



Henrietta Szold Institute
The national institute for research in
behavioral sciences

**PROGRAM EVALUATION
EZER MIZION'S
DEVELOPMENTAL
COORDINATORS TRAINING
PROGRAM, ASHDOD**

**Summary of findings – beginning and end
of 2015-16 school year**

Executive Summary

November 2016

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Background

The program for training developmental coordinators for early childhood was developed by the Ezer Mizion Children's Division and is funded by the Van Leer Institute of Holland. This training program is a follow-up program to the Active Nurturing Playground Program, which is also operated by Ezer Mizion. The aim of the program is to train teachers (melamdim) at religious schools to serve as developmental coordinators with a broad knowledge of early childhood development. They will be responsible for early childhood development in the school (Talmud Torah) in which they work, advising other teachers, facilitating the progress of students with developmental challenges, maintaining contact with parents about developmental issues and guiding them as to how to further their child's development.

In the 2015-6 school year, a training program for developmental coordinators was held in Ashdod, with a group of 15 teachers from different religious schools, who completed their first year of training in the summer of 2016.

Research questions

This executive summary will present a preliminary picture of the teachers at the commencement of their training and how they related to different aspects of the coordinator's role. Findings will also be presented regarding the attitudes of the training staff, school principals and mothers.

The evaluation study as a whole was designed to address the following research questions:

1. To what degree does a change occur in **attitudes and awareness** with regard to early childhood issues and reducing difficulties in the **community** as a whole and among **parents** and **staff members** in particular?
2. What **change in functioning** occurs in the teachers' work, as they implement the **knowledge and skills** gained from the developmental coordinators' training program?
3. Do the coordinators **disseminate** their knowledge within the school, and if so, in which ways? What is the influence on the attitudes of their **colleagues on the teaching staff**?
4. What **influence is the training program** perceived to have on the physical, social, emotional and language development of the Talmud Torah students?
5. Can a change be seen **in the Talmud Torah** as a result of the training program?

Method

Quantitative and qualitative data were collected for this evaluation study, which was conducted in the 2015-6 school year. A variety of tools were used: preliminary questionnaires for teachers, interviews with teachers, tools for reflective practice at the beginning and end of the year, preliminary questionnaires for the principals, preliminary questionnaires for the training staff and a questionnaire for mothers of children at the Talmud Torah.

Table 1: Dates of administering research tools

Research Tool	Date administered
Preliminary questionnaires for teachers	October 2015
Tools for reflective practice – beginning of year	November 2015
Interviews with teachers	December 2015
Preliminary questionnaires for training staff	November-December 2015
Preliminary questionnaires for principals	January 2016
Questionnaire for mothers of children at the Talmud Torah	May-July 2016
Tools for reflective practice – end of year	July 2016

Main Findings

Expectations of the training program

- ❖ The teachers began their first year of training with motivation to learn and expecting to acquire tools with which to help the children progress, including the ability to identify and chart difficulties and, as a result, ways of dealing with these difficulties.
- ❖ Most of the principals believed that the teacher's participation in the training program would help the Talmud Torah improve professionally and focus more on early childhood issues. They expected the training to generate a change in the way the school handles children with difficulties, chiefly by means of identifying and understanding the difficulties and being able to deal with them inside or outside of the school setting. In addition, they expected to see a rise in awareness of the importance attributed to early childhood developmental issues at the Talmud Torah and among fellow teachers.
- ❖ The training staff expected the teachers to attend the training program regularly and play an active part in it, to demonstrate curiosity, interest and initiative and to implement the material learned in the classroom.

Preliminary attitudes regarding developmental issues

- ❖ At the beginning of the training program, the teachers perceived early childhood development issues to have a high degree of relevance and importance to the success of children at school (average of 4.25 out of 5) and considered that helping children with difficulties to be part of their job (average of 4.24 out of 5). However, they felt that they had only a moderate degree of knowledge (average of 3.04 out of 5), tools for identifying difficulties (average of 3.17 out of 5) and strategies for reducing these difficulties (average of 2.77 out of 5) (see Figure 1 in the appendix).
- ❖ The teachers reported a moderate/high degree of knowledge and ability to guide developmental activities (average of 3.86 out of 5) and a moderate degree of ability to distinguish between temporary difficulties and significant difficulties requiring attention (average of 3.21 out of 5). They noted that their classroom serves as an enriching developmental environment to a moderate degree (average of 3.21 out of 5) (see Table 1 in the appendix).

Coordinators' contact with staff members and parents - starting point

- ❖ At the beginning of the year, the teachers' responses indicated, to a high degree, that they felt comfortable in advising other teachers (average of 4.07 out of 5), but the interviews revealed that this did not occur in practice in an organized manner. They also felt, to a high degree, that they had the ability and tools to work with parents of children with difficulties (average of 4 out of 5). However, they had only a moderate degree of knowledge regarding out-of-school services to which children could be referred for treatment (average of 3.14 out of 5), and the interviews showed that they lacked knowledge in this area (see Table 2 in the appendix). This reflects the teachers' starting point, and these topics are not yet studied in the first year of training.
- ❖ Mothers of children with difficulties, describing their contact with and expectations of the developmental coordinator, considered different aspects of the coordinator's role to be important. These aspects include: advising teachers on early childhood issues (100%); counseling parents on activities with their children at home (100%); enriching the children's environment (98%); and advising parents to seek evaluation and treatment services outside the school setting, if necessary (99%). It was also found that almost all of them (99%) would trust the coordinator's judgment if he were to recommend therapy by an external professional, chiefly because of the knowledge, expertise and experience he had gained. Mothers also expressed a desire to be involved and maintain ongoing contact with the coordinator concerning their child and school activities and to receive guidance on how to work with their child at home.
- ❖ Both teachers and training staff viewed the principal's support as being extremely important for the successful implementation of the program in the Talmud Torah.

The teachers' professional development over the course of the year

- ❖ At the beginning and end of the year, using tools for reflective practice, the teachers related to children's difficulties and ways of dealing with these difficulties. For most of the difficulties, the teachers correctly identified the area of development to which the difficulty belonged (79% at the beginning of the year and 80% at the end of the year respectively) (see Figure 2 in the appendix).
- ❖ At the end of the year, most of the steps taken by the teachers to reduce the children's difficulties were considered appropriate, and an increase had occurred in the degree to which their actions were appropriate, from 50% at the beginning of the year to 71% at the end (see Table 3 in the appendix).

Children's progress resulting from teacher intervention

- ❖ By the end of the year, most (76%) of the difficulties were reduced significantly or fully: 55% significantly and 21% fully. 23% of the difficulties were partially reduced (see Figure 4 in the appendix).

Summary

In the first year of the training program, the teachers undoubtedly acquired the knowledge, skills and tools to serve as developmental coordinators for early childhood education. They are aware of the importance of this function in the Talmud Torah, for the children, for colleagues on the teaching staff and for parents.

In the second year of the training program, the progress of the teachers should be further monitored, in order to assess the usefulness of the training program, the challenges it faces and the manner in which it is implemented in practice.

Appendix

Figure 1: Teachers' attitudes at the commencement of training

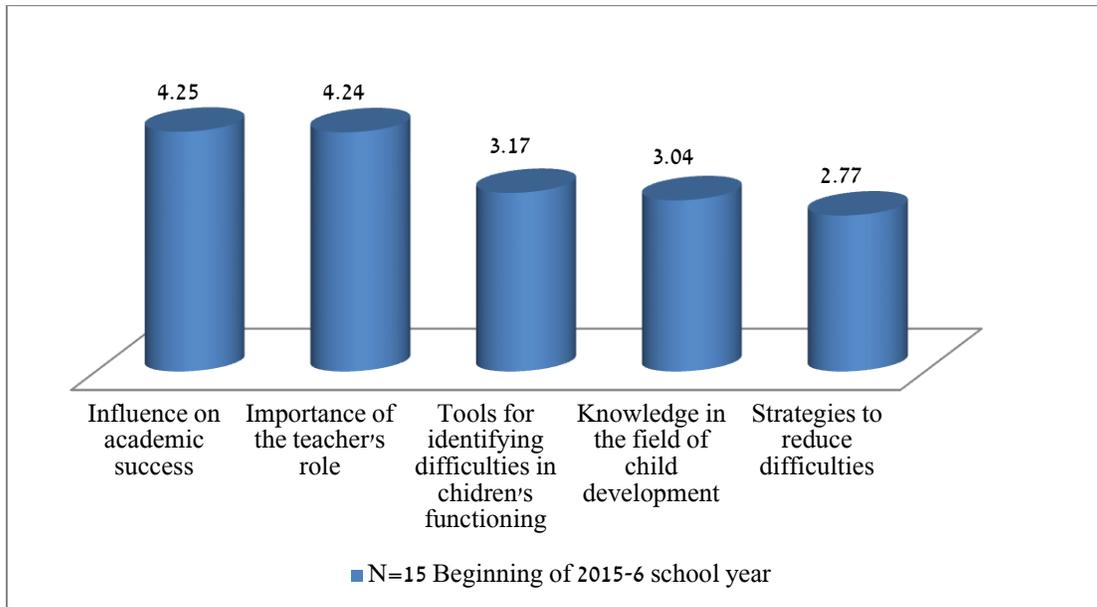


Table 1: Additional skills required of the coordinator (beginning of the year)

In your opinion, to what degree...	Beginning of 2015-6	
	Average (N=15)	Standard deviation
Do you have the knowledge and ability to guide developmental activity for a group of children	3.86	1.23
Are you able to distinguish between a child's temporary difficulties and significant difficulties that require treatment by a professional outside the school	3.21	0.7
Your classroom is an enriching developmental environment	3.21	0.89

*Responses are on a scale of 1-5: 1 = not at all and 5 = to a very high degree

Table 2: Contact with other staff members and parents at the commencement of training

In your opinion, to what degree...	Beginning of 2015-6	
	Average (N=15)	Standard deviation
Do you feel comfortable advising other teachers about developmental issues	4.07	0.73
Do you have the ability and/or tools to speak to parents of children with difficulties	4	0.88
Do you have knowledge of outside-school services to which children can be referred for intervention	3.14	0.86

*Responses are on a scale of 1-5: 1 = not at all and 5 = to a very high degree

Figure 2: Does the description of the difficulty match the area of development (beginning and end of the 2015-16 school year)?

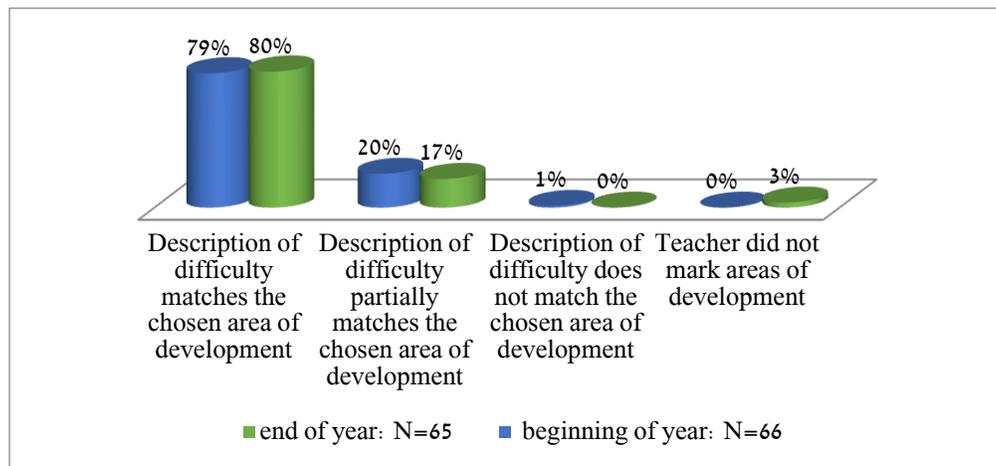


Figure 3: Are the actions suggested by the teacher appropriate for reducing the difficulty (beginning and end of 2015-16 school year)?

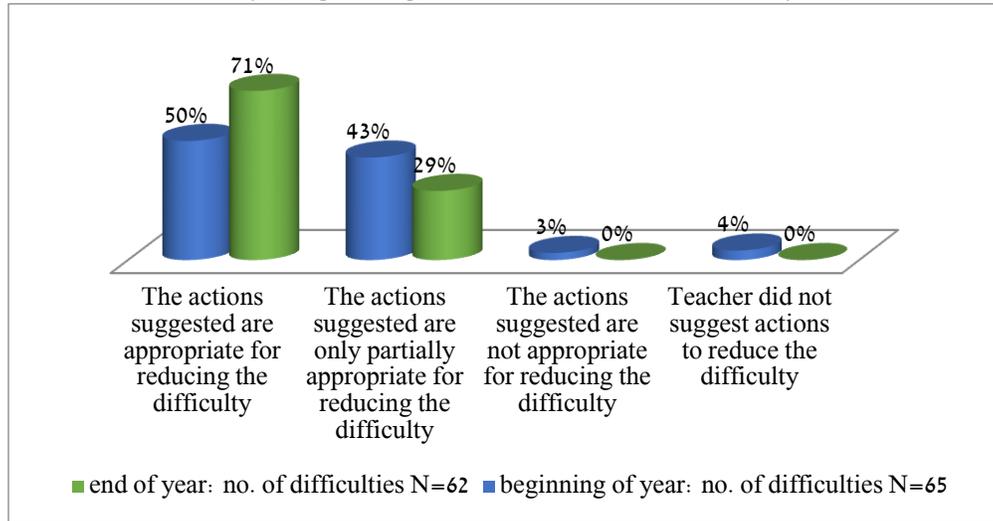


Figure 4: Has the difficulty been significantly reduced (end of year)?

