including children with difficulties than are teachers in the higher grades (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996). Duke & Prater (1991), in their research of kindergarten teachers’ perceptions of difficult children claim that labeling these children with developmental difficulties or not, will not

influence the teachers' attitudes to them. Neither will it affect the measure of success they predict with the children or their perceptions of their ability to help them. Moreover, they state that it is possible that this accepting attitude may be fostered by the fact that kindergartens are not considered academic settings and do not demand academic outcomes such as reading or writing. In addition to the opinion of the researchers, the kindergarten teachers have been trained to work with a wide range of behaviors and functioning of young children. Therefore, they are less rigid in their attitudes towards children with behavior different from the ordinary. Brophy, Webb & Hancock (1997) share this positive opinion and add that they combine the tools existing for their work with the regular children with special education techniques in order to improve educational or social capacities of children with "difficulties". The researchers report that kindergarten teachers state that they would appreciate having more tools and more time for consultation on these topics, but they do not make these requests a condition for working with these children in their kindergarten.

In contrast to the kindergarten teachers who exhibit a high level of capability, willingness to remain open to the "different" and a lack of dependence on labeling, the literature indicates more rigid and conditional behavior on the part of teachers. This attitude, expressed in cognitive, emotional and behavioral dimensions, reflects a resistance to the inclusion of children with difficulties in the educational system (Gans, 1987; Brophy et.al, 1997) For example, Scruggs & Mastropieri (1996), reporting on teachers' perceptions about the inclusion of children with learning difficulties, state that two thirds of the teachers expressed theoretical willingness to include such children, depending on what kind of difficulty and the extra obligations that would be expected of them as a result. Some of them claimed that the inclusion of such children would pose a challenge. However, about half of them said they have insufficient knowledge, tools, time or training to allow for such inclusion. Gans (1987) found that though there is theoretical willingness, there is insufficient attention to emotional aspects,

in particular to opinions that create a basis for teachers' resistance. Neither is there attention paid to the cognitive dimension of providing for appropriate knowledge. On this topic, Shade & Steward (2001) claim that it is very important to provide knowledge and problem-solving tools on issues of special education and the inclusion of such children in class. This knowledge must be given in the training of teachers in seminaries and in-service programs. Theoretical and experimental learning will, in his opinion, change teachers' attitudes about the inclusion and work with children with minimal difficulties. Knowledge, he says, is a key factor in changing positions.

Soodak & Podell (1998) also attempt to ascertain the factors contributing to teachers' resistance to inclusion of difficult children. Their research examined the characteristics of teachers, pupils and school settings as factors influencing the willingness to include difficult pupils. They found a direct link between openness and responsiveness and the perception of professional skills and the "toolbox" at his/her disposal. It was also connected to the inclusion of children with physical, rather than mental or educational difficulties. In contrast, he claims that research findings show that teacher's behavior exhibiting anxiety or hostility is influenced by the beliefs teachers hold about who is a difficult child, what are his/her characteristics and the attitudes of the management towards inclusion. The researchers suggest that reducing the number of children in class and constructing a perception of educators' superior professional capability will reduce the anxiety and hostility previously expressed. A construction of this capability can be obtained by knowledge, a variety of work techniques and confronting teachers' perceptions towards children with difficulties.

Many research studies indicate the theoretical willingness of educators to include and work with slight difficulties and show attempts to locate the causes of resistance. Few studies, however, have actually examined the behavior of teachers with these pupils in practice or their attitudes not just regarding inclusion, but those regarding the pupils themselves (Kaspa &

Cohen, 2004). A qualitative research was conducted by Shechtman and Almog (2004) with the participation of teachers of integrated classes in the first-third grades. Data was collected by observation in the classroom. During interviews, the teachers reported on their tendency to prefer supportive approaches to solve the behavior problems of children with learning difficulties. In practice however, they used many more limiting approaches to “put out fires” and did not back this up by a consistent or methodical approach to the child exhibiting difficulties.

Shechtman and Almog (2004) go along with other researchers in claiming that in training teachers the theoretical and the practical must be bridged by accompanying the teachers through the process of implementing the new teaching methods. They must be able to participate in teachers’ and researchers’ “think tanks”, in order to create training and learning situations by analyzing authentic situations. This way, the teacher is instrumental in instigating knowledge and not merely consuming it. In addition, these researchers, similar to Soodak (1998) emphasize that apart from imparting knowledge, techniques and methods, teachers must be taught about formulating a "democratic world view". This approach includes openness to change, patience, flexibility and sensitivity to social equality.

In summary: research shows that expanding the teacher’s “toolbox” by schooling and in-service programs is not sufficient. On the one hand, the teacher’s perceptions of difficult children must be exposed. On the other hand, the teacher’s personality must be empowered and developed.

In contrast to this research that examined the behavior of educators in practice, a pioneering research examined the attitudes of educators and therapists towards pupils with educational difficulties directly. Einat (2005) exposed the wide variety of teachers’ reactions to the population of children in their classrooms suffering from learning disabilities. The teachers reported on feelings of anxiety, rejection, contempt and pity, as well as the fear of being

contaminated by the pupil whose exception is not visible to the naked eye. Additional difficult emotions triggered in the teachers were helplessness, disappointment, frustration, exhaustion, anger, despair and a sense of failure. Their self image was challenged as a result of coping with these pupils. On the institutional level, the teachers reported feeling isolated and lacking in practical and emotional support from colleagues and the administration. In summing up the findings, the researcher concludes that there are many parallels between the reactions of the pupils with the learning disabilities towards the process they experienced with their teachers and the response of teachers to them.

This research, like that of Shechtman and Almog (2004) does not only suggest expanding knowledge and the teacher's "toolbox". It recommends the empowerment and development of the teacher's character; the extension of support and guidance over a period of time in the institutional setting and a reduction of the emotional and cognitive isolation experienced by the teacher in his/her training and daily work (Einat, 2005).

The above has surveyed the literature relevant to the field of education in the secular world, due to the basic difficulty conducting similar research in the Haredi sector. Despite this, there is one study by Lipshitz & Globman (2004) that examined the positions of teachers (male/female) in the Haredi sector with reference to the inclusion in their classrooms of children with slight "difficulties". This study, in contrast to general research literature, attempts to examine positions both by gender and in reference to different kinds of "behavioral problems" including learning disabilities.

Due to the presence of male and female kindergarten teachers in the Torah educational system for boys and of (female) teachers and kindergarten teachers in the educational system for girls, it was possible to conduct a unique study, examining positions from a gender perspective. This contrasts with previous studies in the secular educational system where most of the teachers are female. Lipshitz and Globman (2004) found, to their surprise, that in contrast to their

preliminary expectations that the female Haredi teachers would be more positive than melamdim about the inclusion of “difficult” children, different findings appeared for each type of difficulty.

The (female) teachers’ positions were more favorable than those of the melamdim only about the inclusion of children with severe difficulties and only in large cities. In contrast melamdim (male kindergarten teachers and school teachers) were more positive than (female) teachers about the inclusion of students with learning problems or slight difficulties. The researchers believe that the reason for this is that (female) teachers tend to be more self critical about promoting the “weak student” as opposed to feeling more secure in handling the “child with special needs”. This is in light of the therapeutic-educational orientation that they absorbed at the teaching seminaries regarding the promotion of the “child with special needs”. In contrast, the researchers believe that melamdim, who lack therapeutic training and orientation, feel obliged to accept these pupils in their institutions. Children with slight difficulties are included as long as they do not interfere with the course of studies. In addition, there are no suitable settings in the community to handle such pupils and melamdim feel obliged to accept them lest they be thrown out of the educational system. The (female) teachers, on the other hand, are aware of suitable settings for girls with difficulties and therefore do not assume responsibility for their promotion.

An important additional finding is that a sense of capability, agreement with an inclusion policy and positive positions towards types of disabilities are more prevalent in both (female) teachers and melamdim in large cities, as opposed to cities in the periphery. Researchers believe that this finding stems from the proximity of educators (male/female) in large cities to sources of knowledge and changes in educational approaches originating in the wider secular public. In contrast, in peripheral towns, local social control and less accessibility to and influence by external knowledge lessens the willingness to include problem children in class.

The researcher, like other researchers in the secular educational system, recommends the advisability of providing information and circulating practical educational approaches to all educators and particularly to those working in peripheral areas.

However, the recommendations take on a unique gender shading in the context of the educational background of melamdin versus that of the female teachers. Whereas the melamdin, in the eyes of the researchers, must receive extensive basic training that includes knowledge and work practices in relevant developmental fields, female kindergarten teachers and school teachers who are Seminary graduates must acquire knowledge and skills in working with “weak” learners in primary schools and children with “developmental difficulties” in kindergarten.

In summary: a review of secular literature refers mainly to attitudes and positions of female teachers about the inclusion of children with special needs or learning disabilities. A minority of researchers refer to kindergarten age and to children with “developmental difficulties” at this age. However, there is more willingness on the part of female kindergarten teachers than on the part of school teachers to include and work with such children.

Very few studies have examined the positions of the teachers about the children themselves or about their behavior towards children exhibiting learning difficulties, from a gender perspective. There is, however, one unique pioneer research that was conducted in the Haredi sector that examined the different positions taken by male teachers as opposed to female teachers with regard to children with learning difficulties and other slight difficulties. The research showed an unequivocal connection between gender factors and the positions taken with reference to children with slight or severe difficulties.

These gender dimensions are unquestionably important and must be taken into account in constructing a culture-sensitive intervention program that strives to engender change in educators with reference to the “difficult” child in the Haredi community. Therefore, the next

section will review culture-sensitive intervention programs and explore the principles that contribute to their success amongst educators, in general, and with Haredi educators (male/female) in particular.

2.4 Culture-Sensitive Intervention Programs as an Impetus for Processes of Change

Involving educators in intervention programs to achieve a desired change is a complex venture that relates to dimensions both inside and outside the school.

In the literature there are three factors inside the school that influence the assimilation of intervention programs. These factors include the school culture, the attitudes of the administration and the attitudes of the educators themselves towards the program.

An intervention project must include an understanding of the school culture in order to ascertain whether or not the desired change matches this culture (Saranson 1982; Friedman, 1988). The school culture is defined as the sum of the behaviors, rituals, language, norms and values deemed important in the eyes of the educational establishment. Culture also includes the philosophy that guides the institution's policy, the overt and concealed rules that guide the individuals working there, as well as the network of relationship amongst the educators and between them and the pupils, the parents and the community (Prosser 1999; 1988).

In addition to the school culture, the intervention plan must consider the attitude of the school principal regarding the process and must enlist his cooperation. The principal is often one of the consumers of change, though he may also become an agent of change within the system who acts either to promote or sabotage the program (Lazarawitz, 2002). The principal can act on a number of levels that represent his position on the intervention program. For example, he can allow his institution to be included in the intervention project but not extend any further organizational assistance needed to implement it. In such a case, the principal's behavior will convey the message that the project is a foreign body in the school and belongs only to the

external agents of change. In contrast, the principal who indirectly, but consistently uses his authority to grant the support and assistance needed by the educational staff to implement the program, conveys the message that he supports it and fosters the conditions where change can occur (Sharan & Yishai, 1994).

Other than the role of the principal in assimilating the program, an important factor is the attitude of the educators themselves to the program. The willingness of educators to adopt a certain program may be possible by pressure from higher echelons. However, implementation over a period of time is destined to fail if they are merely coerced in to accepting it. According to the rationalistic/bureaucratic model, educators were thought of as passive parties meant only to absorb the change. In this sense, the intervention program and the changes it attempts to introduce are presented as an object being transferred from the experts to the consumers – the educators. This approach has been proven ineffective and has more recently been replaced by an interactive model of multi-directional communication between experts and teachers. This approach claims that change is made possible thanks to reciprocal actions taken by the agents of change – both administrators and educators. This approach champions enlisting the cooperation of the people involved, those who will be influenced by the change (Gordon, 1989).

Sharan & Yishai (1990) expand upon this perspective and identify five important factors that must be included in the intervention program: theoretical study, practical illustrations, hands-on experience in new skills taught in workshops, practical feedback to participants and in-service training at the workplace. In light of the above, researchers claim that in-service programs tend to fail over and over again if they lack assistance in implementation and follow-through in the educational setting. In-service workshops do not lead to change amongst educators as they remain only programs that broaden the scope of general knowledge of the educators who participate in them.

In addition to the school factors involving school culture and the attitudes of the principal and educators towards the intervention program, there are factors outside the school that influence the program that seeks to engender change. The school is an open system, dependent on its environment. This dependence is also expressed in the connection of the school and the local municipality. Therefore, agents of change must ensure active support of the municipal supervision, so that schools can meet the requirements of the intervention program. Lacking the support of important parties in the municipality can lead to the creation of resistant groups who may overpower the program and defeat it (Sharan & Yishai, 1994).

The agents of change are another important factor in the equation, in addition to the system of supervision. Agents of change can be individuals from inside the educational system. However, they usually come from outside the system. Sharan & Yishai (1990) identify four types of agents: the catalyst, the resource enlists, the problem solver and the assistant to the process. Agents of change can match one of these types, but can also fill all of these roles simultaneously. However, often they make use of various people inside and outside the system to promote processes. According to Gordon (1989) close cooperation between all internal and external agents of change and between their clients (i.e. educators) is instrumental in engendering the desired change.

Agents of change who initiate and run intervention programs must construct them to flow from the top down. However, during the implementation period, they must maintain close contact with the field and take into account the needs of educators by sharing various aspects and decisions that involve them.

The growth of early childhood intervention programs began to grow in light of the establishment of early childhood educational frameworks and the understanding that the educators working can be trained to help foster change amongst children with special needs.

Many research approaches indicate the connection between early intervention and the prevention of future educational problems amongst primary school aged children. Studies of early intervention programs show that the earlier a child is exposed to a developmental environment that matches his/her educational needs, the better his/her chances for significant improvements and the reduction of difficulties that will surface in the future (Winoker, Goldhirsch, 1997). Guralnick et.al. (1995) add that a child growing up in an environment that does not provide all of the above or is only exposed to it at a relatively older age, may develop inefficient coping mechanisms that even therapy may not disentangle. In this sense, early intervention can prevent the aggravation of existing difficulties, the appearance of accompanying emotional-social difficulties and a reduction in the severity of learning disabilities at school age.

Many researchers in the field of psychology, health and education claim that for an early intervention program to bring about positive results it must include the following factors:

- The program must be implemented in regular educational settings, with the educator (male/female) leading the identification and intervention process.
- The intervention must be multi-disciplinary, including educational and therapeutic professionals working together with full cooperation. Their cooperation will allow for an efficient combination of therapeutic and educational aspects of the intervention, will create shared responsibility and will decrease the sense of isolation felt by the educator during the process.
- The (male/female) educators who lead the process must have sufficient knowledge of normal child development and that of children exhibiting developmental challenges. They must also have skills in minimizing difficulties as well as the ability to plan developmental/educational activities for children with developmental difficulties that include the parents in the process (Kedman et.als. 1997).

Lipshitz & Ofer (1999) expand upon these important characteristics of intervention programs and add on several criteria for constructing an effective early intervention program:

- Quality – the program must match the developmental stage of the child and his/her needs, with reference made to the interpersonal differences between the children. Quality includes the physical surroundings in which training takes place as well as the materials used and the content conveyed.
- Intensity – the more intensive the program and the more active and regular the educators' participation, the better the results that will be achieved by the program.
- Duration of intervention – the longer the intervention continues the more benefit accrues. The time during which the educational staff receives support is also important. The optimal time for accompanying staff is throughout the entire school year, for three consecutive years.
- Programs must be relevant to the cultural context of the educators, the children and the families who are its target audience. Ramey & Ramey (1998), claim that this is the only way programs will be accepted and internalized in the daily life of the target community.

Many researchers currently speak of observing “cultural difference”, as opposed to previous terms such as “social deviation” or “cultural equality”, which imply a measure of judgment (Garcia coll & Meyer, 1993). Leshem & R. Strayer (2003) support this position and claim that in the past, professionals tended to ignore cultural influences on their professional work. The researchers suggest that professionals should now develop new models of culture-sensitive intervention programs. The adoption of such models refers, first and foremost, to a familiarity with the target population of the intervention program. In this context, Shimoni (2005) adds on the importance of having service-providers or agents of change research their own cultural background and confront their personal beliefs and prejudices and the ways these influence their world view. Arbel and Avrahami (2005) in their book “The Path to Follow” stress that the agents of change must contact the community’s accepted leadership and utilize inter-cultural

moderators who will help decipher cultural codes and the promotion of the program on the community level.

In a background paper written by Sirkin, Zalzburg & Yuruwitz (2004) mapping out the needs to be met and the research directions to be taken in the Haredi community, several principles were established for working in the community:

- The program must be approved and backed by the spiritual leadership and accepted Rabbis from as many sectors as possible in the community.
- Agents of change must be careful to preserve the religious nature of the setting and of their behavior. For example, the separation between men and women, modest dress and appropriate language.
- The Rabbis must be consulted on a regular basis during the entire intervention program.
- Haredi advisors and researchers must be employed to serve as a bridge between the secular professionals and the service consumers.
- Community agents, as opposed to external professionals should be utilized where possible to engender the change.
- Staff members should be employed according to gender and sector considerations.

Intervention programs in the field of education involve agents from both inside and outside the school. All these agents constitute the organizational environment that can provide an impetus for processes of change or can work to prevent them. Many researchers in the field of early intervention programs connect the child's development with the various systems to which s/he belongs. In their opinion, over and above direct intervention with the child, creating change must include the child's family framework and other frameworks such as the schools and the educators with whom he/she is involved (Sakran et. als., 2004).

Nonetheless, the current research challenge does not rest solely on which model is the most efficient in engendering change in educators or in children. Rather, it is based on determining the type and character of intervention best suited to different populations. In this sense, every intervention program must refer to the cultural context in which it takes place, as well as criteria such as gender, risk factors and other interpersonal aspects in order to achieve its goals.

2.5 The “Active Nurturing Playground” Project

The “Active Nurturing Playground” project is an early intervention program taking place within a unique cultural context. This intervention program includes training Haredi educators (male/female) to identify and minimize the difficulties of kindergarten aged children. To understand the processes of change, in reference to children with difficulties, undergone by the women educators as opposed to men educators, we must first address the essence and components of the program and the cultural adaptations that were needed to match it to the cultural context of the Haredi community and the participating (male/female) educators.

The “Active Nurturing Playground” Project Synopsis

The “Active Nurturing Playground” is an early intervention program for (male/female) educators in Talmud Torah kindergartens in the Haredi community. The project focuses on:

- ❖ Creating an enriching developmental environment for all the children in the kindergartens participating in the intervention program.
- ❖ Identifying at an early age, children with difficulties who are at risk for learning disabilities and minimizing their difficulties with the help of the educational staff.

- ❖ Encouraging processes of change in (male/female) educators as well as in more extensive circles in the community, in reference to the child exhibiting developmental difficulties.

The project was initiated by a developmental occupational therapist and a developmental physiotherapist in the children's division of "Ezer Mizion" and is being implemented with the help of the Bernard Van-Leer Foundation, Ashalim – Joint Israel, The Matan Foundation – "your way to give" and the education departments of local municipalities. The project began in 2004 in 60 kindergarten settings, after a pilot project that was conducted in 16 kindergartens in Bnei Brak. The project in its current format will end in the year 2007.

The developmental staff of the children's division of "Ezer Mizion" noticed the fact that Haredi settings of education for boys lacked a suitable infrastructure to identify children with developmental difficulties in early childhood. Lack of infrastructure, both in training and knowledge of educational staff and in the playground environment, delays the referral of boys for developmental treatment until the ages of 7-8 and keeps them from realizing their potential.

Lack of Suitable Training for Educational Staff

Most of the kindergartens are staffed by male kindergarten teachers, usually lacking in formal training. This is reflected, among other things, in a lack of tools and a lack of awareness of the importance of play and movement at an early age or the identification of slight developmental challenges. A minority of kindergartens are staffed by seminary trained female teachers but whose training has focused mainly on cognitive and pedagogical aspects, without knowledge of the sensory-motor aspects of development and its implications on the learning process.

Meager Stimulus Environment

The learning environment in most Talmud Torahs for boys is extremely lacking in stimulus (playground equipment and games) as compared to the environment in girls' kindergartens and as compared to kindergartens in the secular population in Israel. These findings motivated the professional staff of the "Children's Division" to try and solve this problem by creating an enriching developmental environment in playgrounds for all children, and particularly for those exhibiting developmental difficulties. Such an environment, coupled with training, granting practical tools and knowledge for the educational staff (male/female), creates an educational climate favoring a change in attitude to children with developmental challenges. It also enables the educators to identify difficulties at an early stage, thus minimizing the difficulties of those children at high risk for learning disabilities. In addition, it enriches the developmental world of the all the children in that particular educational setting.

Project Goals

- ❖ Training of the educational staff by a developmental team:
 1. Early identification of boys aged 3-5 exhibiting signs of developmental difficulty and minimizing their challenges through playground and classroom activities.
 2. Early referral of these boys for developmental treatment where intervention by the teachers is insufficient.
 3. Encouragement of "processes of change" of educators (male/female) in reference to children with developmental difficulties
- ❖ Creating an enriching developmental environment for all the children in the project.

- ❖ Increasing the awareness of the community and its leadership regarding the importance of sensory-motor components of early childhood development, in general, and in the area of education, in particular.

Target Population

Sixty educators (male/female), 1,800 boys, aged 3-5 learning in municipally run or Talmud Torah kindergartens. The kindergartens were chosen by the education departments of the various municipalities. They represent various sectors in the Haredi community. The project encompassed all the children in the kindergartens. However, special emphasis was placed on identifying children with developmental difficulties, at risk for learning disabilities.

The developmental challenges addressed by the program include:

- ❖ Difficulties stemming from lack of regulation of sensory systems (superficial sensation, deep sensation, balance and posture).
- ❖ Difficulties in balance.
- ❖ Weakness and unsteadiness of the shoulder girdle.
- ❖ Low muscle tone and coordination problems.
- ❖ Attention and concentration deficits.
- ❖ Social-emotional difficulties linked to the developmental challenge.

These difficulties have a direct implication on readiness for school, on a pupil's accomplishments and achievements and on the implementation of cognitive skills such as reading, writing and abstract thinking.

Children suffering from developmental difficulties appear to be functioning like others their age. It is only a trained eye that can identify the minor problems at such an early age. These children are of average intelligence or more. The developmental difficulties

not identified and treated in time contribute to additional problems in the emotional-behavioral sphere; for example – a sense of failure, a lack of self confidence, social isolation and so on. Without early identification of the problem and its treatment, these children may need special education in the coming years. In extreme cases, they may even drop out into the margins of society.

Implementing the Program – Putting Thought to Action

The project, begun in 2004 has three stages of implementation:

Stage A – Environmental design of the kindergarten playgrounds, to adjust them to the developmental needs of children aged 3-5. This included checking the playground area for size, choosing equipment that would allow for creative use and would foster development of movement elements vital for school readiness.

Stage B – Training of the educational staff over a period of three years; by lectures on various developmental issues, training in playground activities and discussion groups. This stage included theoretical and experiential sessions for 3-4 academic hours, once in several weeks. It also included practical training every week in the school playground and classroom in order to apply the enrichment program for all the children and for the children with difficulties, in particular.

Stage C – Enrichment lectures for parents, educational workshops for principals and early age supervisors; publication of a training pamphlet for parents and educational staff in the community.

Cultural Adaptation

The project's establishment took into account the unique cultural, educational and ideological characteristics of the target population:

- ❖ **Choosing the playground as the site of intervention** relayed to all relevant parties a message of non-intervention in educational content sensitive to change and intervention.
- ❖ **Seeking the backing and support of a non-profit organization such as “Ezer Mizion”** that is acceptable to all sectors in the community. Seeking the support of additional local Rabbis during the entire training programs of the educators and principals.
- ❖ **Enlisting principals and supervisors in the process** by conducting workshops and update sessions for principals on topics relevant to the project. These sessions were applied according to the behavioral codes suited to each sector.
- ❖ **Consulting frequently with a Haredi advisor** whose job was to accompany the process as far as content matter and to interpret behavior codes.
- ❖ **Choosing developmental therapists** willing to work in a community that differs culturally from his/her own and to comply with religious dictates in his/her dress and behavior. The division of the staff in different areas was based on gender considerations.
- ❖ **Implementing the program via community agents** – use of educators from the community as opposed to introducing external developmental staff to diagnose, locate and refer children for developmental treatment. The use of these agents increases the efficacy of the project and the likelihood that it will continue to be assimilated, even after the project in its current format has officially ended.
- ❖ **Identifying the child with challenges by the kindergarten teacher and the melamed and working with him in his peer group** in the playground and in the classroom. Identifying the child in his natural location without setting him apart prevents stigma and its harsh implications in this closed community.

- ❖ **Adjusting the educational and practical tools** in the training program and in its implementation to the gender of the participants (male/female educators) and the feedback received from them.
- ❖ **Refraining from involving the parents at the first stage of the project** due to the intense suspicions of parents regarding programs in educational settings. Only after the Talmud Torah principal's trust was acquired were parents approached and involved in the program.

Methodology

In this thesis, we have studied processes of change that occurred as a result of the “Active Nurturing Playground Project”, in the Haredi educational staff (male/female) with reference to the child with developmental difficulties. In addition, we attempted to ascertain the differences in the way these changes occur in the women, as opposed to the men, participating in the project, as well as the way their cultural context affects these changes.

I. Research Method

The qualitative research method strives to interpret a phenomenon and a process from the perspective of the subjects and the significance they themselves grant situations that have occurred. Qualitative research does not rest on preliminary assumptions, as is acceptable in quantitative research. The qualitative researcher’s perceptions and theories are constructed over the course of a dynamic process, based on the cumulative findings from the field (Zabar Ben Yehoshua, 1997).

In research that examines a phenomenon influenced by behavior, environmental context and conditions of the subject, quantitative research cannot provide answers as satisfactory as does qualitative research that can provide a glimpse into the world of the subjects and their own particular perceptions (Merriam, 1998).

In addition, qualitative inquiry is characterized by its holistic approach to a phenomenon. In this approach, it is important to understand the context of the phenomenon in question. This context includes conditions, times, setting, history and the norms in which the events occur. Therefore, any research attempting to examine a phenomenon must take these dimensions into account (Shkedi, 2003).

Therefore, the research method chosen was a qualitative research method known as “**action research**”. Action research in education attempts to examine the connection between the

action carried out and the professional development of educational staffs (Zabar Ben Yehoshua, 2001). This study has examined the “Active Nurturing Playground” early intervention project and its implications on processes of change undergone by Haredi educational staff in reference to children with developmental difficulties.

Action research is characterized by circular maneuvers of data collection that include pinpointing the problem, the action taken and its evaluation. These circles create a reflexive spiral in which the participants – both initiators and subjects – are invited to share their thoughts and change their practices. These spiraling maneuvers are represented at various levels in three models of action research in education. These models are: the traditional-technical, the cooperative-practical and the emancipatory-critical. After examining these models it was evident that this study reflects certain dimensions of both the traditional-technical model and the cooperative-practical model. In the traditional-technical model of action research the goal is to create processes of change, in particular a change of attitude. In addition, the individual, in this case the educator, is perceived as both an instrument and an object of change processes. The research allows for corrective feedback from the educator and his/her cooperation is sought after. In addition, the overall goal of the research is known, however there is no clear knowledge as to where the research will lead (Zabar Ben Yehoshua, 2001).

However, the project and the research process conducted also contain elements of the cooperative-practical research model. Though preliminary goals did not change, over the course of research a cooperative, reflective process was conducted at each level and in between each level of action. This was true on the part of the project initiators, as well as the teaching staff and the educational staff. Cooperation at the level of the educators led to requests for specific information, methods for the transmission of learning materials and recommendations concerning various elements of documents, questionnaires and reports that were constructed.

Following recommendations from the field and the attitudes voiced by educational staff, many of the project's documents were changed and even revamped. In this sense the individual, i.e. the educator, was a full partner to processes and not only their object (Zabar Ben Yehoshua, 2001).

In addition to the research approach chosen above, it is also possible to identify the use of the **ethnographic research** method. The "Active Nurturing Playground" project and an examination of processes of change took place within the Haredi community. Moreover, it took place within Haredi educational institutions - Talmud Torahs- where boys study. These institutions represent a stronghold of the community. Therefore, the cultural-ideological context, the initial nature of the project in this context and the suspicions it triggered, all contributed to coloring the process that I was attempting to examine.

According to Zabar (2001) the ethnographic researcher also investigates the norms and the values that subjects are not aware of and take for granted. Therefore, ethnographic research refers to questions such as: What is the social situation in question? What cultural issues surface from an inquiry into circumstances? What cultural discoveries emerge from the field? (Zabar, 2001). In the discussion, we have tried to answer the research questions and we have, in particular, tried to refer to the differences in the processes of change undergone by the women as opposed to the men participating in the project. Without this type of ideological/cultural/gender reference, such an answer would not be complete.

II. Research Field

Sixty members of the educational staffs (male/female) working in Talmud Torah kindergartens for boys in the Haredi community. There were two groups of men and two groups of women located in Jerusalem, Bnei Brak, Kiriath Sepher and Rechovot. Most of the women in the two groups are kindergarten teachers by profession, with accreditation by teachers' seminaries.

Their professional experience ranges from a number of years in the field, through as much as twenty years experience. The Rechasim group includes assistants without professional training whatsoever; considered inferior in their knowledge as compared to the kindergarten teachers. The group in Kiriat Sefer is comprised of teachers and assistants who have been trained as kindergarten teachers, but have taken the job of assistant for lack of employment elsewhere as teachers. The “melamdin” are male teachers with no professional educational training – their only training being yeshiva study. Their average years of teaching range from a few, through 20 years, similar to the female teachers.

We direct the project and conduct monthly meetings to supervise, train and teach the project’s teaching staff (3 women and 3 men) consisting of developmental therapists who, in turn, teach the educational staff.

The training program run by the teaching staff includes lectures on various developmental topics, training in the usage of practical tools and discussion groups. Practical training takes place within the kindergarten setting; implementing the enrichment program for all the children and with particular emphasis on the children exhibiting challenges. Theoretical-practical training, undergone by the educational staff, is the main axis of the project. Its aim is to create cognitive, behavioral and emotional processes of change regarding the child with developmental difficulties. The developmental and managerial staff remains in the background of the project and the intervention program, with the educational staff in the forefront. It is the educational staff that identifies the problems, deals with the developmental difficulties exhibited by the children and refers to other therapeutic interventions, as needed. This format contrasts with an intervention program executed by an external developmental staff that screens and diagnoses children exhibiting challenges in educational institutions and refers them for external developmental treatment. We believe that such programs keep the educators from becoming involved and taking responsibility for the child at risk. They reduce the efficacy of

the intervention process and the processes of change they are attempting to introduce with reference to the challenged child.

III. Research Tool

An examination of the research tools, described in the literature on intervention programs in an educational context, led to the conclusion that a combined use of observations, questionnaires and interviews would be most suitable.

- The **questionnaires** were distributed to the educators (male/female) working in the Talmud Torah kindergartens at two points in time. Open-ended questionnaires were distributed during the middle of the first year (Appendix Number 1) and a more structured questionnaire towards the end of the second year (Appendix Number 2). In these questionnaires, the educators described the functioning of one or two children that they had identified as having difficulties. They gave details about the process they had undergone with them, including the feelings, thoughts and their conduct before and during the intervention program.

- The **Personal interviews** (20) with the pre-school female teachers and the melamdin occurred at the end of the second year. The interviews were performed by the Myers-JDC-Brookdale institute. The teachers were asked about the project, the difficulties they had encountered; changes in their attitudes in the course of their participation and how they would assess the effectiveness of the project.

IV. Research Significance in relation to Gender

The female teacher in the boys' kindergartens and the melamdin trained in the "Active Nurturing Playground" intervention program, acquire knowledge and tools that can promote the challenged child. They become a voice that is more in demand; they are better able to express themselves with greater intensity, both vis a vis the administration and the parents of children entrusted to their care. This empowers the educators and transforms them into more

highly valued teachers, both in their own eyes and in the eyes of others. The mother and the father of a child who is trained by such a teacher, in turn, become aware of their own resources as a parent and their capacities to change a bad decree. As a result, their status may also change and not remain as defined and blocked off as before. Even if their child is having difficulties, it will no longer label them and their other children who are waiting for a “shidduch” (a good match) as less valuable. The mother and father can take action on behalf of their child and on behalf of themselves. This power can influence other areas of their functioning as well, creating a chain reaction of improved powers. The “Active Nurturing Playground” project, with its interlaced changes, creates an opportunity for educators and parents of a challenged child to sound a “different voice” in the community.

V. Research Significance in Other Realms

- An examination of processes of change in educators, if they had occurred, validated the present training program and its construction. It was also important to be aware of junctures where the processes were disrupted, in order to make the necessary improvements.
- The formation and the maintenance of processes of change regarding the child with challenges from a judgmental, rejecting stance to a position of support, understanding and acceptance, increased the efficacy of knowledge acquisition, as well as the practical implementation in the case of these children. It is possible that such a process will help preserve the project and its principles over time, even after the current format ends and will remain influential at a wider community level.
- This research is important to coordinators of other projects, both in Israel and abroad. It is particularly significant in culturally sensitive early intervention projects and especially those where both men and women are involved. Coordinators can learn from this documentation and possibly implement the principles fostering change processes in general

and, in particular, those that refer to gender. This will enable the at-risk child to become a child with potential in their projects.

VI. Research Limitations

This research, its topics and avenues of actions, posed several limitations:

- Our presence as a non-Haredi researcher examining a process, occurring within a cultural space foreign to her own, was likely to influence our analysis of the process. We have been employed by Ezer Mizion for 15 years and have previously worked for another organization within the Haredi community. Our daily work involves extending aid, training and teaching within the community. However, as it is not our own culture, our interpretations of processes occurring in its midst could be mistaken. Hence, throughout the process of data analysis, we have consulted with individuals in the community and researchers in the field of culture-sensitive intervention, in order to decipher the findings with as much credibility as possible.
- An additional limitation of the research involves the distribution of questionnaires. In the Haredi sector the discussion of behavior, feelings and thoughts is kept discreet, more so when it comes to children with developmental difficulties. Therefore, it is possible that the answers in the questionnaires do not completely divulge the “honest” answers of kindergarten teachers/melamdin. In addition, it is possible that the close-knit relationships, between the teaching staff and the educational staff, woven throughout the training process and the research process may have influenced the material written up in the questionnaires. It is possible that in an attempt to please the teaching staff, the educational staff wrote up what it felt was expected. In light of these findings, we distributed anonymous questionnaires, explicitly stating in the introduction not to mention the name of the child identified. We also stated that every answer is important and there are no specifically right

or wrong answers. In view of the complexity of change processes in educational settings, and particularly in such a closed community, two differently structured questionnaires were used at two different points in time. They referred to children exhibiting difficulties who had been identified before the training program began and during the course of the program.

- Another limitation that we, as researchers, believe exists in the research is the subjectivity that influences research findings. As the researcher is involved in the field and in the process for an extended course of time, it is likely that his/her opinions and beliefs will influence data collection. Thus, there is an approach that claims that such research lacks scientific credibility (Zabar Ben Yehoshua, 1997).

According to Levi (1998), the evaluation of such a complex process must take place with caution and awareness of subjective interpretations. This caution can be ensured by including various perspectives of different people involved in the process. In this case, we maintained constant contact with the staff teaching in the project. Shared reflections with these parties and their various points of view contributed to creating a more profound evaluative process and abstaining from narrow subjective interpretations that fall short of the mark.

Findings and Discussion

Introduction

The current qualitative research was born from a desire to examine processes of change undergone by female kindergarten teachers as opposed to melamdim in Talmud Torah kindergartens in the Haredi community, following the “Active Nurturing Playground” project. This project is an early intervention program for educators (male/female) that focuses on the identification of challenged young children, at risk for learning disabilities and the minimization of their difficulties. In addition, the research has examined the gender and cultural context of these changes.

An analysis of the questionnaires answered by educators led to three categories:

1. Profile of the Challenged Child from the Educator’s Perspective
2. Perceptions of Professional Capabilities of Educators
3. Empowerment

1. Profile of the Challenged Child from the Educator’s Perspective

Findings involving the profile of the challenged child, as seen through the eyes of (female) kindergarten teachers and melamdim, refer to the period before and during the intervention program. This profile has three categories.

- 1.1. Characteristics the educators chose to describe the challenged child
- 1.2. Beliefs, perceptions and feelings concerning the challenged child
- 1.3. Means of coping with challenged children

These three categories will be described in the time dimension (before and during the program) and in the gender dimension (men as opposed to women).

1.1 Characteristics of the Challenged Child (before the Intervention Program)

Women:

The female kindergarten teachers usually opened with a description of the child's difficulties. It was mainly a wide generalization that referred to four areas of the child's functioning: language, behavior, socialization and learning. Possibly, these difficulties were mentioned precisely because they have a direct influence over the abilities of boys to fulfill their destinies as "Talmedai Chachamim" (Bible scholars) and are therefore the qualities most valued. The description is replete with professional terms that the teachers have acquired in their studies at the seminary and during their educational career (training and in-service workshop center, Beit Hamoreh, 2006).

"H. has functional difficulty with language that causes problems both with friends and with the teachers; he also has a hard time understanding instructions and carrying them out properly" (questionnaire 1).

"I accepted a child who was very quiet, didn't cooperate, was very jumpy, wandered around and had difficulties in attention and learning, counting, numbering, terms and colors; socially, he was not popular to say the least" (questionnaire 1).

"At a glance, I could see that he was different from his friends. Israel had difficulties with language; his speech was deficient and it was not always clear" (questionnaire 2).

If the child's problem is not as well defined as language or learning, the teachers immediately start labeling the perceived behavior as "different", without understanding what causes it and what it hints at. This fact is apparently related to the fact that in the seminaries much emphasis is placed on the process of learning and language skills. As far as other areas, the teachers are taught about the diagnostic aspects of disabilities, without developing the ability to observe and reach conclusions from their observation. The descriptions are not directed to the

characteristics of the child's behavior, but to its irregularity. This fact contradicts what has been stated in academic research about secular female kindergarten teachers being less influenced by labeling, less judgmental and more open to the challenged child due to the fact that the kindergarten is not an academic setting (Duke & Prater, 1991). It may be that the kindergarten teachers in the Haredi community, who are required to prepare the boys for fluent reading, cannot, unlike their counterparts in secular society, allow themselves the luxuries of being open minded and less judgmental towards the challenged child.

“M. tends to watch his friends who are playing and keeps out of the game. M. arrives at school neat and orderly but very quickly his appearance changes for the worse. He drools a lot and doesn't seem bothered in the least by hair in his eyes or crumbs left on his lips. During our morning circle, he frequently changes position and sometimes falls backwards. Very often, he takes a rest break on the couch. He puts nearly everything in hand's reach in his mouth; bites his sleeve and drools on his shirt. He even puts stickers we use for creative work in his mouth. We hardly have any verbal communication with him; he's hard to understand” (questionnaire 1).

“S. is nearly 4 years old; it's his first year in kindergarten. From the first day, it was quite clear that he was different. He behaved like a baby who found it hard to part from his mother. He cried and refused to come into the kindergarten. It was only after a few days, a warm approach and large amounts of persuasion that he entered happily. The most obvious things about him was that he behaved like a baby; walked like one, jumped like a one year old, talked baby talk and even ate and drank like a baby” (questionnaire 1).

Some of the kindergarten teachers include words such as well groomed, clean, neat, cute and sweet in their descriptions of the children. The minority state functional strengths. The few who do so, refer to these strengths as a reflection of values the community finds important;

those that included in its concept of “Derech Eretz” (desired mode of behavior) (Appelbaum, 2000).

“He’s a sweet child, well groomed, handsome, with a rich vocabulary; a child with feelings, considerate of others” (questionnaire 2).

“T. is a neat child who looks different from the others. He remains aloof during activities, daydreams during our morning circle. He’s a smart child; with a wide vocabulary and a particularly high level of intelligence” (questionnaire 1).

“M. will be three years old in two months; a content child who likes to help out and lend a hand whenever possible” (questionnaire 2).

Most of the kindergarten teachers report difficulties during activity time in class, such as the morning circle, creative work times and during meals. There is almost no mention of difficulties exhibited during movement activities or in the playground. This may be due to the fact that the approach they have learned at Haredi seminaries for women teachers is basically a cognitive theory of development. It is only in recent years that there is more understanding about the importance of sensory-motor functioning, apparent in the kindergarten and in the playground, and its influence over learning processes (Guralnick et al, 1995).

“E. loves quiet games without the fuss of lots of children around him. He likes to sit with the books and play quietly by the table. He finds it hard to manage with scissors and also with coloring.” (questionnaire 1).

“H. is a quiet child; he doesn’t much like to play with puzzles or construction games. I try to get him to play one game after another, but he does it with compulsion and stops playing as quickly as possible. He sits quietly and looks like he’s dreaming during creative activities. He works without desire and doesn’t finish his creative work.” (questionnaire 1).

In summary, the women describe the challenged child by telling about his difficulties and make almost no mention of any functional strength. The difficult areas described are mainly those of learning, language, behavior and social adjustment – areas of functioning that are valued by the Haredi community. Most of the descriptions focus on what takes place in the classroom, rather than in the playground.

Men:

In contrast to the women, most of the men begin their description of the child by telling about his functional strengths. Only afterwards do they begin to describe his difficulties. The strengths the melamdim mention are significant in terms of community values, but in addition to external dimensions (such as nice, well groomed, pleasant) they make note of personality and functional aspects. Afterwards, they give detailed behavioral descriptions with very little labeling or professional terms. The feeling is that the child is not merely a sum of his difficulties and has an identity over and beyond the declared difficulties. The question that can be asked is whether these melamdim, who are at the bottom of the ladder in the Talmud Torahs and have not themselves fulfilled their destinies as great scholars (Levi, 1997), are perhaps less judgmental and more sympathetic to the challenged child than are the women. It is also possible that their lack of knowledge and academic acumen causes them to base their evaluations more on emotional resources.

“Kobi. is a sweet child with many talents and a rich vocabulary. His external appearance is reasonable and he attends kindergarten regularly. He is a very sensitive child with strong inner energies. This is expressed by crying. When he comes to school I greet him with a good morning and he breaks out in tears. I ask him why he’s crying and he won’t tell me. When he needs to go the bathroom, he cries instead of asking to go. When he brings in a note from his parents for the Rabbi, he cries instead of giving

me the note. He cries at the drop of hat, good, bad, little, big... I must say that he wanted to come to cheder, but when the children were sitting at attention for prayers or for a story, he didn't fold his hands and he would slide down the chair or lie on the table or rock his chair back and forth" (questionnaire 1).

"He's a very sweet child who makes a great impression on everyone. He has above average talent, healthy logic, a good visual memory and a heart of gold. On the other hand, he falls down a lot and can't even go down the stairs like other children his age" (questionnaire 1).

Similar to the (female) kindergarten teachers, most of the melamdim (lacking in any developmental knowledge whatsoever) notice the difficulties. However, this is only regarding classroom activities and there is no mention of difficulties in the playground or in any kind of movement activity. The community, in general, and the melamdim in particular are not sufficiently aware of the connection between movement and learning processes. Therefore, many of the educational settings, particularly the kindergartens, are lacking a yard or the proper recreational equipment. In addition, prevalent attitudes hold that recess is only to help children relax and is therefore quite marginal to the classroom and what goes on there (Todor, 2006).

"When the children were sitting at attention or praying or during story time, he didn't fold his hands; he would slide down the chair, lie on the table or rock his chair back and forth." (questionnaire 2).

"I could see right away that Yudale had difficulties with crafts; anything to do with his hands was hard. The child was very restless during classes that last only 40 minutes. He falls off his chair several times during lessons, as well as during prayers and morning attention-circle." (questionnaire 1).

“The pupil Shlomo is well groomed and neat, with very supportive parents. However, his difficulties were seen very quickly when he couldn’t cope with the rigid framework of classroom discipline.” (questionnaire 1).

In summary: The findings show that the description of the challenged child by women is labeling and judgmental with little or no mention of any functional strength. In comparison, the melamdin's description of the child is more behavioral, less judgmental and more empathetic; with mention made of functional strengths. Both gender groups do not refer to the sensory-motor functioning of the kindergarten children or playground recess time.

Perhaps these findings stem from the academic knowledge the women acquire during seminary that puts an emphasis on learning and diagnosis. It may also stem from the women’s gender role in preparing the boys from an early age for high achievement in reading. It may be that the men’s description of the children stems from a lack of developmental knowledge and from their identification with them.

1.2 Beliefs, Perceptions and Feelings concerning the Challenged Child (before the intervention program)

Women:

In addition to the knowledge exhibited by the women prior to the intervention program, their general perception of the challenged child is that he is unfortunate and miserable. It is clear that they pity him. The child is described as having difficulties in attention, concentration, language and learning. However, he is also miserable, unfortunate and "does not belong with us". This range of reaction is similar to those voiced by teachers about students with learning disabilities in their classes (Einat, 2005). Though teachers are equipped with a certain amount of developmental knowledge, acquired over years of in-service training programs, it does not

change their perceptions or have the power to instigate changes in their behavior or emotion (Sharan & Yishai, 1994). This fact stands in contrast to what has been said about how knowledge can be instrumental in changing opinions (Fuchs, 1995).

Not only does their knowledge not seem to change their perceptions and feelings about the challenged child, but on the contrary, the women are captured by and lost in the diagnostic labels and do not seem able to understand the connection between the difficulty and the child's behavior.

“The child seemed to have difficulties connected with clumsiness. It seems like he will stay that way and not much can be done for him. I thought I'd try to help him and maybe he'd make a little progress, but he seemed quite miserable; everything is harder for him and that's how he'll remain.” (questionnaire 2).

“I thought Yossi was a clumsy child; weak, slow, bashful, very apprehensive. Not too many things in kindergarten were able to give him the feeling of success.”

(questionnaire 2).

The child's situation raises many questions about which the kindergarten teachers ponder:

“What is he missing? Why does he keep on interrupting in class? Where does it come from? Why does the child have such a frequent need to make sounds and with such an intensity?” (questionnaire 1).

“What does he feel? What does he need from me as a teacher that can help him?”

(questionnaire 1).

“I didn't know what to think. A. would capture a piece of my mind and my heart; I worried about him for nearly the whole morning. I wanted to understand what was wrong with him, what made him different from the rest of his friends.” (questionnaire 1).

Other teachers try to explain the situation of the challenged child. They, and even more so their assistants, who have no training or professional knowledge, link the difficulties to emotional or social problems; or they tend to blame the parents.

“I thought that Avremi wasn’t doing so well socially. Maybe all the bitterness he was accumulating in his family he was exhibiting in kindergarten. I thought that he didn’t know how to make healthy social bonds so he resorted to hitting. As far as his lack of attention during morning circles, I thought that if he was bitter and had social problems, then he wouldn’t be able to listen because he was preoccupied with his own troubles anyway.” (questionnaire 1).

“We have a child who has a hard time following instructions. Whatever he feels inside he does immediately, even if the instruction is to sit quietly at attention. The child must come from a home without boundaries.” (questionnaire 1).

“The child grew up in a home where the parents speak a foreign language. When he came here, he was very quiet. I could sometimes feel that he was going into a rage from the slightest provocation. I was afraid that he had a mental problem.” (questionnaire 2).

Other teachers spoke about the challenged child not belonging in the present setting. This opinion may be influenced by the fact that the Haredi woman, in general, and the female teacher who works in the Talmud Torah, in particular, is measured according to the achievements of her sons and her students (Levi, 1991). Challenged children usually also have learning problems. Therefore, their difficulties may be interpreted as the teacher’s lack of ability:

“As I have already written, I didn’t believe I could help him. I thought that this was something for the child development institute.” (questionnaire 1).

“I thought maybe he belonged in a special setting, he didn’t belong here with us, he wasn’t suited to our kindergarten.” (questionnaire 2).

Another outstanding feature in what the women have written is the emotional opacity of the descriptions. The descriptions hardly reflect any of their emotions about the challenged child and what he triggers in them as a result of his situation. Their writing is very logical and revolves mainly around a description of the difficulties, perceptions, beliefs and methods of coping with the child. This perception and its expressions match the practical-existential role of the woman in the Haredi community (Levi, 1989). Perhaps the Haredi woman is not used to expressing emotions, let alone negative ones, in public. It is possible that the kindergarten teacher is wary of saying what she feels in order not to shame the child and his family, enter “private territory” or sin by voicing “slander” (Levi, 1997). Nevertheless, the women’s writings do exhibit a few sentences expressing empathy, pity or sorrow about the child’s situation and other statements in which the teacher feels as if the child’s behavior is directed specifically against her:

“I cry along with him and really want to be able to get inside what his heart is feeling. I can imagine how many disappointments and failures are lodged there.” (questionnaire 1).

“Two years ago, I thought he was a sad case, as someone with a problem.” (interview).

“I felt sorry for him. I really do care about him.” (questionnaire 2).

“At the beginning of the year I had a suspicion that maybe he wants to get me angry? Maybe he wants special attention?” (questionnaire 1).

“It’s hard to see him, why does he behave like that?” (questionnaire 1).

“When Bezalel comes I feel compelled to keep him busy, to make sure he’s playing and that his friends don’t tease him.” (questionnaire 2).

The teacher’s perception of the challenged child is that he has difficulties and is therefore unfortunate, miserable and pitiable. The kindergarten teachers try to interpret his situation but find it hard to understand. The assistants, lacking in professional knowledge, relate the

difficulty to emotional and family problems. The writings of both the teachers and their assistants exhibit emotional opacity toward the challenged child.

Men:

The knowledge factor is not dominant in the beliefs and perceptions of the men towards the challenged child, as they have only Yeshiva training and are not required to study in any additional framework in order to qualify for their jobs (Appelbaum, 2001). Their perceptions range between two extremes. On the one hand they express a sincere desire to help the child. On the other hand, in contrast to the women, they interpret his situation and behavior as a reflection of bad deeds and a “divine decree” that cannot be changed and therefore, do nothing to promote him. This contrasts with the expectation that the melamed must treat the child as if he were a doctor because he is responsible for curing his illness and must spare no effort to do so (Rabbi Friedlander, 1992).

“I know that something is bothering him. He doesn’t color or play and I would like to help him”. (questionnaire 2).

“I decided to try and help him as much as possible so that he would make progress and feel like an integral part of the class.” (questionnaire 2).

“I thought he was a “goilem” (dummy); a child, who does nothing, doesn’t function, in a group or independently. Whatever he does, he does without friends. He doesn’t go to the bathroom, doesn’t wash his hands. You have to do everything for him.”
(questionnaire 1).

“I thought that he would just remain like he is now for good; miserable and weak.”
(questionnaire 2).

“I thought he just couldn’t do anything and was naturally lazy.” (questionnaire 2).

“I thought, well that’s that. That’s how he was born and that’s how he’ll live for the 120 years he will have.” (questionnaire 2).

“Nothing can be done with him. That’s how he was born and that’s how he’ll remain. He’ll only be here for a year anyway, so why should I worry about what comes next. How much can I do for him, after all? What’s real is real!” (questionnaire 2).

“I used to think he was spoiled, behaving inappropriately” (interview).

“I used to think he was lazy, had no interest in it.”(interview).

“I used to think he was just sick and feeble.”(interview).

Other melamdim, similar to the kindergarten teachers, speculate about the child’s situation and therefore, open up a possibility for change:

“Moshi was rejected and looked strange and I just couldn’t really figure out what was going on with this child. At first I was like an onlooker who sees the child and only knows how to ask what’s going on? What’s his problem?” (questionnaire 2).

As opposed to the kindergarten teachers, only a few of whom relate the difficulties to emotional problems, most of the melamdim, similar to the assistants, relate the difficulty to emotional or family problems. This perception may be nourished by the melamdim’s lack of knowledge or by rabbinical literature that refers to children with difficulties as challenged children or children with a problematical education (Admor Shlita, 1991).

“I thought that his heaviness and his character are just his way; maybe he’s been spoiled and his parents do everything for him.” (questionnaire 2).

“It’s unfortunate, what a shame, a child that is not properly treated by parents; whose parents just don’t care.” (questionnaire 2).

“At the very beginning of the year I didn’t have a clue about these issues and I just thought he was a child lacking – lacking in discipline at home or lacking in educational motivation.” (questionnaire 2).

As opposed to the women, the men’s writings are quite emotional. They describe the feelings triggered by the child’s situation, mainly through the use of metaphor. This means of expression may have been influenced by years of studying the Bible in depth. The singsong style of the men’s writings is reminiscent of the musical line of prayers and the world of the Gemara and the Talmud, whose teachings are interspersed with parables and legends (stories that explain everyday life through metaphor).

The range of emotions expressed by the melamdim is as wide as the range of their perceptions about the challenged child. These feelings range from pity to identification to rejection, pressure and anger:

“The sight of him filled me with compassion. I found myself quite drawn to him.”
(questionnaire 1).

“As opposed to his parents, Shlomo was well aware of his own failures and from time to time would have a fit of frustrating desperation and unwillingness to try again. These were usually accompanied by salty tears.” (questionnaire 1).

“I felt very sorry for Kobi.” (questionnaire 1).

“My heart filled with compassion for the boy.” (questionnaire 1).

“It hurt me to see his classmates’ negative reactions to his situation. I understood that his difficulties would make the rest of the year hard. This exhausted me and I had absolutely no idea as to how to help him. I want to give up, but I’m holding back because he’s got a good head on his shoulders and maybe he’ll end up a genius like the Hazon-Ish (Avraham Yeshayahu Karelitz, a Talmud scholar called the “Visionary”)”
(questionnaire 1).

“He bothered me personally the most. I was with him for more or less four hours each day.” (questionnaire 1).

“You could say that at first I was very frustrated from merely seeing the child and not knowing what to do with him or with myself.” (questionnaire 1).

“I was deeply frustrated throughout the entire period. My feelings were flooded by the rancid waters of my inability to do anything.” (questionnaire 1).

The spectrum of emotions expressed in the writings of the melamdim may stem from the rabbinical literature written for educators on the topic of children with difficulties (Friedlander, 1992). On the one hand, the Rabbis write that their behavior stems from bad deeds. This can lead to anger and rejection by the educators. On the other hand, they write about the child as a sick child who the educator must heal. This prompts their responsibility and their pity.

In summary: The findings show that the women perceive the problematic child as one with developmental difficulties who is also miserable. However, their reactions are mainly rational and marked by emotional opacity. The men are quite emotional in their perception of the child and they explain the difficulty as a result of faulty education, bad deeds or a “divine decree” rather than a developmental difficulty. Similar to the men, the (female) assistants also base the difficulty on emotional and family difficulties.

1.3 Means of Coping with Challenged Children (before the Intervention Program)

Women:

The perceptions, beliefs and feelings about the challenged child dictate behavior towards him. The (female) kindergarten teachers’ methods of coping are, first and foremost, characterized by an attempt to deal with the problem by themselves. They usually do not involve other parties such as the administration, supervisors, parents or additional teachers, in order to consult with

them. Perhaps turning to another party would seem to reflect a lack of skill on her part.

Therefore, she prefers to cope with the problem alone. She may consult with other women, if so, she does this secretly. The phenomenon of the Haredi kindergarten teacher's isolation is similar to the isolation of teachers, in general. They generally are alone "behind the classroom door" (Einat, 2005). It is even more extreme in the case of women working in the men's world of the Talmud Torah. She must prove herself more than teachers working outside the Talmud Torah setting or teachers working with girls in the community.

A description of their methods of coping is written up with heavy use of words such as I tried... I made an attempt.... This means that their behavior exhibits a trial and error method that includes varied coping strategies that do not lead to the desired results.

"I tried to be very nice to him, to give him increased attention, I tried to teach him the basic rules of conduct in society and during our morning circles I tried to seat him with calm, nice children. I didn't seem to get any results at all!" (questionnaire 1).

"We always pitied the children with difficulties. I did things instead of them and encouraged them." (interview).

Coping strategies of the kindergarten teachers with the challenged child included:

- Verbal support and encouragement of the child to fortify his self confidence, in his own eyes and those of his friends:

"I tried to encourage him to speak about his distress, but he was very uncomfortable with this, so I stopped." (questionnaire 1).

"At first I encouraged him to talk to me. I would ask him about what he likes. I stood beside him and tried to give him strength by encouragement and support." (questionnaire 1).

- Various explanations (explaining, talking, engaging in conversation) to try and create proper behavior and assigned tasks:

“I tried to intervene and explain things to him. Now your friend is doing it, and soon it will be your turn... Then I gave him the assignment to set the table and bring things I needed, so he would feel active and would get satisfaction from what he was doing.” (questionnaire 1).

“We tried to be very warm and encourage him to do various assignments like opening and closing the gate.” (questionnaire 2).

- Use of behavior adjustment techniques, such as rewards:

“I tried to give him an assignment to clear and collect the plates. I remarked on his clothing, his appearance and gave him a sense of security and love. Occasionally I gave him prizes and rewards for the crafts that he did.” (questionnaire 2).

- Behavior motivated by giving in to the child because of pity:

“I tried to smile at him so he would feel happy. I could see his suffering and so I gave in to him.” (questionnaire 2).

The trial and error method of coping reflects feelings of responsibility in helping promote the children’s progress, including that of the challenged child. On the other hand, it shows a lack of knowledge and skills that could help her cope with the child exhibiting developmental difficulties. That is why she tries to use all the common strategies she has learned at the seminary. However, these strategies prove inefficient in coping with the challenged child and address the external manifestations of the problem rather than its core.

Men:

As compared to the women, the men do involve other parties within the educational framework in coping with the challenged child. At moments of crisis they turn to parties in the administration such as the principal or educational supervisor, but not to other teachers. This fact indicates the professional isolation of teachers in the Talmud Torahs and in general (Einat, 2005). This isolation may be intensified amongst melamdim even more so than amongst (female) kindergarten teachers, as such exposure could reduce the value of the educator whose status within the system is already tenuous. However, the melamed may frequently approach parents after having consulted the principal and after exhausting all other possibilities. Approaching the parents comes from desperation and a lack of ability to cope.

“I tried to encourage him, to get him to talk, to find out what’s bothering him. I also went to the administration.” (questionnaire 2).

“No matter what I did, it didn’t seem to help him. So the principal and I decided that we had no choice but to put him back a class as there was no possibility of helping him.” (questionnaire 1).

“I called his parents. The first conversation was kind of confusing. The parents were bewildered, even though they agreed on the facts. But they kind of hoped things would work themselves out.” (questionnaire 1).

“We spoke to the father on occasion and tried several things to improve his behavior, but without results.” (questionnaire 2).

Some of the actual coping practices of the melamdim resemble those of the (female) teachers and assistants; others differ. They use strategies similar to the (female) teachers, such as: praise, encouragement and attention. However, in contrast to the (female) teachers, they use more touch and fewer explanations. Also, in contrast to the women and assistants, the melamdim report openly on limiting approaches they use such as punishment, ignoring the

child, not cooperating with him and even giving up on him. Research on the topic (Sachtman & Almog, 2004) finds that not only did such methods not improve the situation, they caused it to deteriorate.

“I praised him when he did things right. I sat him next to very sociable children. I also tried to pose intellectual challenges for him.” (questionnaire 2).

“I drew him closer by lots of touches and hugs. I talked positively with him – look here, see how well you’re doing. If anyone does something to you, let me know about it, don’t try to handle it alone.” (questionnaire 1).

“I gave him some attention this morning. The main thing is that the other children won’t hurt him and that he’ll go home in one piece and the parents won’t have any complaints to lodge against me.” (questionnaire 1).

“At the beginning of the year the child was punished for his behavior because everyone suffered from him. He reacted with frustration and there was no evidence of improvement.” (questionnaire 2).

“I ignored him like he ignored those around him. After all, he didn’t do any damage and didn’t disturb anyone. Finally, I hardly paid him any notice at all and in the morning circle I would send him outside to play and not disturb me.” (questionnaire 1).

In summary: The findings show that the women’s methods of coping with the challenged child are mainly characterized by an abundance of verbosity. In addition, the women use techniques of behavioral adjustment and do not involve other parties from the educational system in coping with the child. By comparison, the men use fewer explanations, more touch and the use of inhibiting approaches (punishment). They also tend to engage the administration in their coping attempts. Both gender groups tend to use trial and error methods, without a consistent plan and without achieving the desired results. Results are not forthcoming as they are not

supported by a methodical work program that refers to the source of the developmental problem.

It is evident that the perceptions, beliefs and feelings of the educators (male/female) influence the methods they utilize in coping with the challenged child. As has been described, following the intervention program a number of changes occurred in the educators' descriptions of the child's profile. These changes are reflected in both attitudes (of melamdin and women kindergarten teachers) towards the child and methods of coping with him.

1.4 Characteristics of the Challenged Child (during the Intervention Program)

Women:

As a result of the knowledge acquired during the intervention program ("Active Nurturing Playground") the teachers' descriptions of the child are replete with more professional terms than previously. Moreover, considerable attention to nearly diagnostic details is apparent. There is also the first indication of making a connection between the difficulties, an improvement in the difficulties and the child's behavior. In addition to describing the child's functioning in class, the teachers and their assistants now refer to his movement functioning in class and in the playground. The description gives evidence of a much broader developmental perspective of the child that includes all the areas of his functioning, not only his cognitive ability. This perception matches that of Kedman et.als. (1997) who emphasize the importance of a suitable developmental environment based on a broad developmental perspective of the child.

“Israel is afraid to let go of the ground. His gross and fine motor skills are poor due to muscle weakness. When I. is asked to do something in the playground, he gets very tense but tries very hard to undertake what he has been assigned.” (questionnaire 1).

“The child’s muscle tone is low. He is unstable, has difficulties navigating the steps, and playing with ball games. He doesn’t speak in class, hardly a word comes out of his mouth and he doesn’t chatter with friends. He sits on the sidelines during morning games and in playground games. He looks tired, with labored breathing due to the low level of muscle tension after even the simplest motor activity.” (questionnaire 2).

“The child has difficulties planning his movement. He acts quickly and falls, he’s a bit clumsy. As far as fine motor activities - he has a hard time holding a pencil with the correct fingering. As far as language – he has pronunciation problems. When it comes to gross motor skills – he’s afraid to climb on the playground equipment, finds it hard jumping, walking on a rope and so on...” (questionnaire 1).

“One morning I led the group, Yehuda included, to the special yard equipment and I made him take part. At first he said... I don’t know how! I encouraged him and showed him how he could do it with a little help. At first the results were poor, but after repeating the action several times, I was amazed at the difference. After a month and a half, Y. sits better on his chair; his attention span is better, he talks more at home and is more sociable. I hope that very soon he will be like all the other children.” (questionnaire 1).

“I have a child with poor muscle tone. He's really thin, can hardly run, and is weak at climbing. At his age he should be climbing one foot at a time; he was climbing two at a time. He was weak at throwing balls. He wasn't keeping up with the others in many things.”(interview).

Men:

As a result of the knowledge acquired during the training program, the men's descriptions begin to resemble those of the women, with professional terms entering into their descriptions. Similar to the women, the men (during the intervention program) also start to refer to spatial movement functioning and the children's activities in the playground. This is because the training program emphasizes the importance of playground activities and the way a child functions in these activities. In contrast to the women, the men continue to preserve an overview of the challenged child's strengths and do not lose sight of it as a result of acquiring academic knowledge:

“At the beginning of the summer we tried to understand his nature a bit more in depth by tracking his functioning in various activities in the class and in the yard. We saw a child whose motor skills were slightly cumbersome. This seemed to frustrate him quite a bit because of the gap between his (theoretical) strength and his actual ability to act.” (questionnaire 1).

“A wonderful child, a genius, but he abstains from all actions requiring fine motor skills: writing, coloring and cutting. He tears up all the papers we distribute. He gets up from his seat frequently. (The child has an unusually large vocabulary, he frequently uses adult language).” (questionnaire 2).

“A close watch highlighted various difficulties in motor organization that caused low functioning in fine motor skills – creative building of small forms, cutting, pasting and so on. Also, in the playground, he hardly took part in group activities and preferred wandering around alone. Sometimes he would climb on the recreational equipment, but didn't dare carry out more complex tasks. During class time, or story time, he appeared to be listening, but hardly ever took part verbally in class discussion.” (questionnaire 2).

“For example, a pupil with writing difficulties is weak at writing but talented in other subjects. It was hard for me to help him. I noticed that on the climbing frame he couldn't even hold onto a single bar. We understood that he had a problem with his shoulder girdle and took it into account.” (interview).

In summary: The findings show that, as a result of the intervention program, the description of the child by the women became more diagnostic on the one hand and more observational on the other. This type of observation allows them to understand, for the first time, the connection between the child's difficulties and his behavior. In comparison, the men do not lose their broad overview of the child, but add on a professional dimension that is reflected in the use of professional terms they include in their descriptions. The descriptions of both men and women refer to the movement (sensory– motor) dimensions of the child in the classroom and in the playground.

1.5 Beliefs, perceptions and feelings concerning the challenged child (during the intervention program)

Women:

The women's descriptions indicate that their beliefs, perceptions and feelings for the challenged child changed completely during the intervention program. The difficulty no longer defines the child, but becomes part of him. They no longer associate it with a personality factor. Rather, they see the behavior as a reflection of difficulties that can be improved. Instead of pity, they have compassion and a more affectionate approach coupled with a desire to help the child according to his own abilities so that he may achieve what is expected of boys in the community (El Or 1998).

“I think that the child can overcome the difficulties and really reduce them with the help of the appropriate activities. He’s not unfortunate; he just needs the right treatment and experience to attain great achievements.” (questionnaire 2).

“I see him as a child with potential. True, there is a problem, there is difficulty but we will help him decipher the problem and we’ll get on the right track. With a lot of patience, work and G-d’s help, we’ll succeed.” (questionnaire 2).

“I’ll help him cope, to overcome his problem and A. will be able to find his place among the other children. He’ll be able to read and think just like a regular child. He’ll use his gifts, his wisdom, his understanding and he’ll be one of those who excel – with G-d’s help.” (questionnaire 2).

“When I saw that this was the situation, I took things in stride and felt that here was a difficulty that I could handle and set straight. I understood that he didn’t mean to disturb, to make anyone angry. He was having a hard time and was calling out for help.” (questionnaire 1).

“We have learned not to stigmatize the children with difficulties.” (interview).

“We used to get angry, shut them up at once. Today we understand that you need to understand more and be more considerate in the context of the child.” (interview).

The changes in perception, belief and feeling, described by the women teachers did not occur in one fell swoop. Rather, they were a result of an ongoing process of learning and fostering a learning environment in a study group that was learning about forgoing a judgmental attitude, both in the group and in reference to the challenged child. The training program emphasized the construction of observational skills. The teachers became accustomed to describe the child and his behavior and try to understand the reasons for it. In addition, the learning environment

allowed for coping with emotional difficulties that emerge in the teachers when faced with the challenged child (Soodak & Podell, 1998).

Men:

The men, similar to the women, change their perception and feelings toward the child, as a result of the training program, in light of the knowledge they acquire and the accompanying learning environment that encourages acceptance and empathy. The pity, the revulsion and the lack of understanding are replaced by expressions of empathy and an interpretation of the child's situation. Problems have solutions and the melamed understands that he has the power to influence the life of the challenged child.

“I now know that there are solutions for all these problems and the pupil needs suitable practice and encouragement so he'll have self confidence.” (questionnaire 2).

“During the school year, I learned that he is not guilty, after all, that things are not as they should be and this makes him behave that way. Now I have all the tools I need in order to help him.” (questionnaire 1).

“We used to leave him on the side, ignore him or punish him. Now we understand what troubles him.” (interview).

“I used to have to shout at him, correct him, and tell his father that his son was undisciplined. Our understanding and patience with those with difficulties has risen by 90–100 %.” (interview).

“We are certainly able to ease the course of his development and to promote him and he's become a challenge for me. I see him as a wonderful child and his difficulties are something apart that can be handled. With G-d's help we'll succeed and consider him from a different angle. He's not only an unfortunate creature who must be pitied. There

is hope and the knowledge that this pupil will grow and advance just like all the others.” (questionnaire 1).

In summary: The findings show that the women’s perceptions changed entirely. The difficulty no longer defines the child; it is merely a part of him. The pity is replaced by compassion that continues to be practical and achievement oriented. The men, by comparison, do not over emphasize the child’s achievements. Both gender groups express a fervent desire to help the child. The development of an attitude that focuses on the difficulty and not only the child makes the observation of the child less threatening and less frightening. This allows empathy for the child to surface and anger, rejection and fear are cast aside. The empathy and the compassion towards the child connect with a sense of challenge promoting him and acting on his behalf.

1.6 Means of coping with challenged children (during the intervention program).

Women:

During the training period, the (female) teachers make the transition from a process of trial and error with the child, to methodical, practical and clear behavior. This view is accompanied by the recognition that actions adjusted to the child’s level will lead to improvement, whereas giving in can lead to gaps in his development.

As far as sharing this challenge with others, the (female) teachers continue to work alone to improve the child’s achievements. There are no signs of approaching the administration to report on what has been done or to ask for their involvement. Maybe the teachers are still cautious because of the existing hierarchy between women and men in the Talmud Torah. However, it may also be that, unlike in the past, she refrains from approaching the

administration because she feels more competent as a result of the knowledge and the skills she has acquired during training. Not approaching the administration may be a reflection of a new found power rather than a sign of weakness.

“The child’s ability is improved by initiating all kinds of activities and by using the playground equipment. In addition, we tend to encourage the child and spur him on. This triggers his motivation and shows him that he can succeed. The combination of activation and encouragement does wonders.” (questionnaire 1).

“During recess in the yard, I encourage him to climb the ladder, to slide and I give him lots of compliments for what he’s done.” (questionnaire 1).

“We went into the yard to practice on the equipment with the whole group. We climbed over the tires; we threw a ball, etc. I’m starting to drill him on gross motor skills like climbing and jumping and thank G-d, we see that he’s beginning to improve.” (questionnaire 1).

“That’s why I took a ball and threw it to Haim. He didn’t manage to catch it, so we used a ball that’s easier to catch and I stood a little closer to him. He threw the ball with success. I tried to strengthen the muscles of his hands and his shoulders by having him bear weight on his hands. I also lifted his feet and walked him like a wheelbarrow, and in due time much improvement could be seen.” (questionnaire 1).

“I worked with a child whose problem was to learn new things and move ahead. He didn't remember the order for doing things. We worked with him on the playground equipment and we gradually gave him instructions what to do. Run to the ladder, get down, walk to the slide. He began with two instructions and, bit by bit, it became more complex. We repeated the instructions and saw that when he'd already done something, he could do easily afterwards. After that he moved to reading. ”(interview)

“There's one child for example. We saw he had a problem with the muscles in his finger. He was very bad at drawing lines. For example, when we play with modeling clay, I let him use his finger and not a rolling-pin like the others, because that's his special problem.” (interview).

The explanations about the child decrease as does the pitying attitude. Instead there is structured activity with encouragement and motivation. The combination of applying structured tools and a patient attitude, render significant improvement. These, in turn contribute to a sense of ability on the part of the women teachers and lead them to act on behalf of the child. As opposed to the past, they now attempt to enlist the parents' help as well (Kedman et.als. 1997).

Men:

With the melamdim, practice is combined with more expressions of emotional support. This takes the shape of touch, verbal encouragement and an emphasis on the child's success. These beget the expected improvements with amazing rapidity. Like with the women, the men's anger, pity, rejection and difficulty are replaced by actions adjusted to the child's difficulty and his abilities. It seems that concrete action is not enough to bring about improvement. It must be accompanied by empathy and understanding in order to close down existing gaps. This finding matches the view of Shechtman and Almog (2004) on the importance of imparting a “democratic world view” to educators, in addition to knowledge and tools, in order to create progress in the child experiencing difficulties.

“My whole attitude towards him has changed. We have come to accept him, we have been more understanding of him and his behavior and the positive feedback did not take long to appear. His behavior quieted down until almost without realizing it, virtually all the provocations and fights disappeared.” (questionnaire 1).

“We work with him on the playground equipment to strengthen the muscles of his shoulder area. We also do exercises for his hand and finger muscles. This gives him a feeling that he is succeeding and can do even better. I give him exercises in sensory type work such as writing or drawing on a mirror with foam.” (questionnaire 2).

“After learning, I could see that the child was suffering from various difficulties. I

1. Reacted differently, with more understanding.
2. I offered him a release.
3. I put space between him and the other children so he shouldn't suffer from their touch.
4. I referred him to an “occupational therapist” for treatment.
5. I let him do quiet activity at his seat such as a foot game or cut-outs.” (questionnaire 1).

“I'm faced with children with great difficulties who can hardly pick themselves up to jump; on one foot they are really uncomfortable. At first I give them a hand, then I tell them to try, slowly I go up with them one step at a time. If I said "jump with your legs together," I allow him to jump with his legs apart, etc. ...” (interview).

“At first, the whole thing was very hard for both of us. Naturally for the child, he was frustrated in coping with his challenges. I was frustrated because of his suffering. In time, the child learned not to let his frustration defeat him. To encourage progress, we would quote and sing the words to “seven times the righteous falls and gets up” according to the interpretation that the righteous man's rise comes from his falls.” (questionnaire 1).

“It's important for me to support a child with difficulties and to let him experience

success. For example, we were playing a group game – the child's group and mine; I didn't let my group win, so everyone wanted to move to his group, and since then he's been king of the preschool.” (interview).

“When kids see that a friend of theirs isn't successful, their natural response is to demean him. So I explain that it is important to be respectful and everyone does what he can, and you don't laugh at anyone. That gives him the confidence to try again.”(interview)

In summary: The findings show that both the women and the men form practical and methodical coping methods in their work with the challenged child. Both gender groups understand that their approach must be accompanied by an accepting and encouraging attitude, in order to improve his condition. The women continue to exclude the administration; however they now do this as a result of the power of their new knowledge and tools. The men, on the other hand, turn less to the administration than in the past and they are less exposed to frustrating situations where they feel helpless in coping with the child. Both gender groups experience new abilities with reference to the challenged child. This is apparently the result of the structured tools they have acquired following the intervention program.

Summary of the section “Profile of the Challenged Child from the Educator’s Perspective

The profile of the challenged child, through the eyes of educators, changes in all of the categories. These changes are both on a time succession (before and during the program) and regarding women as opposed to men. Following the intervention program, both the (female) teachers and assistants and the (male) melamdin undergo a change in their perceptions of the challenged child. The child is transformed from a “problem child” to a “child with difficulties”; from a child who will not realize his destiny in the community to a challenging child who will

find the right track with the appropriate help. Despite the similarity, there are also differences: the (female) teachers' voices are more empathic towards the challenged child while maintaining a practical approach. They describe the need to help the child attain achievements. The men, by comparison, voice a more focused, practical approach to the challenged child, without losing their initial emotional attachment to the child.

2. Perception of Professional Capabilities of Educators

Both male and female educators' professional capabilities, with reference to the challenged child were perceived as quite negligible prior to the intervention program. This lowered esteem was nourished by knowledge that did not allow the (female) teachers to analyze the child's behavior and surmise the best way to help him. It was also fed by fixed perceptions, beliefs and feelings and inefficient coping methods. A lack of success in promoting the challenged child created in both teachers and melamdim a sense of hopelessness, confusion and personal and professional frustration.

Women:

The teachers were confused and frustrated in trying to cope with the challenged child. As the (female) teachers experience themselves as knowledgeable professionals, when confronted by the challenged child they link their helplessness less to their knowledge and more to a lack of tools and varied work techniques. They continue to do whatever possible to help him.

“I was pretty embarrassed. I didn't know what to do with him because I didn't have significant tools needed to cope.” (questionnaire 2).

“I thought that I would very much like to help him. If he were my child I'd really want everything to be done to help promote him, but I didn't know how to help him, I didn't have a clue what to do; I didn't have the tools.” (questionnaire 2).

“I didn't really know what was important. I knew he needed treatment but I didn't know what kind of treatment was appropriate because I didn't understand what the difficulty stemmed from or the many problems he had.” (questionnaire 2).

“You need to identify the children and I didn't know how. I saw the difficulties, but I didn't know how to classify them.” (interview).

The reports of the (female) teachers give evidence of great confusion and embarrassment. These feelings contradict their self image of high functioning professionals (Levi, 1997). It is possible that their non-focused, inconsistent work with the child, that does not yield results, leads to a system of “putting out the fire”. This matches the findings of Shechtman and Almog (2004). In addition, such a work method feeds a sense of the teachers’ helplessness and professional incapacity, as evidenced in the findings of Einat (2005).

Men:

The melamdim’s perceptions of the challenged child are basically similar to those of the (female) teachers. Though they may explain the source of the difficulty as based on misdeeds or bad education, their perceptions are largely determinist. They have reservations about the child who triggers in them feelings of helplessness and pity, similar to those of the (female) teachers. These perceptions and feelings, coupled with the lack of tools and work methods leave them feeling professionally incapacitated (Einat, 2005). This sense increases even more, considering that they, like the women, are evaluated by their pupils’ achievements. It increases even more in light of their low status in the educational setting and in the community.

The men also speak of their sense of professional incapacity in terms of a lack of knowledge and tools. We can assume that both the (female) teachers and the melamdim lack support and guidance in the educational setting and proper instruction in forming a "democratic world view" that accepts the different. They also need a reduction in the cognitive and emotional isolation they experience in their daily work (Einat, 2005; Soodak & Podell, 1998).

“Poor kid, I didn’t know what to make of him or how to treat him. He was a problem child that needed help and I haven’t the slightest idea about how to help him.”

(questionnaire 2).

“I thought that he didn’t understand. I didn’t know what his problem was. I tried all kinds of things and I gave up and didn’t try to promote him any more.” (questionnaire 2).

“I didn’t know exactly what to do with him and it was very hard for me.” (questionnaire 2).

“I would give him work and whatever he’d do, that would be it, because I didn’t really know how to help him.” (questionnaire 2).

“I have no tools and terms for what I’m doing here or for who I can turn to. Little by little this influenced my behavior and that of all the children towards him.” (questionnaire 1).

“Last year, a child with difficulties would remain as he was from the beginning of the year to the end of it, not making any progress. I didn't believe I was able to advance him.” (interview).

“I used to think that a child with difficulties was a different kind; that he wouldn't manage to settle in. I don't understand him and there's a barrier between us. I thought that he'd remain that way, being difficult and having difficulty, and that I'd be unable to help him.” (interview).

As far as the men are concerned, the perception of their lowered capacity was also reflected in their relationships with the parents. Their reports give evidence of the fact that the parents are not receptive to being approached by the melamed. They reject them, are puzzled by what they say and often tend to blame them:

“I tried to contact the parents, explain the problem and share it with them. They said the Rabbi was to blame because the child is smart and takes in all the material learned. At home, he tells 100% of the material learned in cheder. Therefore, it must be the Rabbi’s

fault. I didn't feel very good with a reaction of the parent bursting into tears. After another conversation, they claimed that the Rabbi was pestering and hitting Kobi. My answer was that this was not the case." (questionnaire 1).

"I told the principal about the difficulties and the lack of cooperation on the part of the parents." (questionnaire 1).

"I called the parents. The first conversation was a bit puzzling; they were amazed, even though they basically agreed to the facts and hoped things would work out somehow. After the conversation, I wondered if I had presented it correctly. Maybe I hadn't said enough, maybe they hadn't understood me, or maybe they were just hurt."

(questionnaire 1).

Summary of the Section: Perception of Professional Capabilities of Educators

The child's profile before the intervention program and the lack of success in coping with him has an influence over the educators. It creates a sense of lowered professional capability, both for the (female) teachers and the melamdim. The women, who have a consolidated professional identity and do not spare effort in trying to cope with the child, nevertheless feel that they are unsuccessful. Their lack of success contradicts their professional image and makes things hard for them. The melamdim and the (female) assistants are characterized by a lack of professional identity. Their confidence and sense of capacity tends to deteriorate more and more.

3. Empowerment

3.1 Self-empowerment of the Educators (men and women)

From a low level sense of professional capability, with reference to the challenged child, men and women educators alike undergo a process of professional empowerment during the training program. This nourishes their sense of personal empowerment. They internalize empathy for the challenged child as a result of acquiring the appropriate knowledge and gradual, structured work methods through experiential learning under the guidance of therapeutic professionals. This leads to improvements in the challenged child, surprising in their intensity (Kedman et.als., 1997). The improvements, in turn, spur the educators on to continue acting on behalf of the child. They imbue the educators with a sense of personal empowerment and immeasurably improved professional capacity, as individuals and as a team. However, it must be noted that the expressions of personal empowerment, both in the (female) teachers and in the melamdin are few. They express them mainly in reference to the child, to the parents and to the entire group of children. In a community where one of the virtues is modesty, it is not worthy to pride oneself on one's accomplishments (Appelbaum, 2000).

Women:

In the rare direct expressions of empowerment, the women talk of it on the team level and in their own personal lives. The (female) teachers are at the stage where they are mainly internalizing the acquired knowledge and terminology, but they are also beginning to create their own insights.

“I have more faith in our team. That we can do it, see the achievements we've accomplished. There is actually more capability than I would have thought – in carrying out the program, in planning systems, providing ideas; various aspects of analysis and

surveillance. It made me feel very good. Thank goodness that we have who to lean on. The program pushed us to creating trust in our team. This trust yields results. It helped us carry out the potential we had inside.” (questionnaire 2).

“We have a problem/difficulty and we don’t have access to a professional to help us locate/examine/treat it. However, let’s think about what we can do with the time and the equipment we do have at our disposal. Let’s make the most use of what we have and realize all the options. It gives a lot of strength- whether at home or in all kinds of situations. It teaches us resourcefulness and that is good for us and good for the children.” (questionnaire 2).

“It’s very sweet for a kindergarten teacher to feel that not only academics are capable, “she too can do it too”. A regular teacher and her assistant have reached achievements that without the course they wouldn’t have believed they could.” (questionnaire 2).

As opposed to the teachers, the assistants are able to construct a professional identity along with their sense of empowerment. It’s the first time they sit and study side by side with the teachers in a group. It’s the first time they are asked to sound their voices – or as defined by the researchers Belenky, Blythe, Goldenberg & Tarulea (1997) – exit the stage of silence.

“An open heart that allowed us new worlds of understanding” (questionnaire 1).

“To examine, to see, to sense, to elevate.” (questionnaire 1).

“That they built in us worlds of capabilities.” (questionnaire 1).

Men:

The men, like the assistants, build a professional identity and absorb the confidence that accompanies it. Their voice, like that of the assistants, is heard for the first time. Instead of the "silence" that marked them previously, they are invited to study, to teach, to listen and to speak (Belenky et. als. 1997) and this is clearly noticed by them and by others working with them:

“The joy and the success transformed the cheder melamed’s job from a menial to an important position that promotes pupils and helps them. The results are highly evident. As a supervisor of kindergartens, I feel that the course has helped them to professionalize their work.” (questionnaire 1).

“My confidence as compared to other melamdin is incomparable.” (questionnaire 2).

“My basic approach has been immeasurably improved. My analyses are more professional, my overall feeling is much more powerful and secure.” (questionnaire 2).

With study and with the acquisition of techniques that promote the challenged child, it is evident that the melamdin are now able to “stand tall”. The pride that accompanies their actions and yields results is not only internal. It radiates to surrounding circles in the educational setting. This process is tantamount to a quiet revolution, characteristic of change processes in a closed, traditional society.

The sense of professional ability and empowerment, both of men and of women is attributed to the project.

Women:

The women see the project’s contribution as part of the professionalization process they are undergoing generally. They are certain however, that the language and the tools they have now acquired are serving them better than previously. Some of them express this modestly; others do so with more vigor. Perhaps some of the doubt expressed by part of the teachers is a sign of their personalities or resistance to the process. This finding matches what has been said by Dreufus et. als. (1989) who claimed that change processes or resistance to change are influenced by the unique personality of each educator.

“I really hope that with the help of the efficient and professional learning we have received we will be able, with G-d’s help, to help him overcome his disability. Little by little, he’ll be able to fit in socially. If we encourage him and build up his self image he’ll be able to function ordinarily that will ultimately lead to learning.” (questionnaire 1).

“It’s hard to describe the immense change that has followed studying. Like a blind man walking in the dark as opposed to one who can see with a huge light.” (questionnaire 1).

“I can feel a huge change. My eyes have been opened.” (questionnaire 2).

Men:

The men see the contribution of a project as a clear, sharp turning point and they tend to express it with the use of moving metaphors. This perspective may be nourished by the fact that the women are used to studying, whereas the men are being exposed to professionals and to educational and extensive practical training with their colleagues, for the first time.

“Rays of sunshine began to caress us when we started participating in the ‘Active Nurturing Playground’. I received tools and skills. I could identify and treat according to the instructions. Now, a year and a half after treatment began, Shlomo has proved himself over and beyond our wildest expectations.” (questionnaire 1).

“One bright day, the principal came into my room and asked me to attend the ‘Active Nurturing Playground’ project. Ever since then, I’ve begun to see the light at the end of the tunnel.” (questionnaire 1).

“When studying began and the special playground equipment provided by Ezer Mizion arrived, all of a sudden we were graced with a Chanukah miracle.” (questionnaire 1).

Furthermore, the sense of professional ability and empowerment exhibited by the men and the women educators is not only expressed in relation to a specific child, but leads to awareness about the importance of the intervention as a whole.

“Where there is a problem, help should be given: Why let the child overcome his problem alone? I think that if a child has a problem – no matter what – it should be dealt with. One's born with crooked teeth, another with floppy hands. What's the difference? You have to deal with both”.

“One cannot rely on the problem going away by itself: Problems don't get solved if no one solves them. It depends on the problem, but without help there won't be any progress. A child may find ways of circumventing the problem, but not of dealing with it. He'll never deal with it. He'll hide it, so as not to stand out”.

“The younger the age at which the intervention is given, the more effective it is: The younger the child, the earlier he can be treated. If a preschooler carries a problem with him as he grows up, it will be harder to get rid of, things will get worse. If he gets reinforcement at preschool, the fact that he had any problem will be completely forgotten”.

“The difficulties have a negative scholastic effect: There are difficulties that also affect studies, such as poor muscle tone in the shoulder girdle or being able to sit up properly in class”.

“The difficulties have a negative socio-emotional effect: If children are not treated, it impacts on them socio-emotionally. A clumsy child finds it hard socially. He'll always be last. It's sometimes really important to teach a child physical skills so that he can be part of society”.

3.2 Empowerment With Reference to the Challenged Child

Following the intervention program, there are changes to the profile of the challenged child. Both the (female) teachers and the melamdin present an integrative view of the change they have undergone with reference to the challenged child. This perspective includes changes in cognitive, behavioral and emotional dimensions and creates a sense of professional empowerment in all the gender groups, according to their roles and their initial point of departure (Fuchs, 1995; Fuchs, 1998).

This empowerment most likely influences the dialogue that the women conduct with the administration in an all male institution. This perception concurs with that of Admanit (2004) who says that this female voice creates “movement in the hierarchy” that exists between women and men in the community, in general, and in the Talmud Torah, in particular.

Women:

“I’m entirely different. I’m much more aware of problems. I know how to focus on them. I know what causes them and what they eventually lead to as far as learning, and I know how to act.” (questionnaire 2).

“I feel that when I encounter a difficulty, I can take it as a challenge and not as a weakness or the cause for pity, but as something that requires treatment. Thank G-d, after in-depth study and the tools we have received, I am successful in helping and I can see amazing improvements in the challenged children.” (questionnaire 1).

Men:

“I can trace the causes of the difficulty; develop ways to cope with it and the kind of success that will allow each child to develop himself and his capacities.” (questionnaire 2).

“As far as knowledge and understanding of the difficulties, I don’t panic. I know how to categorize them and to focus on the correct actions. With G-d’s help we will also see results.” (questionnaire 1).

In summary: Both (female) teachers and melamdin clearly express a sense of professional empowerment with reference to the challenged child that occurred as a result of the intervention program. Their reports present the change occurring in each possible circle of change – in the cognitive dimension, in the emotional dimension and in the behavioral dimension. It should be noted that there is no significant difference between the men and the women as far as their sense of empowerment in reference to coping with the challenged child. The similarity between the two groups exists despite the differences between them as far as their gender roles and formal training are concerned.

The educators’ circles of empowerment that occur during the intervention program are not limited only to the changes occurring in their attitudes towards the challenged child. The changes occur in their dealings with the parents of the challenged children and in their work with all the children in their classes.

3.3 Empowerment with Reference to the Parents of Challenged Children

There is an identical sense of empowerment reported upon by the men and women, in reference to the parents of the challenged child. Both gender groups experience more confidence in addressing parents, following the learning and the success of their child at school. Both groups report on more cooperation, a listening ear and a more serious attitude on the part of parents towards what they have to say. In addition, after participating in the program, both (female) teachers and melamdin state that they address parents not only to report a difficulty, but to

explain what it is, where to turn and what can be done at home. However, there are also differences. The (female) teachers, in contrast to the past, report on contacting the parents more often and having greater empathy for the parents and their situation. The men report on the same number of contacts as in the past, but report mainly on the feelings triggered in them by this contact.

Women:

“I’m more sensitive to the parents. I know they have a hard time hearing and seeing their children with difficulties. They would like children who have an easy time and are successful in everything. I learned how to guide them so they can promote their children.” (questionnaire 2).

“I am more understanding of the parents’ difficulty in accepting their children’s problems. Only now, I have more answers for them. I know that it is possible to treat the situation easily and efficiently, during class time and I can calm their worries that there is treatment available and we’ll be able to help.” (questionnaire 2).

“In the past, it was very unpleasant and I had extreme reservations about talking with parents of challenged children. Now that I understand, it’s much easier to talk to them. When the parents see that I’m not alarmed, they also take the problem much more calmly and are able to take action with moderation.” (questionnaire 2).

“The parents are more trusting when they hear that I’ve had more training and they are happy to hear what I have to say and cooperate with me.” (questionnaire 1).

“When you can’t put a name to a problem, it’s not taken seriously. When you can give it a name and say that it needs treating, it makes it easier to go to the parents. They take it more seriously.” (interview).

As opposed to the past, the (female) teachers report on contacting the parents with greater empathy for them and their situation. From what they write about the present, it is possible to discern the apprehensions they had in the past when contacting parents. These fears were nourished by the fact that in the past, they could only report on the problem without offering any solutions. Now, they are able to address the parents from a new position. They have a toolbox filled with explanations, solutions and even reports on their success with the child to be shared with the parents.

Men:

Some of the melamdin express their lack of confidence in contacting parents. This may be due to the fact that they are still in the initial stages of constructing a professional identity. Or perhaps it can be attributed to a personality factor of the melamed himself who has a hard time contacting parents. However, there are others who express a great deal of confidence and a sense of value that is connected to the training they have undergone (Fuchs, 1995).

“After the conversation, I felt shaky. I wondered if I had spoken correctly. Maybe I hadn’t said enough or maybe they hadn’t understood me, or were just hurt. In all honesty, despite my fears, I was certain I had acted correctly – according to all I had learned in the ‘Active Nurturing Playground’ course. After a few days, about a week, I could see results. The mother called me to tell me with emotion that she had seen the occupational therapist and they had confirmed what I had said. The child was entered into a treatment program once or twice a week.” (questionnaire 1).

“I know what I’m talking about. I know how to explain the problem, if there is one. And I know to whom to refer the child if necessary. The parents are very attentive to what I have to say.” (questionnaire 2).

“You contact parents to catch their attention and they see that you understand what you’re talking about.” (questionnaire 2).

“I involve the parents when there's a difficulty. The course contributed to this too. We know what to say to the parents and they trust us more, because the teacher has learned more.” (interview).

“Today I have more tools to explain to parents what will happen if they don't treat the problem and ignore it. I now have the self-confidence to stand up to the parents. I know what points to step on. I know where to place the emphasis.”(interview).

The melamdin reported on contacting parents in the past and they continue to do so. However, they state explicitly that the aim of contacting the parents now, similar to the women, is to explain, to share and to refer when necessary. However, their main emphasis is not on the parents, but on the way they feel when contacting them. These feelings include a sense of satisfaction when the parents refer to them respectfully. They are empowered by their new found ability to identify children in such a way that professionals back up their recommendations and accept children into developmental treatment.

3.4 Empowerment with Reference to Working with all the Kindergarten Children

Both women and men report on a change in perception and empowerment in working with all the regular children in the kindergarten. They speak about implementing a more developmental approach in their work and feel that it benefits them as well (Lifshitz and Ofer, 1999). The women report on more variety in their work practices, the men speak of a turning point. Perhaps the melamdin consider this to be the case because until recently there was little play in their kindergartens or they lacked the understanding of how important play is to the development of young children.

Women:

“I saw that even children without difficulties make much more progress if they are given a variety of tools with which to progress.” (questionnaire 2).

“Even the better pupils can be improved and have their level raised and made more efficient. I have learned how to be more varied in my practices.” (questionnaire 2).

“I feel completely different; I try to encourage the children to play in the playground and the yard with things that I hadn’t before considered using.” (questionnaire 2).

“In any case, it's good to work with the children because they all need strengthening, even those who do not have great difficulty.” (interview).

Men:

“I use activities, exercises and games that I didn’t use before.” (questionnaire 2).

“The whole daily schedule has changed and my perception of the activities is different.” (questionnaire 2).

“The moment it enters your subconscious that you are responsible for the fate and the future improvement of your pupils, you keep on thinking how to best promote all of them; each in his own particular way that best suits him.” (questionnaire 2).

Summary of the Section on Empowerment

From the present chapter it appears that both the men and the women are undergoing a process of professional empowerment. This empowerment is apparent in a number of dimensions: in reference to themselves, in reference to the challenged child, in reference to the parents of the child and in reference to their work practices with all the kindergarten children. Though the (female) teachers abstain from speaking of personal empowerment directly, they express it

indirectly with reference to their professional empowerment in the other dimensions. This sense of empowerment probably creates a more powerful and confident voice on the part of women working in the world of the Talmud Torah that is essentially a male world. A dialogue with this increasingly powerful female voice may cause change in the patterns of action in the boys educational system. This may lead to “movement” in the hierarchy that exists between women and men in the Talmud Torahs and in the community at large.

Moreover, the (female) teachers seem to discover the female team around them (other teachers, assistants and mothers). They enlist them more frequently to help promote the challenged child in the kindergarten. They consider the training program as part of their professionalization and tend to become more sensitive and empathetic to the challenged child and his parents.

Nevertheless, their approach continues to be very practical and achievement oriented. It is possible that in the world where they must function, they have to prove themselves constantly. They choose to do this by practical action and less by an expression of the accompanying emotions.

The men and the (female) assistants, by comparison, speak much more clearly about a sense of personal empowerment and a construction of their professional identity, in addition to their empowerment in other dimensions (in reference to the challenged child, the parents and all the other children). The melamdim, as compared to the (female) teachers refer to the training program as a turning point. Similar to the teachers, they report on the formulation and application of a practical approach to their work with the challenged child and his parents. Nevertheless, they do not appear to lose the emotional side of their attitudes towards the children that had existed previously.

Summary

The current research sought to examine the processes of change undergone by (male versus female) educators in Talmud Torahs with reference to the challenged child, following their participation in the “Active Nurturing Playground” project. In addition, the research examined the gender affiliated, cultural context of these changes.

The findings show that there are two main changes. The first is a change to the profile of the challenged child in the eyes of the educators. The second is a process of professional empowerment in both men and women with reference to the challenged child, his parents, to the other children and to themselves.

The profile of the challenged child changes from perceiving him as “problematical” before the intervention program, to a child coping with difficulties, during the intervention program.

There is also a change from a situation in which the difficulty defines the child into one where the difficulty becomes more marginal; something that can be handled with methodical work; something that can be supported, improved and minimized. This perception, which also empowers the child, is a perception that enables mobility and change in comparison to the previous perception that often led either to giving up or to stagnation.

In light of the changing perception of the educators and the learning platform they have been granted as a “group of colleagues” who can become “agents of change” and not only “knowledge consumers”, they set out on a course of professional and personal empowerment. During the project their professional image begins to change from a perception of negligible ability to one of professional empowerment, as they witness the significant improvements that the child undergoes as a result of their actions. However, it does not end here. The circle of empowerment, like a stone thrown in a pond, is beginning to influence ever widening ripples of empowerment, both with reference to the child’s parents and their attitudes towards all the other pupils.

Over and above these two major processes that include all the educators, there are essential differences between the process undergone by the women and the processes undergone by the men. However, it is possible that these differences are nourished mainly by the culture-gender roles of men and women in the Haredi community.

Women in the community are entrusted with the practical side of life. They are responsible for earning a living for their large families and, as a result, must also acquire formal higher education in order to find and maintain employment. A scarcity of available jobs in the community, particularly in the field of education, creates an unprecedented situation of competition. These existential necessities are coupled with the keen sense of responsibility that a (female) Haredi educator experiences in her attempt to spur the boys on to achievements in reading and in “Derech Eretz” so that they will be able to follow the path of Torah. They force her to do everything she can to excel at her work. These existential exigencies and values may influence the woman’s voice and make it a more practical one; a voice of purpose and achievement without any accompanying emotions. This is the dominant female voice emerging from this research.

In light of this, the female kindergarten teacher (before the intervention program) is portrayed in the research as an independent and professional isolated educator. The fact that she does not turn to the administration or to other female colleagues for advice and the fact that she tends to abstain from contacting the challenged child’s parents are perhaps the best expression of her fears that she could be looked upon as an unworthy professional. Despite the fact that she continues to try and cope with the challenged child, she is unsuccessful in promoting him. This lack of success not only reduces her sense of professional capacity, it contradicts with her basic self perception as a strong and knowledgeable educator.

After the intervention program there are two interesting changes. On the one hand, the (female) teachers undergo a process of personal and professional empowerment that, most certainly,

empowers her voice and her dialogue with the male voice of the administration in the Talmud Torah. On the other hand, her voice also begins to take on new shades that are more rounded and softer than previously and are reflected in her attitudes towards the challenged child and his parents.

With recognized achievements amongst all the children and particularly with the challenged child, the current (female) teacher's voice, according to this research, is much more powerful and hence, much more confident. It is plausible to assume that the progress made by the challenged boys and her confidence in her own ability are obvious to the men who constitute the administration. They are likely to understand that they can benefit and learn from her methods, even regarding the education of boys. In this sense, she is "making waves" in the existing hierarchy at the Talmud Torah. Possibly, as her voice does not reflect a revolution but rather, grows as an intrinsic part of her work, without forgoing traditions, it is valued and does not trigger resistance. In a community in which any departure from the rules is very threatening, change can only be created when the individual, in general, and particularly the woman, continues to act within the framework of existing rules. This is similar to the way that Rabbi Hirsch (1989) describes women. A woman is also called a "nekeiva" (a burrow) that leads to a certain place by an encompassing, winding road that eventually leads to a destination. This is similar to the expression "a woman has been graced with surplus wisdom". The woman educator follows her path without forfeiting the essence of the traditional ways in the world of the men who surround her. In this sense, the Haredi woman adapts herself to the hierarchy characteristic of the Haredi community. She appoints her husband and her (male) principal to reign over her, but she does this with her empowered voice and not as an unfortunate victim. Rather, she does this because she believes that she is contributing to the supremely important structure of the community that is her guiding light.

The research shows that when newly acquired skills prove themselves, the female educator allows herself the luxury of voicing a less pitying voice for the challenged child. She is more empathetic and more compassionate to him. This new voice expresses a greater affinity for the challenged child than previously. In addition, she is more confidently able to turn to outsiders. Thus, she can contact her colleagues or the mothers of the challenged children. The female educators, as well as the assistants, begin to discover the feminine network surrounding them that they had previously ignored; the teacher due to the fear of showing her weakness and the assistant, because she didn't even realize that she had the right to do so.

In turning to the mother of the child, the female educator empowers her as well and enlists her on behalf of her son. This transmits two messages to the mother. The first is that there is a way out of the difficulty. The second message is that the mother has a role to play in promoting her child; that she can act on his behalf and also on behalf of herself. This power can eventually influence other functional dimensions and create a chain reaction of surplus powers.

The cultural gender context also influences the processes of change undergone by the men as a result of the training program. In contrast to the women who are responsible for the practical side of life, men are socialized to fulfill their destiny as "learned scholars" and attain superior achievements in learning the Torah. The archetypal Haredi men, particularly the core of Torah scholars and Yeshiva students, are men who are not educated to promote themselves or to compete in professional realms, unlike their male counterparts in Western society. The current research shows that these men, accustomed to a gender role of devoting their lives to Torah scholarship or to making a living in the field of education as *melamdim*, tend to preserve a softer, more circular stance in their functioning, in general, and with the challenged child, in particular. As educators, the lack of formal education amongst the men colors their attitudes towards the challenged child. It fortifies their vision of him and channels the way they cope with him through the filter of emotion. This fact is also true of the (female) assistants who,

despite gender roles identical to the (female) teachers, have no formal education. They have not studied and have not been trained in academic thinking or writing. Therefore, they tend more to address emotional aspects in their attitudes towards the challenged child.

Nevertheless, in the current research it was possible to see that at moments of severe distress (before the intervention program) the melamdim sound a voice that is more direct, blunt, dismissive, ignoring and deterministic in reference to the challenged child. This voice expresses enormous frustration on the part of the melamdim that perhaps grows as a result of their lowered status in the community, particularly within the Talmud Torah. This lowered status intensifies their professional isolation and their sense of professional capacity that is diminished in any case.

The research shows that following the intervention program, the training and the process of professional empowerment undergone by the melamdim, they do not lose their emotional voice in reference to the challenged child. However it is joined by an additional, practical voice that is more focused and methodical than previously. This practical voice is expressed in all the dimensions mentioned with reference to the women: in reference to the parents of the challenged child, to the other kindergarten children and in reference to themselves vis a vis other melamdim and the administration.

From this point of departure, the research shows that in addition to professional empowerment, both the melamdim and the (female) assistants also acquire a professional identity. For the first time they have a voice and a platform. The assistants introduce this empowerment into other circles of their personal lives but remain cautious within the kindergarten framework. They are aware of their position in reference to the (female) teachers and they are not interested in the burden of responsibility that comes with the job. The melamdim, by comparison, air their voices proudly in the kindergarten class, in the Talmud Torahs and from there to their families, children and perhaps even towards the community.

The research shows that educators, both men and women, link the processes of change that they have undergone to their participation in the “Active Nurturing Playground” project. It is plausible to assume that preserving the principles of a culture-sensitive program, creating a learning environment that nurtures a “democratic world view”, imparting practical knowledge in authentic situations coupled with theoretical knowledge and the enlistment of intra and extra-school circles in implementing the program, contributed their share in creating the change processes reflected in this research.

The contribution of this research lies in understanding the complexity of change processes in educational settings, amongst educators and particularly in the unique social context of Haredi society that colors the entire process.

Moreover, as most of the research in the field of education involves women, this research gives a platform for processes and needs of male educators in this unique cultural context.

This research is therefore a pioneer in a research field that is not generally transparent - Talmud Torahs where boys study in the Haredi community. This is the first time that research has been conducted in an attempt to highlight the worlds of Haredi educators, women and men, in educational institutions. The research exposes their perceptions, beliefs and feelings about challenged children. The research can serve as the basis for future research on change processes undergone by educators in the community. In particular, it can contribute to raising public awareness of the field of the “challenged child”, whose existence has only lately come to the awareness in the Haredi community, following the implementation of projects such as the “Active Nurturing Playground”.

Alongside the contributions made by the research it is subject to a number of limitations that must be mentioned:

- In light of the complexity of the topic of change processes in educational settings, and with the desire to paint a more comprehensive picture, it is important to add on

additional research tools, with strict adherence to programs with culture-sensitive principles. These research tools must include observation (participatory and non-participatory) of educators within the framework of their class by the professional developmental teams teaching them.

- The current research exhibited recognizable difficulty on the part of the men in writing their reports, due to their lack of experience in writing in general. The women, on the other hand, and mainly the (female) kindergarten teachers who are accustomed to academic writing, barely exposed any other dimensions of their personalities, which we believe exist but were not expressed or given liberty.
- As the educators' change processes are influenced by factors such as school principal and the agents of change, it is worthwhile to interview them as well in order to attain a broader picture.
- In the questionnaires and interviews utilized for the research it was impossible to expose the resistance to change that may be as important as the change itself. Therefore, it is advisable to expand the questionnaires and interviews in order to allow educators the opportunity to express the dimension of resistance.

In summary, the current research indicates processes of change undergone by educators in the Haredi community. In these processes there were both similarities and differences between the women and the men. It is evident that the differences stem mainly from the cultural-gender roles of the women and men in the Haredi community.

In light of the fact that the Haredi community has unique characteristics in comparison to other populations, it is difficult to project the current research results on to additional populations. In order to learn about these processes in other populations, it is important to examine processes of change amongst educators both in closed communities and in more open, secular

communities. In both groups, it would be interesting to see how gender and the cultural context are reflected in the process.

In addition, in light of the findings emerging from this qualitative research in which the “emotional” voice of the (female) teachers is barely heard, it is worthwhile to inquire into the learning practices informing women’s education in the community and how they influence her attitudes, perceptions and mainly her feelings about challenged children. Possibly, such an examination will encourage women heading the various specialty departments at the educational seminaries to examine their programs of study. They can then add on factors to empower the emotional dimension of (female) kindergarten teachers, rather than addressing mainly cognitive and practical aspects. There is a possibility that within such a conservative, closed society, the (female) kindergarten teachers do not allow themselves to touch upon these facets of their personality or to express them openly. By having their teachers grant them the legitimacy to do so, it may allow the introduction of these important elements into their work with children in general, and especially with those indicating developmental challenges.

Bibliography

Appelbaum, H. (2000). *“Black on White” – A Glimpse into Haredi Intimacy.* Ramat Gan: Mazuz Am Collel. (Hebrew)

Aviram, A., Dahan, N. (2002). *Inter-Cultural Encounter: An Experimental Program of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem to Train Haredi Women in Social Work.* Report of the Hebrew University, School of Social Work. pg. 138. (Hebrew).

Beit Marom, R. (1986). *Research Methods in the Social Sciences.* Tel Aviv: Open University. (Hebrew).

Belenky, M. F., Clinchy, B. M., Goldenberger, N.R., Tarule, J.M. (1997). *Women's Ways of Knowing.* N.Y.: Basic Books Inc.

Brophy, K., Webb, P., Hancock, S. (1997). Early Primary Teachers' Perceptions of the Process of Inclusion. *Journal of Developmental Disabilities, 5* (1), 62-85. retrieved February 1, 2006, from PsycINFO database.

Carlebach, S. (1989) Our Way in Education. Chapters in the Theory of Education. Bnei Brak. (Hebrew)

Carmel, A. (1997). *Judaism for Two Thousand Years.* Jerusalem: Feldheim. (Hebrew).

Caspa, H. & Cohen, Y. (2004). Pupils with Special Needs in the Education Department. Goals and Dilemmas in R. Arhood and A. Klingman (eds.) *School Counseling in a Changing Society*, pgs. 247-265. Tel Aviv: Ramot Publishing, Tel Aviv University. (Hebrew).

Darom, D. (1989). *A Climate of Growth.* Tel Aviv: Sifriat Poalim. (Hebrew).

Duke, J., Prater, G. (1991). Pre-school Teachers Expectations of Pre-schoolers Labeled Developmentally Delayed: a Pilot Study. U.S.: Kentucky. (Eric Document No. ED355047). retrieved Dec,28, 2005 from ERIC database.

Dreyfus, A, Kushnir, T, Keiny, S. (1989). A Search for self-renewal: Modes of Participation. *Small Group Behavior*, 19, 333-343.

Einat, A. (2005). On the Emotional World of Learning Disabilities. *Panim*, 31, pgs. 44-52. (Hebrew).

El Or, T. (1992). The Haredi Community, in A. Raz (ed.) *Community Gates*. pgs 35-38. Ramat Aviv: Matach. (Hebrew).

El Or, T. (1998). *Education and Ignorance in the World of Haredi Women*. Tel Aviv: Am Oved Inc. (Hebrew).

Engel, A., Avrahami A. (2005). "Following the Path", Jerusalem: Joint Israel. (Hebrew).

Friedlander, M. Zatsa"l (1992). Life Tracks in Education. Bnei Brak: Official Records and Tapes. (Hebrew)

Friedlander, M. (2006) "The Special Child". Bnei Brak: Toras Emes.

Friedman, Y., Horowitz, T. Shliv, R. (1988) *Cultural Efficacy and the School Climate*. Jerusalem: Henrietta Szold. (Hebrew).

Friedman, M. (1991) *Haredi Society: Sources, Trends and Processes*. Jerusalem: Israel Institute for the Study of Israel. (Hebrew).

Friedman, M. (1995) The Haredi Woman in Y. Atzmon (ed.) *A Look at the Lives of Women in Jewish Societies*. pgs. 273-289. Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Institute for Jewish History. (Hebrew).

Friedman, M. (1999) The Outer Honor of the Kings Daughter – the Haredi Woman. in D. Ariel, M. Leibowitz, Y. Mezik (eds.) *Blessed is He who made me a Man? The Jewish Woman*

from Bible Times to the Present Day. Pgs. 189-205). Tel Aviv: Yedioth Aharonoth, Hemed Books. (Hebrew).

Frishman, B. (1979) The Opinions of Haredi and Secular Girls on Marriage, Pregnancy and Birth. *Society and Welfare B* (6), pgs. 64-70. (Hebrew).

Fuchs, A. (1995). *Change as a Way of Life in Educational Institutions*. Tel Aviv: Cherikover Publishers. (Hebrew).

Fuchs, S. (1998). *The Psychology of Resistance to Change*. Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press. (Hebrew).

Garcia Coll, C. T., Meyer E. (1993) The Social Cultural Context of Infant Development in C. H. Zeanah Jr. (ed.) *Handbook of Infant Mental Health*. pgs.56-70. N.Y.: The Guilford Press.

Goshen-Gottenstien, E. R. (1984). Growing up in Geula: Socialization and Family Living in an Ultra-orthodox Jewish Subculture. *Israel Journal of Psychiatry Related Sciences*, 21, 37-55.

Gomby, D. S., Larner, M.B., Stevenson, C. S., Lewit, E M., Richard E., (1995). Long Term Outcomes of Early Childhood Programs; Analysis and Recommendations. *Future of the Children* 5 (3): pp.6-24.

Gordon, D. (1989). The Dynamics of Change in Active Schools. Jerusalem: Ministry of Education and Culture. (Hebrew).

Greenbloom, D. (1996). The Attitude of Jewish Sources and the Jewish Community to Exceptional and Weak Populations. *Social-Educational Work Encounter* 8-9, 15-23. (Hebrew).

Greenwald, Z. (2005) In the Footsteps of Education. In *Educating the Children*. retrieved 13 December 2005 from <http://www.arachim.co.il/articles.asp?Category.html>

Gumbo, R., Shwartz, S. (1989). A Comparative Perspective of the Value System of Young Haredi Women. *Megamot*, 32(3), pgs.332-362. (Hebrew)

Guralnick, M.J., Connor, R.T, Hammond, M. (1995). Integrated and Specialized Programs: Parent Perspectives of Peer Relationships and Friendships. *American Journal on Mental Retardation*, 99, 457-476.

Hanan, L. (1997) *The Paths of Education*. Jerusalem: Dvir Printing Inc. (Hebrew).

Hirsch, S. (1989). The Book of Genesis with Interpretation. Jerusalem: Yitzchak Breuer Institution Publication. (Hebrew).

Ilan, S. (2000) *The Haredim Inc*. Jerusalem: Keter. (Hebrew).

K”K Maran Admdor Shlita, (1991). The Paths of Education – Assorted Articles on Education. Jerusalem: Emunah & Da’at Institute. (Hebrew).

Kaplan, K. (2003). Study of Haredi Society in Israel: Characteristics, Achievements and Challenges in A. Sivan, K. Kaplan (eds.) *Haredim in Israel: Integration without Assimilation?* pgs. 224-277. Jerusalem: Van Leer Institute and the Kibbutz Hameuchad. (Hebrew).

Kedman, N., Wagner, A., Winoker, M., Goldhirsch, A. (1997). Locating Pre-school Children. Tel Aviv: The Pre-school Division of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports. (Hebrew).

Klien, P.S. (1996). *Early Intervention*. New-York and London:Garland Publishing Inc.

Laufer, G. (1988). The Essence and Spirit of Counseling Haredi Parents in R. Berger (ed.) *Counseling Haredi Parents*, pgs. 166-180. Tel Aviv University: School of Social Work, Continuing Education Unit. (Hebrew)

Lazarowitz, R., Shapira, T. (2002). Women Leading Change in the Arab School. Reflections on the Administration and Organization of Education, 26, pgs. 35-67. (Hebrew).

Leshem, A. (2003). Israel as a Multi-Cultural Nation on the brink of the Twenty First Century in A. Leshem & D. Roar-Streyer (eds.) *Cultural Diversity as a Challenge to Human Services*. Pgs. 72-79. Jerusalem: Y.L Magnus Publishing, Hebrew University of Jerusalem. (Hebrew).

Leshem, A. & Roar-Streyer, D. (2003). *Cultural Diversity as a Challenge to Human Services*. Jerusalem: Magnus Publishing, Hebrew University of Jerusalem. (Hebrew).

Levi, A. (ed.) (1998). *Alternative Evaluation: Theory and Practice – A Collection of Bible Scholars and Reflective Remarks*. Tel Aviv: Mofet Publishing. (Hebrew).

Levi, A. (1999). *The Haredim*. Jerusalem: Keter Publishing. (Hebrew).

Lifshitz, A., Elad, S. & Kweller S. (1996). Program for Challenged Children of Pre-school Age. Jerusalem: Ma'a lot Publishing. (Hebrew).

Lifshitz, H. & Glaubman, R. (2004). Opinions of Teachers from the Haredi Sector on the Inclusion of Children with Special Needs in Regular Education. *Megamot 13(2)*. Pgs. 329-346. (Hebrew).

Lifshitz, H., & Glaubman, R. (2004). Caring for People with Disabilities in the Haredi Community. Adjustment Mechanism in Action. *Disability and Society, 19*, 469-486.

Lifshitz, H. & Ofer, H. (1999) Intervention Program for Pre-school Children and their Parents (unpublished position paper). Jerusalem: The Center for Children and Youths, Brookdale and Ashalim Institute. (Hebrew)

Lupu, Y. (2003). Turning Points in Haredi Society: Professional Training and Academic Studies. Florsheimer Institute for Policy Studies. pg. 104. (Hebrew).

Ma'agan – A Support System for the Kindergarten (1998). *Intervention Program for Educational Frameworks from Infancy through the Age of Five*. Tel Aviv: Ministry of Education Press, Unit for Pre-School Education. (Hebrew).

Mercaz Hachshara and Training, Beit Hamoreh (2006). Learning Program for Teaching and Education – Beis Ya'akov. Bnai Brak: Beis Yaakov. (Hebrew).

Merriam, S.B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*, California: Jossey- Bass Publishers.

Miski, Z. (1981). Chapters in Teaching. Brooklyn, NY: Moriah. (Hebrew)

Prosser, J. (Eds). (1999). *School culture*, London: Paul Chapman Publishing.

Ramey, C. T. & Ramey, S. L. (1998). Early Intervention & Early Experience. *American Psychologist*, 53 (2): pp 109-120

Ravitsky, A. (1993) Messianic Thought, Obedience and Religious Radicalism in Israel. Tel Aviv: Am Oved. (Hebrew).

Saranson S.B (1982). *The Culture of the School & the Problem of Change*, Boston Allyn & Bacon.

Scruggs, T.E., Mastropieri, A. (1996). Teachers' Perceptions of Mainstreaming/inclusion: A Research Synthesis. *Exceptional Children*, 63 (1), 59-75. retrieved Dec.28, 2005 from Expanded Academic ASAP database.

Shade, A., Steward, R. (2001). General Education and Special Education Pre-service Teachers' Attitudes towards Inclusion in Preventing School Failure. Vol. 46, Issue 1. Retrieved Dec. 2, 2005. Academic Search Premier database.

Sharan & Yishai (1994). Planned Change in Education in Y. Danilov (ed.) Planning Educational Policy. Pgs. 169-214. Jerusalem: The Ministry of Education and Culture.

Sharet, R. (1996). The Free and Structured Play of Girls in Haredi Kindergartens. M.A. Thesis, Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University. (Hebrew).

Shechtman, D., Almog, A. (2004). Democratic Positions, the Perception of Teaching Ability and Teacher's Style of Coping with Behavioral Problems of Children with Special Needs. *Social-Educational Work Encounter*, 20, pgs. 11-31. (Hebrew)

Sheleg, Y. (1998). The New Haredi. *Panim* 4, pgs. 43-48. (Hebrew).

Sheleg, Y. (2000). The New Haredi – Changes in Haredi Society. Jerusalem: Keter. (Hebrew).

Shimoni, L. (2005). *The Home Program – A Briefing*. (unpublished). Jerusalem: Joint-Brookdale.

Shkedi, A. (2003). *Words that Try to Touch – Qualitative Research – Theory and Practice*. Tel Aviv: Ramot Publications. (Hebrew).

Shonkoff, J. P. (1996). Assessing in young children with disabilities and their families. In: S.Harel and J .P Shonkoff (Ed), *Early Childhood intervention & Family Support Programs: Accomplishments & Challenges* (pp. 203-212). J .D. C. Brookdale Institute, Tel-Aviv: Sourasky Medical Center.

Sikrun, L., Zaltzberg, S., Yuruwitz, L. (2004) Haredi Children and Adolescents in Israel: Needs, Solutions and Research Directions. (unpublished background paper). Brookdale-Joint Israel. (Hebrew).

Soodak, L. & Podell, D. M. (1998). Teacher, student and school attributes as predictors of teachers responses to inclusion. *Journal of Special Education*, 31 (4), 1-16. retrieved February 1, 2006 from Academic Search Elite database.

Stephenson, E. McKey, C. (1991). The identification and treatment of motor/learning difficulties: parent perception and the vale of the therapist. *Child Care, Health and Development*, 17, 91-113.

Stoler, M. (1997). Differences in the Perceptions of Haredi and Secular Mothers of Children with Developmental Delays; Variables of Coherence, Family Ecology, Attachment Patterns and the Child's Characteristics. (unpublished thesis). Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University. (Hebrew).

Todor, S. (2006). The "Cheder" as an Educational Institution in *Da'at*. retrieved 19 February, 2006 from <http://www.daat.co.il/daat/mahanaim/hacheder-4.htm>

Tzabar Ben Yehoshua, N. (1997). *Qualitative Research in Teaching and Learning*. Modan Publications. (Hebrew).

Tzabar Ben Yehoshua, N. (2001) *Traditions and Trends in Qualitative Research*. Dvir Publications. (Hebrew).

Tzadok, S. (1997). Characteristics of Haredi Society. Tel Aviv: Hamu'l Meiri, (Hebrew).

Tzafroni, A. (2001). Assimilating Changes in the School – Rationale, Process and Coping with Resistance. *Mikra Ve'iyun*. (80), pgs 3-22. (Hebrew).

Watzlawick, P., Weakland, J.H., Fisch, R. (1974). *Change: principles of problem formation and problem resolution*. NY: W.W. Norton.

Winger, R. (1995). The Process of Introducing Changes in the School. *Talelei Orot*, 6.pgs. 537-552. (Hebrew).

Witztum, A., Goodman, Y. (1988). The Expressions of Mental Distress among Haredim: Constructing a Narrative and Culturally Sensitive Narrative Interpretation. *Society and Welfare* (6), pgs. 97-123. (Hebrew).

Appendix

A. Questionnaires

1. Open questionnaires for women kindergarten teachers..... I
2. Open questionnaire for melamed (male kindergarten teacher)II
3. Semi-closed questionnaire for women kindergarten teachers III
4. Semi-closed questionnaire for melamed (male kindergarten teacher) VI

B. Brookdale Research Institute Interview Questions VII

C. Contact Information, Mission StatementVIII

D. Photo montage of senso-motor activities from the projectIX



Date _____

Dear Kindergarten Teacher/Assistant,

Following the training you have received in our project, we would appreciate if you would answer the following questions in detail. Each answer is important and there are no right or wrong answers.

1. Describe a child with developmental difficulties in your kindergarten, as you remember him before you joined the “Active Nurturing Playground” training project.

2. What did you think of him and his behavior?

3. How did you behave with the child?

4. Describe the current situation of another child with developmental difficulties.

5. What do you think of him and his behavior?



6. How do you now behave with this child?

7. Do you feel anything “different” about your work as a result of your participation in the project?
A. With all the children. B. With challenged children. Please describe in detail.

8. Is there a change in your relationship with the parents of challenged children as a result of the project?

9. Any additional suggestions/remarks.

Thanking you in advance for your cooperation,

Project Directors

Simone Wolfson

Malka Stoller



Date _____

Dear Melamed,

Following the training you have received in our project, we would appreciate if you would answer the following questions in detail. Each answer is important and there are no right or wrong answers.

1. Describe a child with developmental difficulties in your kindergarten, as you remember him before you joined the “Active Nurturing Playground” training project.

2. What did you think of him and his behavior?

3. How did you behave with the child?

4. Describe the current situation of another child with developmental difficulties.

5. What do you think of him and his behavior?



6. How do you now behave with this child?

7. Do you feel anything “different” about your work as a result of your participation in the project?
A. With all the children. B. With challenged children. Please describe in detail.

8. Is there a change in your relationship with the parents of challenged children as a result of the project?

9. Any additional suggestions/remarks.

Thanking you in advance for your cooperation,

Project Directors

Simone Wolfson

Malka Stoller

Brookdale Research Institute

Interview Questions with Preschool Teachers and Melamdim

1. What do you think about the principle of the ACTIVE NURTURING PLAYGROUND that the responsibility of identifying children with difficulties lies with the preschool teacher/melamed? What are the advantages and disadvantages of this principle?
2. One component of the project is the introduction of playground equipment at the preschool/Talmud Torah. What are the advantages and disadvantages of doing so?
3. From your experience, can playground activity help children learn and minimize their difficulties?
4. Another component of the project is intervention during activity periods at preschool. Does this happen at your preschool/Talmud Torah? What are the advantages and disadvantages of doing so?
5. Have you acquired new/other knowledge through the project?
6. Do you now think that one should work with children who have been identified as having difficulties or should they be left to overcome their difficulties on their own? What happens if they are not treated?
7. Do you think that the methods of working that you learned through the training are effective for children with difficulties?
8. Have you (on your own or with the help of a member of the paramedical staff) identified any children with difficulties? If so, give examples. How did you help them cope with their difficulties? Do you think your work with them was effective?
9. If you have identified and worked with any children at your preschool/Talmud Torah, have you ever decided that what you were doing was not enough and therefore referred them to external services? If so, how many children have been referred? Give examples. Did you have any dilemmas about the referral? Do you think it was the right thing to do?
10. Have you contacted the parents of children with difficulties and involved them in their children's difficulties. If so, what do they feel about the implementation of the ACTIVE NURTURING PLAYGROUND project at preschool/Talmud Torah? How much cooperation do you have from them? Give examples of cooperation and lack of cooperation.
11. Do you feel that your ability to understand children with difficulties has changed?
12. Do you feel that your behavior toward children with difficulties has changed?

CONTACT INFORMATION

EZER MIZION

5 Rabinov Street

Bnei Brak 51561, ISRAEL

Tel: +(0)3-614-4570 Fax: +(0)3-614-4572

Email: rdd@ezermizion.org

www.ezermizion.org

EZER MIZION MISSION STATEMENT

Ezer Mizion, Israel's Health Support Organization, was established in 1979 as a non-sectarian, non-profit organization. It has since grown into a multi-faceted national humanitarian health aid organization with 25 branches in cities throughout Israel. Ezer Mizion's 16 different paramedical departments assist over 650,000 people each year regardless of race, nationality, religion or gender.

Ezer Mizion's mission is to help people who are functionally or developmentally challenged by providing programs that support and enable them to preserve their dignity, maintain their independence and improve their quality of life. Sincere caring and professionalism form the core of these services, making Ezer Mizion a source of healing, support and comfort for many thousands throughout Israel and beyond.

ACTIVE NURTURING PLAYGROUND PROJECT DIRECTORS

Ms. Simone Wolfson, MA, Developmental Occupational Therapist

Email: swz@zahav.net.il

Ms. Malka Stoler, MA, Developmental Physiotherapist

Email: kadm@zahav.net.il