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**MEETING GUIDANCE BY CHILDREN IN THE
KINDERGARTEN: A MULTI-DIALOGICAL APPROACH**

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Abstract

The application of the Multi-Dialogical Approach (MDA) in the kindergarten aims to improve kindergarten children's social and communicative skills. For example: kindergarten children learn and are able to assimilate the ability for group guidance. When children learn how to guide a group as part of the dialog conducted in the kindergarten, they acquire social-communication skills because it strengthens their self-confidence and their social standing and they learn how to guide without controlling or being aggressive. The article presents part of a research study investigating the development of social communication patterns among children in a multi-dialogical kindergarten. The article focuses on children's guidance of meetings in a kindergarten employing the MDA. The research drew data from participatory observation on the meeting guidance by the children. According to the MDA, in order to assist the children in learning how to guide, the educator allows each child who wishes to do so to guide an activity under their mentorship and guidance. Moreover, the educator constitutes a model both for the role of the guide and for the role of the learner when the child guides the group in which the teacher is a member. Children who guide the group learn to deal with difficulties and strengths, be flexible and open in their thinking, guide their friends, be attentive and tolerant to others, and practice restraint and acceptance. This forms the foundation for the MDA, allowing the child to practice dialog skills through dialogical group guidance.

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1. Introduction

This article describes the use of the Multi-Dialogical Approach (MDA) in the kindergarten. It aims to examine the connection between the use of the MDA and the development of kindergarten children's social and communicative skills, for example: the kindergarten children's ability for group guidance. Among other things, preschool education aims to allow the child to grow and evolve into an involved citizen, who has the ability to judge and criticize and is a curious independent thinker, demonstrating initiative. The fundamental assumption of multi-dialogical education, which forms the foundation for this work, is that when a child learns about his world out of their own inner interest, then they will evolve into that type of adult. The aim of this study is to examine core aspects of this educational method namely, the behavioural patterns and social communication processes of children who learn in a multi-dialogical kindergarten. The children learn to guide their peers during kindergarten meetings, by guiding work in small groups and leading activities at the "creativity tables" according to their suggested ideas and after planning sessions with the kindergarten teacher (Firstater & Efrat, 2014). This process can contribute significantly to the dialog because the children's ideas are recognized and the meeting guidance can focus on their world and their way of thinking. This is one way in which the children can be included in their learning process (Emilson & Johansson, 2009; Pramling-Samuelsson & Sheridan, 2003).

The qualitative part of the research was conducted in two simultaneous stages: participatory observations of 25 children learning in a kindergarten according to the MDA were filmed and transcribed. Additionally, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with 15 kindergarten teachers, seven of whom work according to the MDA and eight who work according to the traditional educational approach. Further quantitative data was gathered from a specially constructed closed-ended quantitative questionnaire administered to 130 kindergarten teachers.

1.1. Multidialogical approach in the kindergartens

The Israeli kindergarten is an educational-learning framework. It aims to promote children's development so that they can become active, initiating, decisive, independent and /OR sociable individuals (Levine, 1989; Ministry of Education, 2010). Multi-dialogical education is based on the principles of dialogical education, which involves the development of a culture of research for the children, while the educator listens to the children, asks them questions, mediates and documents their activity (Fiore & Soares, 2010). This strategy enables children to conceptualize phenomena and situations emerging from activity in their environment (Caspi, 1979). Multi-dialogical education involves the inclusion of the children as partners in decision-making about the kindergarten's operations, not only academic activities but also all aspects of the kindergarten's other activities. This decision-making, was conducted through negotiation between the teacher and the children (Efrat & Ungureanu, 2015), includes discourse relating to their behavioural norms, focuses of activity and how these should be promoted, how to celebrate holidays and the kindergarten's general ethos and way of life.

According to the multi-dialogical approach, the kindergarten staff are attentive to all aspects of the kindergarten, not only the spoken words. In practice, this approach is expressed by enlisting the children as partners in planning kindergarten activities, allowing them to instruct their peers in small groups and in the general meetings, encouraging them to provide feedback to other children on the activities that they instruct,

and through the kindergarten teacher's personal meetings with them to plan activities that they will present (Firstater & Efrat, 2014).

1.2. How children participate in planning and guiding activities in the kindergarten

A significant part of the teacher's work in the kindergarten involves the planning of the activities and the learning that ensues from this process (Venminen, Leinonen, & Ojala, 2010). In the effort to include the kindergarten pupils in that process, the teacher needs to understand how children think and elicit their viewpoints (Pramling-Samuelsson & Sheridan, 2003). The teacher considers the children's viewpoints for the planning, execution and evaluation of activities and learning within the kindergarten. The teacher performs these acts together with the children and does not impose their own views upon them (Leinonen & Venminen, 2012); they listen to and recognize the children's viewpoint and focus their plans on the children's world and their thinking. In this way the teacher develops a dialog with the children and includes them in the planning of the kindergarten program and on their learning (Emilsson & Johansson, 2009; Pramling-Samuelsson & Sheridan, 2003). When children participate in planning their kindergarten activities, an interaction forms between all those involved in the educational act: the children, the teacher and the educational environment (Pramling-Samuelsson & Sheridan, 2003). Essentially the MDA approach involves forming trust with the children so that they can help to plan the kindergarten activities. To implement this approach, the children are encouraged to communicate optimally with the teacher. This process is facilitated by the creation of basic trust and the children's understanding that the teacher trusts their abilities (Thomas, 2002). In this way, the kindergarten children learn how to participate in planning their activities and their learning (Firstater & Efrat, 2014).

The children's participation can be seen in their involvement in the daily routine of the kindergarten and more obviously in their leadership of research of different subjects and of various kindergarten projects (Clark & Moss, 2005; Leinonen & Venminen, 2012). By enabling the children to become involved in the research of new ideas and to develop their viewpoints they are able to attribute meaning to their ideas, and dialog with each other and the teacher enables them to become partners in meaningful investigative and learning process. They do not need to memorize the knowledge but instead they are able to process the information, thus improving their understanding (Fisher, 2007). In the current study, it was noted that the children needed practice and experience to become active group members (Leinonen & Venminen, 2012); this was made possible when their voices were given recognition and respected (Hill, Davis, Prout, & Tisdall, 2004; Sinclair, 2004).

Group guidance is one of the practical applications of the MDA. Kindergarten children learn and are able to assimilate the ability for group guidance. This guidance empowers them (Firstater & Efrat, 2014). It strengthens their self-confidence and their social standing and they learn how to guide without controlling or being aggressive. In order to assist them in learning how to guide, the educator guides them on this subject and allows each child who wishes to do so to guide an activity under their mentorship. Moreover, the educator constitutes a model both for the role of the guide and for the role of the learner when the child guides the group in which the teacher is a member (Ben-Yosef, 2009).

In order to develop kindergarten children's social-communication skills the teacher should demonstrate respect for the children and express belief in their leadership and planning abilities and allow them to take part in their learning. Such an approach has the potential to strongly influence the children in

the present and also affects their future abilities and attitudes as adults (Smith, 2002). Thus, the teacher plays a significant role in ensuring the children's participation including the use of observation, in an attentive manner, and support for the children's social skills (Berthelsen, 2009). Children's enjoy a personal experience when they participate in planning their activities and learning in the kindergarten, enabling them to develop social skills such as listening and involvement, expressing personal opinions, acquiring different learning methods, sharing experiences with other children, practising decision-making on a daily basis, learning to negotiate and to wait for their turn, and sharing information and viewpoints with their peers (Clark & Moss, 2005; Leinonen & Venninen, 2012; Venninen, Leinonen, & Ojala, 2010). A basic understanding here is that all children can participate in their learning; everything depends on the approach adopted by the teacher and the extent to which they allow the children's participation (Nyland, 2009). When the teacher fails to provide opportunities for the children to take part in planning their own activities and learning, children will not autonomously choose to do this (Emilson & Johansson, 2009).

2. Problem Statement

The gap in knowledge that this study aimed to fill is created because most studies, which have been conducted in the dialogical learning field in various countries have focused on elementary school children. Other studies, which related to kindergartens, have mainly examined interactions between the kindergarten teacher and the child (Fumoto, 2011) and the influence of mediated learning on children (Tzuriel & Shamir, 2007). However, as far as can be ascertained, there has been no investigation of the implementation of different educational approaches in early childhood or of their implications for the children and their development.

3. Research Questions

The research questions were: (1) which social, behavioural and interpersonal communication patterns can be identified among kindergarten children in an MDA kindergarten? And (2) which social, communication and interpersonal differences are found between children educated in multi-dialogical kindergartens and children educated in traditional kindergartens?

4. Purpose of the Study

The research purpose was to identify the development of children's social-communication patterns, including: initiative, leadership and meeting guidance by children in an MDA kindergarten

4.1. Research hypotheses

Considering the background provided by the above literature review, the following research hypotheses guided the research:

The social and communication patterns of children educated in multi-dialogical kindergartens will differ from those of children educated in traditional kindergartens.

The main differences between multi-dialogical kindergartens and traditional kindergartens will be found in the extent of meeting guidance by children.

5. Research Methods

5.1. Participants

The research population included three samples: The first group included 25 children aged 3-6; the second group included 15 kindergarten teachers and the third group included 130 kindergarten teachers. The participants were selected according to the purposive sample method (Bocos, 2007; Mason, 1996; Shkedi, 2003; Stake, 1995).

5.2. Instruments

A mixed-methods approach was chosen to collect and analyse both quantitative and qualitative data. An action research study was employed as part of the study, which included the use of participatory observations of the kindergarten activities performed by the researcher in a multi-dialogical kindergarten. Some of which were written up while others were video-filmed and transcribed. These observations helped to clarify the different types of kindergarten children's interpersonal communication. To gather qualitative data, the research also employed semi-structured interviews and closed-ended questionnaires. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a small number of kindergarten teachers to investigate how the multi-dialogical approach (MDA) was applied in kindergartens. The closed-ended questionnaire was constructed on the basis of the content analysis of data from the semi-structured interviews. Data from MDA kindergarten teachers was compared with data elicited from traditional kindergarten teachers. Quantitative data was collected from the closed-ended questionnaires administered to a large sample of kindergarten teachers, to identify and explore ways in which the MDA /OR explore ways in which to apply MDA in kindergartens. T-tests and the Chi squared test (χ^2) were used for the two independent samples in the section describing the sample in order to examine whether there were significant differences in the constant socio-demographic characteristics of the two groups, such as years of experience in teaching, number of children attending the kindergarten etc.

5.3. Procedure

Mixed-methods data-collection tools were chosen to collect quantitative and qualitative data that could be used to respond to the research question. Some qualitative data was collected through action research, including transcribed videotapes and protocols from structured participatory observations carried out in a multi-dialogical kindergarten. These participatory observations were used to clarify the different types of kindergarten children's interpersonal communication. In addition, the research employed semi-structured interviews and closed-ended questionnaires. Semi-structured interviews were performed with a small number of kindergarten teachers in order to collect qualitative data that would help to examine the effect of application of the MDA in kindergartens. Closed-ended questionnaires were administered to a large number of kindergarten teachers in order to collect quantitative data that would help to identify and explore ways in which MDA was implemented in kindergartens. The qualitative research data was analysed by qualitative content analysis based on the formation of categories, while the quantitative data underwent statistical analysis using t-test variance tests in a purposeful sample.

5.4. Data analysis

The qualitative research data underwent content analysis based on category formation. The quantitative data was analysed statistically with the help of t-test variance tests in a purposeful sample.

5.5. Research limitations

This was a qualitative ethnographic study, providing a low level of objectivity. The researcher therefore gathered a wide range of sources of information to increase the data's validity. A further possible limitation is due to the fact that, in the participatory observations, the researcher's presence might have influenced the participants' behaviour. However, over the many hours of observation, the teachers and children became used to the researcher and ignored her presence. In semi-structured interviews, participants tend to want to please the interviewer; the researcher therefore avoided judgmental reactions.

6. Findings

The names of the kindergarten teachers cited in the presentation of the findings are fictive names. Analysis of the qualitative data from the interviews with the teachers shows that the children acquired social-communication skills when they learned how to guide a group as part of the dialog conducted in the kindergarten. Judith explained this succinctly: "children guide other children in the kindergarten", while Anat explained further: "In the multi-dialogical kindergarten children know how to guide others and to present a subject, to say what they want to do, to summarize it" (Anat). This guidance is based on the fact that as Iris noted "The children have many ideas", while Judith explained that "the children profit from their guiding of other children". This occurs when "The child with the help of the activity that he initiates and guides, transmits a message to his friends in different ways" noted Bilha. However, "If the child wants to lead a session for a small group on a subject that he likes, he must travel a long path until he gets there" said Ora. Michal gave an example of this: "A girl, who led an activity table, prepared the materials that she wanted to bring to the group, the day before the activity". For the children who want to lead an activity in a kindergarten working according to the MDA, "the guidance, is actually a language that they learn" said Anat and "when they learn and teach the subject or activity to their friends in the kindergarten, it also means that they need to use learning and communication skills that they would not acquire in another way" added Bilha. It appears that one of the types of dialog that exist in a multi-dialogical kindergarten is the guidance of their peers by the children themselves, skills that are learnt and acquired by the children as part of the social-communication patterns that develop in the kindergarten

Analysis of the quantitative data from the questionnaire revealed significant differences regarding the extent of children's guidance of the meetings in the kindergarten between the reports of the MDA teachers and the reports of the traditional teachers. Grades given for the extent of children's guidance of the meetings in the kindergarten were higher in the reports of the MDA teachers in comparison to the reports of traditional teachers (3.43 in contrast to 1.64 respectively, $t=14.31$, $p<0.01$). More specifically, it was found that the extent to which children guided the meetings in the kindergartens according to different characteristics examined in the questionnaire was significantly higher in the reports of the MDA teachers in comparison to the reports of traditional teachers (Figure 01).

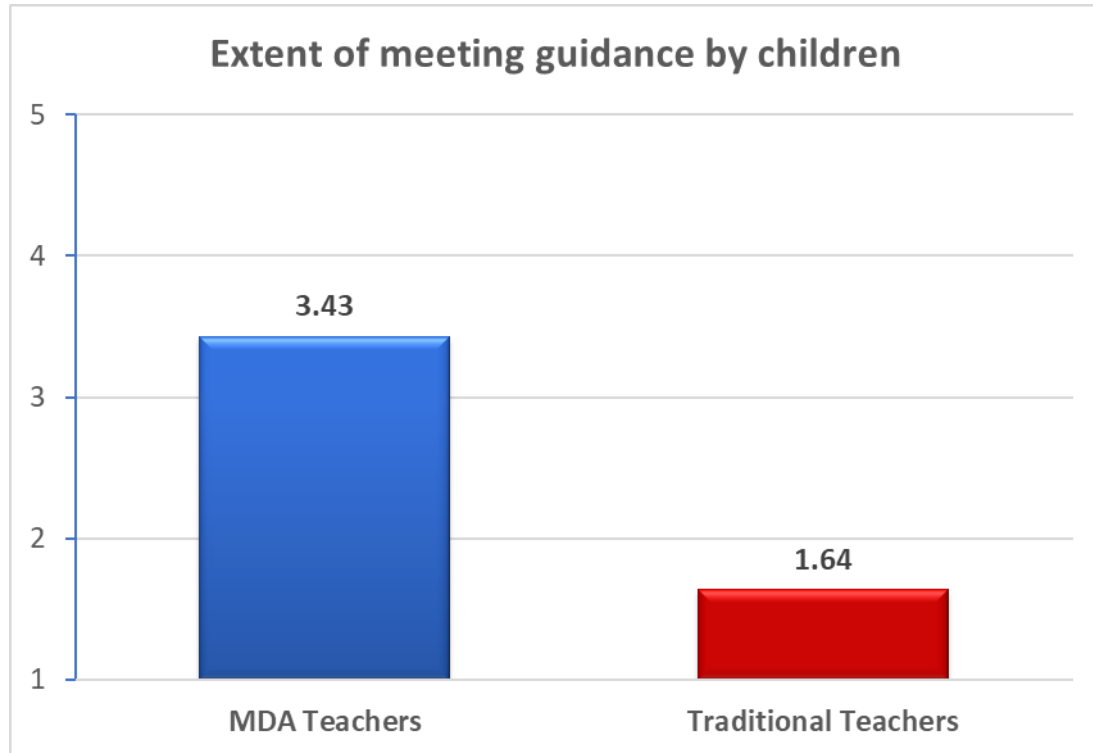


Figure 01. Teachers' estimations of the extent to which children guide meetings

7. Conclusion

Analysis of the findings revealed correlations between the implementation of the MDA in kindergartens and the kindergarten children's development of social-communication patterns. Significant differences were found between the reports of the MDA teachers and reports of the traditional teachers with regard to: the level of the children's initiative, in the extent to which there is children's guidance of meetings and in the extent to which teacher-child meetings take place to plan activities. These differences can be explained as follows: In a multi-dialogical kindergarten, the structured learning curriculum intentionally involves the guidance of children by children, and meetings between the teacher and the children to plan activities. The children's guidance of group meetings by children encourages the children's initiative and they are the ones who suggest a subject that they want to guide. Their guidance of the group also necessitates prior planning of the subject expressed in a planning meeting with the teacher. Additionally, while the child guides the meeting, they actually lead and guide the other children and thus they practice and develop leadership skills. Contrastingly, in a traditional kindergarten, children's guidance of other children and meetings held to plan activities only happens randomly and occasionally and it is not an intentional structured part of the learning curriculum. This finding echoes professional literature indicating that it is important to understand that children's development of initiative and independence depends directly on their participation and involvement in decision-making processes regarding themselves and their daily schedule (Hill et al., 2004). This research therefore contributes innovative knowledge to previous findings in the literature regarding children's social development in early childhood since it relates to children guiding other children, and the practical way in which planning meetings for these activities can be conducted with the early childhood child. To summarize: Social-communication patterns of initiative,

guidance, planning activities and leadership are acquired and shaped when children are given practical structured coaching to prepare them to perform these skills as part of the structured learning curriculum in the kindergarten.

7.1. Research significance

The significance of the research lies in its ability to inform developments in early childhood education approaches and in the kindergarten's daily practices, using the MDA as a foundation for the promotion and shaping of social communication patterns among early childhood children learning in the kindergarten. This is the substance of the multi-dialogical kindergarten.

To apply this approach, teachers need to increase their own awareness regarding the substance of attentiveness in the educational act, and to learn how to apply this attentiveness at their own personal level while also guiding the staff and children to use this strategy in the kindergarten.

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